

Never too late to act

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Beijing, Hanoi vow to boost traditional ties

Xi underlines need for deeper pragmatic collaboration during talks with Lam

By CAO DESHENG
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China rolled out the red carpet on Monday for Vietnam's top leader To Lam, and the two socialist countries vowed to further enhance their comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and advance the building of a community with a shared future that carries strategic significance.

During their talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese president, welcomed Lam's state visit to China, which is the Vietnamese leader's first overseas trip since he became general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee on Aug 3.

Xi said the visit reflects the great importance Lam attaches to the relations between the two parties and the two countries, and also embodies the high level and strategic importance of China-Vietnam ties.

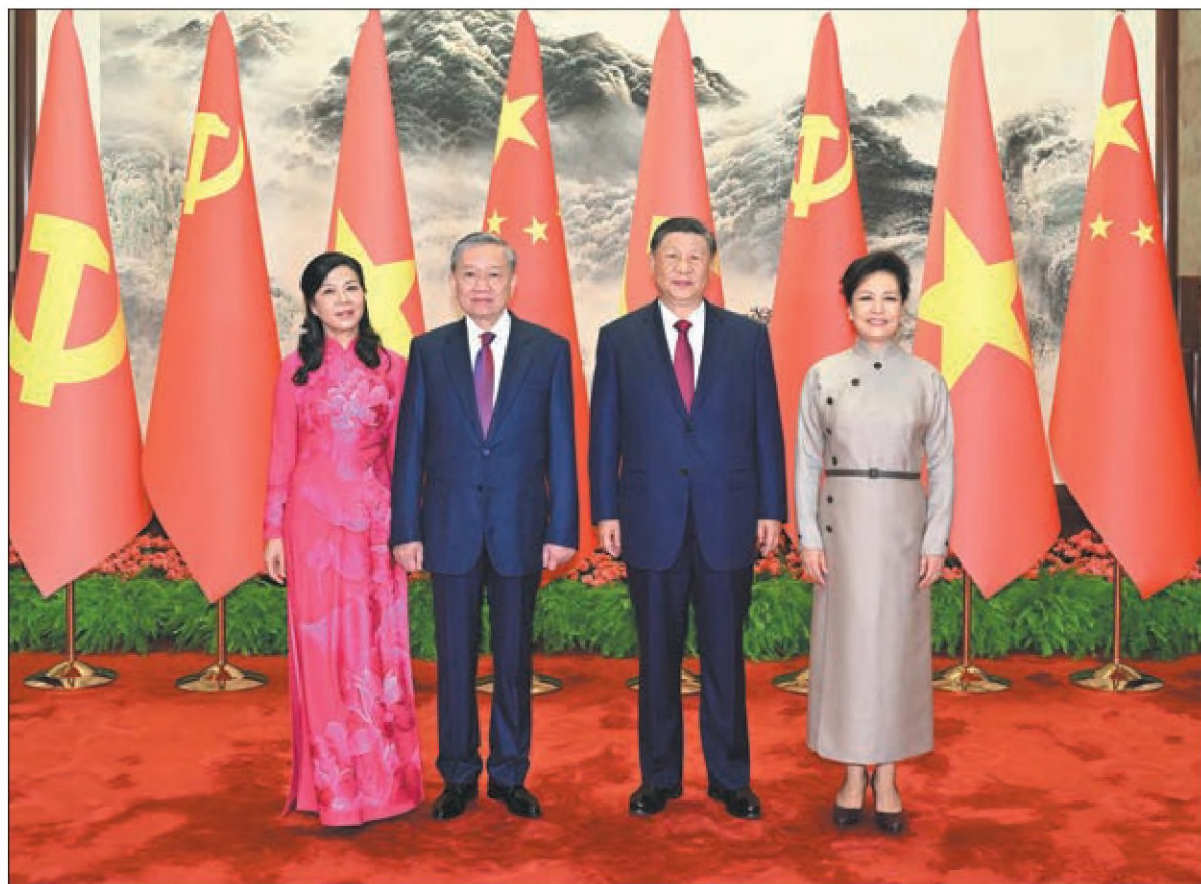
Lam succeeded Nguyen Phu Trong, who passed away last month, and has been serving as the Vietnamese president since May.

The first stop of Lam's three-day state visit to China, which started on Sunday, took him to Guangzhou, Guangdong province, where former leader of Vietnam Ho Chi Minh spent time promoting revolutionary activities around a century ago.

Saying the traditional friendship between the two parties and the two countries is as good as "comrades and brothers", Xi called for consistent efforts to build the China-Vietnam community with a shared future, a consensus reached between the two sides during his visit to Vietnam in December.

China regards Vietnam as a priority in its neighborhood diplomacy, Xi said.

Noting that both countries are at a critical stage of national development and revitalization, he underlined the need for them to solidify a pattern for the development of bilateral relations featuring higher political mutual trust, more substantial security cooperation, deeper pragmatic collaboration, stronger public support, closer



President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and his wife Peng Liyuan, stand for a group photo with To Lam, general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee and Vietnamese president, and his wife Ngo Phuong Ly, in Beijing on Monday before the two presidents held talks at the Great Hall of the People. XIE HUANCHI / XINHUA

multilateral coordination and better management of differences.

China is willing to maintain close strategic communication and high-level exchanges with Vietnam, and actively explore ways to expand the synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and Vietnam's Two Corridors and One Economic Circle strategy, he said.

Xi also emphasized the need for both sides to step up the connectivity of railway, highway and port infrastructure, enhance connectivity of smart customs, and work together to build secure and stable industrial and supply chains.

Lam highlighted the importance of the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries, emphasizing that China is a strategic choice and top priority in Vietnam's foreign policy.

The CPV and the Vietnamese government will inherit Trong's legacy, uphold the leadership of the Communist Party and the socialist path, and steadfastly advance on the path jointly set by the older generations of leaders of both countries, especially Trong and Xi, he said.

Lam told Xi that Vietnam adheres to independence and autonomy, firmly upholds the one-China policy and considers Taiwan an inseparable part of the Chinese territory. He added that his country resolutely opposes any form of "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and firmly supports China in achieving reunification.

Lam also expressed Vietnam's willingness to work with China to properly manage maritime disputes, in order to jointly maintain regional peace and stability.

Vietnam is ready to have closer coordination with China on international affairs, and uphold multilateralism as well as international fairness and justice to contribute to world peace and development, he said.

After their talks, both leaders witnessed the signing of multiple bilateral cooperation agreements in various fields such as Party schools, mutual connectivity, industry, finance, customs inspection and health.

Observers said that Lam's visit marks a milestone in China-Vietnam relations, which will be an example of a new pattern of cooperation between two socialist countries facing challenges and tasks of modernization based on a similar historical trajectory and common international environment.

Hannan Hussain, co-founder and senior expert at Initiate Futures, a

policy think tank based in Islamabad, Pakistan, said the visit is an occasion for both countries to take stock of their cooperation achievements, promote a common vision for aligning markets, and increase favorable exposure for their industries and manufacturers.

China has been Vietnam's top trading partner for many years. Vietnam is China's top trading partner in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and China's fourth-largest trading partner globally. Trade between China and Vietnam reached \$229.8 billion in 2023, according to the Foreign Ministry.

Hussain said Lam's visit is expected to play a crucial role in expanding future investments, fast-tracking development projects and promoting new directions for trade and industrial cooperation.

Inbound travelers surge amid policy push

By YANG ZEKUN
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Entries by foreigners at ports across China exceeded 17.25 million from January to July this year, a 129.9 percent increase compared with the same period in 2023, the National Immigration Administration said on Monday.

The NIA estimated that foreign visitors have boosted consumption by more than 100 billion yuan (\$14 billion), with per capita daily average consumption reaching nearly 3,500 yuan.

The surge in foreign visitors to China is rooted in the impact of a series of policies in recent years aimed at facilitating entry by foreigners, it said.

The administration, working with relevant departments, has expanded the number of countries whose citizens are granted visa-free entry. It has also introduced more than 110 measures to facilitate the entry of foreigners into China since April 2018.

Liu Haitao, deputy director of the NIA, said that China's visa-free transit policy, which has been in place since January 2013, is continuously optimized in terms of applicable countries, ports of entry, duration of stay and available areas.

The policy has been a key factor in making it easier for foreign tourists to visit China, he added.

Liu said that the NIA has also introduced a number of regional visa-free policies, including 144-hour visa-free entry to Guangdong province for foreign tourist groups coming from the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, 144-hour visa-free entry to Guilin, a scenic city in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, for tourist groups from member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 30-day visa-free entry to Hainan province for citizens of 59 countries, and 15-day visa-free entry for foreign tourist groups arriving at coastal provinces by cruise ship.

Recently, a new 144-hour visa-free entry policy for Hainan has been implemented for foreign tourist groups registered in Hong Kong and Macao, benefiting more than 5.9 million foreign tourists, he said.

In addition, Liu said, "Application conditions for port visas have been further relaxed."

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Back to class



A student of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, reads from her textbook in a classroom after the reopening of schools on Sunday. LUIS TATO / AFP

LIN-GANG A HOTHOUSE INCUBATING SUCCESS, PIONEERING TECH

Special area in Shanghai taking innovative approaches to develop industries, attract talent

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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In late June, China's first independent car design company IAT Auto signed an investment framework agreement with Lin-gang Special Area to conduct its automotive research and development, manufacturing and export operations.

Xuan Qiwu, chairman of IAT Auto, which has worked with over



80 industry leaders including Honda, SAIC Motor and Li Auto for the past 17 years, said there were major reasons the company was setting up in the special area section of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone.

Apart from an extensive transportation network linking Lin-gang to the rest of the country and the world, various opening-up policies introduced to improve global competitiveness were good incentives for the company to expand its footprint there, he said.

IAT's new facility will be located in Lin-gang's Yangshan Special Comprehensive Bonded Zone.

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Which nation's economy is struggling?

The media in the United States reports almost daily that the Chinese economy is heading down the wrong road. As one example, The New York Times has noted that the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee that concluded last month had not sufficiently oriented China's future economy toward consumers.

Meanwhile, China continues on pace to record growth at roughly 5 percent in 2024, the target set by the government at the beginning of the year. The World Economic Forum has stated that "economists and government officials say they are optimistic that China can reach its goal". In addition, the country's commitment to identifying areas of high-quality

growth and promoting the green economy continues to draw accolades. Earlier this year, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said China "is already the global leader in deploying renewable energy, and is making rapid progress in green mobility. Its continued leadership is vital to addressing the global climate crisis".

WORLD WATCH

By Anthony Moretti

The experts continue to say the same thing: China is moving in the right direction, and the concept of "Made in China" versus "Made by China" is still on track.

On the other hand, many of those same US media want their audiences to believe that the US economy is

surging. They are emboldened in part by US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, who remains bullish. A few days ago, he said: "You don't see any reason to think that this economy is either overheating or sharply weakening. That's just not in the data right now. What's in the data right now is an economy that's growing at a solid pace, a labor market that has cooled off, but, nonetheless, unemployment is low."

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Strength
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The bonded zone has already attracted a large number of well-established overseas carmakers such as BMW and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles to build design hubs, and international centralized procurement and distribution centers for auto parts. Establishing itself in the zone is expected to accelerate IAT's internationalization, as Chinese automotive companies become more outward looking, Xuan said.

Apart from overseas companies, Lin-gang is also home to a large number of domestic companies in the auto industry chain. The possibility of working with more companies is another major reason IAT was attracted to the area, Xuan said.

In 2023, more than 1.1 million intelligent connected cars were churned out in Lin-gang, with the industry's annual output exceeding 300 billion yuan (\$41.9 billion), which is 10 times the size in 2019.

Big players, big benefits

US electric vehicle maker Tesla can take a big part of the credit for progress made by the industry in Lin-gang. By launching a gigafactory in Lin-gang in 2018, Tesla helped build a full industry chain for intelligent connected car manufacturing in the special area.

More than 180 companies have been providing auto parts or services to Tesla's gigafactory. Of those, 105 are based in 24 cities in the wider Yangtze River Delta region. Tesla's 40 gigawatt-hour energy storage project, also located in Lin-gang, is scheduled to be operational by the end of this year.

With a whopping 50 billion yuan in investment, Tesla's gigafactory is the largest foreign-invested manufacturing project in Shanghai.

More significantly, the massive project involved large and complicated construction work, which in the past usually resulted in a lengthy process to complete administrative approval.

However, Lin-gang allowed Tesla to start construction first and submit the documents later, as long as all the approval procedures were ultimately met. This allowed Tesla to start construction of the facility, put it into use as soon as possible, and churn out the inaugural vehi-

cle in the first year of the factory's operation.

Wu Xiaohua, deputy-secretary of the Party working committee of the Lin-gang Special Area, said the seemingly miraculous speed at which Tesla achieved this feat reflected Lin-gang's dedication to improving the business environment. This also gave the market a glimpse of China's resolve, and the actions taken to expand the country's opening-up.

Tesla's vice-president Tao Lin said the multiple institutional innovations introduced in Lin-gang were another major reason Tesla's operations were galloping ahead there.

"The institutional advantages not only help companies land new projects rapidly, but provide nonstop vitality for the companies' operations, which is as important," she said.

Over the past five years, Lin-gang has realized 138 institutional innovative cases covering free trade, investment, cross-border finance and high-end shipping. Just as importantly, 70 of these cases were the first of their kind in China.

Boeing Shanghai Aviation Services' modification and maintenance businesses in Lin-gang is one of the latest, and best, examples of institutional innovation.

On June 20, the project set a record for Shanghai by completing the process of signing land contracts, gaining construction permits and starting operations within five hours.

To make that possible, Boeing Shanghai took advantage of 13 policies relating to engineering construction projects from Lin-gang's latest review and reform measures.

The presence of the industry giant will help Lin-gang expand the civil aviation industry, one of four frontier industries targeted in its development along with integrated circuits, artificial intelligence and biomedicine.

Path of exploration

As a special economic zone, Lin-gang should undertake more experiments in institutional arrangements, improve weak links and explore new development paths, municipal government officials said at an executive meeting in late July.

It should also take on more special functions and further improve institutional mechanisms to attain

these goals, they added.

Chen Jinshan, director of the Lin-gang Special Area Administration, said the zone will seek more institutional innovations by aligning itself with high-standard international economic and trade rules. Chen cited as examples the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement.

Lin-gang will also conduct more "stress tests" — experiments to test how far the reform can go by including possible challenges and difficulties — on cross-border data, cross-border finance, value-added telecommunications and high-level shipping, he said.

One stress test has already been conducted this year on cross-border data flow in the connected cars, mutual funds and biomedicine sectors, and released in May.

Companies registered in Lin-gang, or other areas of the Shanghai FTZ, can apply for general data cross-border flow services in 11 scenarios specified on a list. However, the data transfer activities must be conducted within Lin-gang.

US carmaker Ford has benefited from the new list, which is the first of its kind in China. Wu Ji, head of information security and data compliance at Ford China, said if one of its cars sold in China needs maintenance, the company needs to transfer the vehicles' information back to its global headquarters to get technical support.

The new list classifies global after-sales services under the cross-border data flow scenario. This means Ford can now provide these services more conveniently, Wu said.

Shen Yi, a professor of international politics at Fudan University, said the list was "down-to-earth and elastic," and stressed its importance to stimulating economic growth. "Cross-border data flows are now a prerequisite for industry development," he said.

"But the compliance cost for such activities cannot be overwhelming for companies. The new list, which is quite exceptional from a global perspective, has provided a list, with limits, that will meet economic development needs because it is based on real business scenarios," he said.

It is also important that Lin-gang was chosen as the location for such an experiment, Shen said.

"Risks cannot be completely avoided while seeking economic development," he said. "The solution is not to eliminate risks, which is impossible, but to strike a balance between development and security, and control risks within a tolerable range."

When it comes to cross-border data flow, no institution, regulatory body or company can come up with a ready-made solution. Also, technologies and application scenarios evolve and upgrade rapidly, Shen added.

The list rolled out in Lin-gang is a realistic solution, he said. "It is through experiments, and maybe mistakes, that progress can be made," Shen said.

A second list covering insurance and shipping will be released in August, said Chen from the Lin-gang Special Area Administration.

Population growth

The expansion of industries and new businesses, coupled with economic dynamism, has propelled Lin-gang's population from 440,000 in 2019 — when it was upgraded to become part of the Shanghai FTZ — to over 600,000 today.

The government's efforts to attract fresh talent to the area have also played a big role.

Over the past five years, Lin-gang has issued 1,110 work permits for expatriates and approved permanent residency for another 79 foreigners. Overseas returnees have set up 270 companies in the special area.

From July 12, Lin-gang took the initiative of issuing China's first e-visas. With the entire application process completed online, a digital visa can be issued within three days.

An e-visa is valid for a single entry, with an entry validity of 15 days and a period of stay not exceeding 30 days.

Yang Wu, deputy director of the human resources department of Lin-gang Special Area Administration, said such measures can help overseas professionals set up businesses and conduct trade.

Ye Wei, head of the port visa office at the Exit-Entry Administration Bureau of Shanghai Public Security Bureau, said they had worked with the Lin-gang administration to keep records for 1,300 companies to help with their future needs. Similar initiatives are expected to eventually be implemented outside Lin-gang, he added.

Over the past five years, Lin-gang has attracted more than 97,000 professionals. Over 27,000 new talents have settled in Lin-gang in the first seven months of this year, a 41 percent year-on-year increase.

A total of 1,132 companies have registered for the online job market launched by Lin-gang administration in early 2023, which has detailed over 8,000 job opportunities and received 146,200 resumes.

Credit, where credit's due

To help technology startups stabilize their core research and development and further boost innovation, Lin-gang introduced a

new type of loan early last year.

Tech companies can use the loan for stock ownership and equity incentives. Companies from the integrated circuits, artificial intelligence, biomedicine, electronic information, life science, high-end equipment and advanced materials sectors can apply for the loans as long as they have at least one technological achievement already acknowledged by the government.

By the end of June, 16 Lin-gang-based companies had applied for the new loans, and eight had already received them. In September 2023, the pilot program was extended to Zhangjiang, another part of Shanghai with a cluster of pharmaceutical companies.

More practical measures are also being introduced in Lin-gang to retain and attract talent. Over 2,200 people from 200 companies have been approved for home subsidies totaling 50 million yuan, to settle in Lin-gang. Another 2.5 million yuan in rental subsidies has also been granted to nearly 300 people.

Meanwhile, construction of Dishuihu School, a public school covering 12 grades, started in March. It will receive its first primary and middle school students in 2025. With a total investment of 2.34 billion yuan, the school will support the families of workers and offer courses in subjects such as AI and IC to cater to Lin-gang's development needs.

During a visit to the area in late July, Shanghai's Party secretary Chen Jining compared Lin-gang to a vigorous and adventurous "little tiger," and said it should strive to complete the reform and pioneering tasks assigned to it by the government.

The special area has the potential to grow into a vibrant growth engine for Shanghai by attaching greater importance to soliciting new businesses and investment, introducing fresh talents, nurturing new industries and consolidating its existing advantages, he said.

"By aligning with China's major development strategies, Lin-gang should initiate more reform and lead further opening-up. More new quality productive forces and world-class industrial clusters should be nurtured here by giving full play to its advantages in institutional innovation and continued opening-up," Chen added.

1,493 firms

The number of registered high-tech companies in Lin-gang in 2023. There were 254 in 2019.

27,000 talents

have settled in Lin-gang in the first seven months of this year, a 41 percent year-on-year increase.



Left: People visit the Shanghai Astronomy Museum in the Lin-gang Special Area of the China Pilot Free Trade Zone, on July 15. The museum attracts many students during the summer vacation. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Middle: Visitors read at the Dayin Bookmall in Lin-gang, which is the area's first cultural reading space. CHEN LI / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: Employees work at Tesla's gigafactory in Lin-gang. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Battle against disease



Patients listen to a doctor on Saturday outside the consultation room of the mpox treatment center at Nyiragongo General Referral Hospital, north of Goma, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The DRC is the epicenter of an epidemic that led the WHO to trigger its highest level of international alert on Wednesday. GUERCHOM NDEBO / AFP

EU risks its climate goals with EV tariff hikes

By ZHENG WANYIN in London
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The European Union's decision to levy additional tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles could be counterproductive, as it puts the bloc's decarbonization goals at risk, experts said.

Stephen Perry, honorary president of the 48 Group Club, a London-based nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting Sino-British trade cooperation, said the tariffs could slow down the EU's transition from petrol cars to electric vehicles.

"It is a good time for European carmakers to make the transition. They are not prepared for this. China will enter joint ventures in Europe if the approach of the EU is friendly. Otherwise, the situation may deteriorate," he said.

"Sharing is the way forward, not battles. Everyone needs to remember that we are all supposed to be cooperating to help reduce carbon emissions. China is sharing its progress."

"Now is not the time for the EU to compete with the United States for the tough-man title," Perry added, alluding to the general perception

that the imposition of additional tariffs mirror the US strategy of pushing for de-risking and decoupling from China.

The European Commission on June 12 announced temporary countervailing duties on battery electric vehicles imported from China, based on its anti-subsidy probe launched last October.

The commission's primary executive arm provisionally concluded that the BEV value chain in China benefits from what it called "unfair" subsidization, which it claimed posed a threat to European BEV manufacturers.

Different manufacturers will be taxed differently. The initial decision imposes a 17.4 percent tariff on BYD, 19.9 percent on Geely, and 37.6 percent on SAIC. These are in addition to the existing 10 percent import tariff the EU imposes on all non-EU electric vehicle manufacturers.

While it is right for the EU to value its homemade goods, Chris Aylett, a research associate at the Environment and Society Centre at Chatham House, a London-based independent policy institute, highlighted in an analysis that the restrictions on Chinese BEVs jeop-

ardize the union's legally binding climate targets of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and at least a 55 percent reduction by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

This is especially concerning given that clean products manufactured in Europe remain expensive, and EU-level investment in the industry falls "far short" with no signs of improvement, Aylett said, suggesting that the union will need to rely on China's imports.

"These targets are ambitious," he said. "With 2022 marking a reduction of 32.5 percent, accelerated and sustained action will be needed. This implies deploying mass-market clean technology products like solar panels and electric vehicles in very large numbers."

"And when it comes to cheap, clean technology, China is the undisputed world leader. Two decades of consistent and targeted industrial policy, combined with the benefits of a huge domestic market, mean that China today produces extremely competitively priced, high-quality, low-carbon goods," he added.

"All else being equal, anything which stems the flow of the cheap-

est low-carbon products will increase the cost of the transition and slow it down," he concluded.

Zulkafli Hassan Khan, president of the Society of International Relations & Law at the Institute of Legal Studies in Pakistan and director of the Pak-China Corridor of Knowledge, said in an op-ed for China Daily that the tariffs make the EU an "obvious loser," as it could fall behind other countries in realizing a green future.

"It would result in increasing the prices of the (EU) EVs because of which domestic automobile producers would face less competition," he said. "Simultaneously, the tariffs would open new markets for Chinese EV manufacturers."

He added that Chinese firms have started picking up shares in countries with small domestic auto industries, such as Australia and New Zealand, which shows that the EU is the obvious loser in this case.

Stephan Ossenkopp, a senior researcher at the Germany-based think tank Schiller Institute, pointed out in his op-ed piece for China Daily that "the real challenge for the European electric vehicle industry comes from developments within Europe, not imports from China."

Philippines urged to halt provocations

Concerns over illegal intrusion by foreign ships and dangerous collision at Xianbin Reef

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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The China Coast Guard took control measures on Monday against Philippine Coast Guard vessels, which successively intruded into the waters near Xianbin Reef and Ren'ai Reef, as the Chinese side accused the Philippines of "attempting to seek a long-term presence" at Xianbin Reef.

One of the Philippine vessels "deliberately rammed" a Chinese law enforcement ship "in a dangerous manner" at Xianbin Reef, causing a collision, Chinese authorities said on Monday, noting that the China Coast Guard's response was "professional, standardized, reasonable and lawful".

On Monday, CCG issued five statements, detailing the provocative actions of the two Philippine Coast Guard vessels and releasing video footage of one Philippine vessel deliberately ramming a Chinese ship twice at Xianbin Reef.

Gan Yu, a spokesman for the CCG, said in a statement that two Philippine Coast Guard vessels illegally intruded into the adjacent waters of Xianbin Reef in China's Nansha Islands without the Chinese government's permission, prompting the CCG to take control measures in accordance with the law.

At 3:24 am, one of the Philippine vessels ignored multiple stern warnings from the Chinese side and deliberately rammed a Chinese law enforcement vessel in an unprofessional and dangerous manner, causing a collision, he said, noting that the responsibility for this lies entirely with the Philippine side.

However, the Philippine Coast Guard's provocations did not stop at Xianbin Reef.

At around 6 am on Monday, the Philippine vessel that deliberately rammed the Chinese ship ignored repeated warnings and navigation controls from the Chinese side, and illegally intruded into the waters near Ren'ai Reef following its provocation at Xianbin Reef, according to the CCG.

Gan said in a separate statement that the CCG also took control measures against the offending Philippine vessel in accordance

with the law and regulations.

"The Philippine side's repeated provocations have violated the temporary arrangement between China and the Philippines on the supply of living materials to a Philippine warship, which has been illegally grounded at Ren'ai Reef for 25 years, seriously infringing on China's sovereignty and severely undermining regional peace and stability," he said. "We sternly warn the Philippine side to immediately cease its infringing provocations. Otherwise, it will bear all the consequences arising from such actions."

In another statement, Gan said that the CCG monitored and controlled the Philippine vessels in accordance with laws and regulations.

"China has indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands, including Xianbin and Ren'ai reefs, and their adjacent waters," he said.

"The China Coast Guard will continue to carry out rights protection and law enforcement activities in the waters under China's jurisdiction in accordance with the law, resolutely thwart any infringements and provocations, and safeguard national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests."

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Monday that the Philippines' action at Xianbin Reef was "attempting to resupply a Philippine Coast Guard vessel anchored in the reef's lagoon, seeking to achieve a long-term presence."

She emphasized that Xianbin Reef, which is part of China's Nansha Islands, is both China's inherent territory and an uninhabited reef.

"This action by the Philippines has seriously infringed upon China's sovereignty, gravely violated the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and severely jeopardized peace and stability in the South China Sea," Mao said.

"China firmly opposes such actions and will continue to take resolute and strong measures in accordance with the law to safeguard its territorial and maritime rights and interests, and to uphold the DOC."

According to media reports, a Philippine Coast Guard vessel entered the lagoon of the reef without China's permission in April and has been there since then.

Facing charges



Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra (right) arrives at the Criminal Court in Bangkok on Monday for the trial in a royal-insult case that is more than a decade old. MANAN VATSYAYANA / AFP

Travel: Visa-free transit policies set to be optimized

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"Foreigners who urgently need to engage in business or other activities in China can now apply for port visas at 100 visa-issuing agencies in 73 cities nationwide. Various convenient services, such as reentry visas for foreign business and investment personnel, are also being provided."

From January to July, immigration authorities across the country issued about 846,000 port visas to foreign nationals who had urgent

reasons to enter China but did not have enough time to apply for visas at Chinese embassies or consulates. That was an 182.9 percent year-on-year increase, according to the NIA.

Liu said the administration will continue to optimize visa-free transit policies, including expanding applicable areas, and will increase coordination with regions and relevant departments to improve the convenience for foreigners traveling to China.

Xu Xiaolei, chief brand officer of

Beijing-based CYTS Tours Holding Co, said that under the combined effects of the 144-hour visa-free transit policy and other convenient immigration policies, entities in the market have seen significant positive outcomes. The measures not only facilitate tourists' travels but also promote the development of China's tourism industry, Xu said.

Since last year, in the wake of the impact of COVID-19, national departments as well as travel-related enterprises have devised numer-

ous strategies to expedite the recovery of the tourism market, with the convenient entry and exit policies being among the initiatives, he said.

At the same time, these policies are conducive to showcasing China's image to the world, Xu said.

He noted that over a period of time, various national departments have continuously optimized aspects such as accommodations, transportation and payment options for foreign visitors coming to China.

Recession: Indicators show potential trouble for the US

From page 1

And what does "growing at a solid pace" mean? The most realistic projections place US growth in 2024 at roughly 2.5 percent.

Before you get caught up in all of the excitement, keep in mind that there is mounting evidence that the US is already in a recession. Just last week, the government reported that the unemployment rate was 4.3 percent, marking the fourth straight month that figure has gone up.

Related to that, only 114,000 new jobs were created last month, a figure that looks worse when one real-

izes that roughly 250,000 jobs were being created per month just one year ago.

If the US economy does slide into recession, then Vice-President Kamala Harris might bear the burden. Not only has she served as President Joe Biden's number two for the past four years, but US people believe that she, not her opponent former president Donald Trump, is better able to guide the economy. Will they feel the same if more and more of their friends are suddenly unemployed and if growth estimates, not to mention the stock market, decline?

Keep in mind that 16 years ago, Republican presidential candidate John McCain's chances of election went up in smoke when the US economy fell apart. Granted, the drop is not nearly as sharp this time, but the fickle electorate might view Harris differently if she is considered even partially responsible for the domestic economic woes.

Two news items from last week highlight the reality of where the Chinese and the US economies could be heading. Sometime soon — the exact date is not yet known — WeRide, the China-based auton-

omous vehicle startup, is going public and will be listed on one of US stock exchanges. According to one report, the "company is seeking a valuation as high as \$5.02 billion in its initial public offering". WeRide already operates in seven countries and is conducting tests in the US. WeRide also has robo-buses, robovans and robosweepers in its arsenal.

WeRide's general manager in Singapore, Kerry Xu, said: "We are not just a Chinese company, but more of an international company. We actually started expanding to other countries."

As WeRide looks confidently to the future, Intel, the company whose chips immediately come to mind when someone thinks of a PC, appears stuck in the past. The company's stock price cratered by 26 percent in just one day, which the British investment magazine MoneyWeek has suggested has been caused by its "focus on PCs" which meant it "missed the boom in demand for mobile phone chips".

Intel is expected to cut 15,000 jobs, identify \$10 billion in cuts next year and cancel dividend payments later this year. Nevertheless, analysts acknowledge that Intel lags behind companies such as Nvidia and TSMC, and there is no guarantee that it can close that gap.

Of course, WeRide alone does not tell the story of how China's economy continues to be transformed. Likewise, Intel is not the only indicator of potential trouble for the US economy. Nevertheless, more nuanced analysis from the mainstream media appears necessary, especially now as US voters are expected to pay closer attention to the presidential candidates and also pay closer attention to how well their own household finances are doing.

The author is department head and associate professor of the Communication and Organizational Leadership department at Robert Morris University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Slippery sport



Villagers participate in a watery tug-of-war competition in Wangdong township in Rongshui Miao autonomous county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Sunday. In recent years, Wangdong has made full use of its abundant water resources to host water sports competitions, which help promote the development of its tourism industry and further its rural vitalization efforts. LONG LINZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Parents help children dodge time limits on online games

Surveys find most are aiding minors despite concerns about addiction

By ZHAO YIMENG
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Despite concerns over gaming addiction among minors, more than half of Chinese parents are willing to provide their identification information to help their children bypass real-name authentication requirements in online games, recent surveys reveal.

A survey conducted by the Beijing News Think Tank between July 23 and Aug 6 found that 58.5 percent of the 1,156 respondents with children age 8 to 18 admitted to giving their personal identification information to their children for real-name authentication in online games.

The survey found that 57 percent of parents with children age 13 to 15 "occasionally" provided their IDs to facilitate their children's gaming, indicating that parents are often willing to compromise when faced with their children's demands for gaming access.

Real-name game authentication

for children was launched three years ago to combat gaming addiction by requiring players to verify their identity.

The National Press and Publication Administration issued regulations in August 2021 that stipulated that all online gaming companies can only provide services to minors for one hour between 8 pm and 9 pm on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays and public holidays.

According to the regulation, online gaming services must not be available to minors in any form beyond these periods.

A report on the protection of juveniles in China's game industry last year said that 46.5 percent of respondents reported using a parent's or someone else's identity, sharing accounts with their parents, or buying or renting accounts for online games.

Only 32.9 percent registered with their own identification, according to the report, which was

jointly compiled by the China Audio-Video and Digital Publishing Association and its game industry research center.

A separate survey by Tong Bicheng, a 17-year-old intern at the Beijing Teenagers Law Aid and Research Center, surveyed 1,108 juveniles in eight counties across several provinces.

His report on online consumption by minors in county-level regions, including rural areas, indicates that over 80 percent of respondents play online games for more than one hour every day from Friday to Sunday, as well as on public holidays.

More than 77 percent of the minors he surveyed used other people's identities to register for the games. About 56.6 percent used their parents' IDs, while 12.8 percent used their grandparents' IDs.

Wang Yufen, the grandmother of two girls in Beijing, said they have been using her ID to register online games.

"Most children around us use their family members' IDs for online games, because they are not able to play during the desig-

nated periods," Wang said.

Her granddaughters usually do homework, practice musical instruments or play outdoors with friends in the community between 8 pm and 9 pm, while the time before bed or daytime on weekends were more available for online games, she added.

Game companies have different degrees of restrictions, she said, with some looser than others and not requiring facial recognition for authentication.

In Tong's report, a middle school student from Guizhou province said he played games for more than 12 hours a day on weekends and holidays. He said that when facial recognition is required, he tells his parents that a school-related survey needs to scan their faces. That way, his parents unknowingly complete the face scan, which allows him to continue gaming.

More than half the surveyed juveniles said they would be willing to register with their own identification information if they could play online games for nine hours a week and not be limited to an 8 pm to 9 pm time slot, the report said.

Top court to focus on cyber money laundering

By CAO YIN
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1,391

The number of people prosecuted for money laundering in the first half of this year

Chinese courts will step up efforts to combat money laundering, with a particular focus on crimes committed through virtual currencies, online game coins and other emerging digital platforms, officials from China's top court announced on Monday.

"With the widespread use of internet technologies, the number of criminal cases involving money laundering is rapidly increasing, and the methods are becoming more sophisticated," Chen Xueyong, deputy chief judge of the Supreme People's Court's No 3 Criminal Adjudication Tribunal, told a news conference.

Chen said courts across China concluded 861 money laundering cases last year, 362 more than in 2021. In the first half of this year, 573 people were punished for the crime.

Chen said over 80 percent of the upstream offenses linked to the cases involved drugs, embezzlement, bribery or the finance sector. He said virtual currencies, online game coins and livestreaming platforms have become new channels for money laundering, complicating efforts to detect and combat the crime.

Chen Hongxiang, chief judge of the tribunal, urged judges to focus on cases involving digital platforms and to impose severe punishments on those using such methods to launder money. He also called for intensified efforts against underground banks, emphasizing the need for stronger cooperation among police, prosecutors and financial inspectors to enhance the crackdown.

"In addition, we will proactively seek international cooperation in the fight against money laundering to safeguard our country's financial security and development interests," Chen Hongxiang added.

To aid judges in accurately applying the law and efficiently

resolving money laundering cases, the Supreme People's Court has issued a new judicial interpretation in collaboration with the Supreme People's Procuratorate. The 13-article interpretation, effective from Tuesday, clarifies the circumstances under which money laundering offenses are considered "serious" and subject to harsher penalties.

Under the new interpretation, a person who repeatedly launders money and handles amounts exceeding 5 million yuan (\$700,480) will be deemed to have committed a "serious" offense and could face a prison term of up to 10 years. Those who refuse to cooperate with property recovery efforts or cause losses exceeding 2.5 million yuan will also be subject to more severe punishment.

Chinese prosecutors have also increased their efforts to combat money laundering in recent years. They prosecuted 2,971 people for money laundering last year, nearly 20 times the number in 2019. In the first half of this year, 1,391 people were prosecuted, up 28.4 percent year-on-year, according to Zhang Jianzhong, an official from the top procuratorate.

"We have contributed to the formulation of anti-money laundering laws and assisted the People's Bank of China in participating in the Financial Action Task Force's revision of international standards on asset recovery," Zhang said.

Prosecutors in regions including Beijing, Shanghai and the provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian, Hubei and Henan have enhanced information sharing and collaboration with financial institutions and academic bodies to improve the handling of money laundering cases, Zhang added.

Welcome to PKU



A freshman poses for a photo with a mascot at Peking University in Beijing on Monday. The university has seen 4,326 undergraduate freshmen register this year. LI MUYI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Experts urge healthy lifestyles to fight obesity

Chinese medical experts are urging caution in the use of weight-loss medicines and surgeries, advocating instead for weight control through healthy lifestyle changes.

The call was made during the 2024 China Obesity Congress, which began in Beijing on Saturday.

Experts at the congress emphasized the importance of reasonable dieting and appropriate exercise to maintain a healthy weight. The discussions have gained significant attention on Chinese social media, reflecting growing public interest in weight management.

Obesity has become a major global public health concern. According to the World Health Organization, about one-eighth of the global population was obese in 2022. In China, over half of the adult population is overweight or obese, and this figure is expected to rise to 65.3 percent by 2030, potentially incurring 418 billion yuan (\$58.5 billion) in medical expenses.

Zhang Yuqing, a senior physician at the cardiovascular department of a hospital affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, highlighted the critical need to combat obesity to reduce the incidence of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, diabetes and certain cancers. More than 2 million people die from cardiovascular and cerebro-

“Whether one relies on medication or surgery, it ultimately comes down to following a healthy lifestyle to achieve long-term weight control.”

Chen Wei, physician at Peking Union Medical College Hospital

vascular diseases in China each year. China is intensifying efforts to raise public awareness about the dangers of obesity, with the government, academic and social sectors working together to promote healthy weight maintenance.

The congress, hosted by China's National Clinical Research Center for Digestive Diseases, was first held in 2021. It is dedicated to ensuring healthy weight levels across the population through standard diagnosis and treatment.

The chairman of the congress, Zhang Zhongtao, advocated an integrated approach to tackling obesity, combining a healthy lifestyle with

special medical treatments when necessary to manage conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart failure caused by obesity.

Experts also called for greater attention to childhood obesity, which can have long-term effects on health. Wang Lu, who lives in Shandong province, took her 8-year-old daughter to a hospital for an endocrine examination in June, seeking a solution for the girl's obesity. Following the doctor's advice, Wang helped her daughter adopt a healthier lifestyle, cutting out sugar and fast food and incorporating daily exercise.

Wang shared her experience on social media and discovered that many parents face similar challenges. According to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly one-fifth of Chinese children age 6 to 17 and 10 percent of children under age 6 are overweight or obese.

China has included the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases in its Healthy China Initiative, with the National Health Commission launching a three-year campaign on weight control in June. The digestive diseases center has also established an organization focused on fighting obesity, aiming to create a standard and

integrated multidisciplinary diagnosis and treatment system.

Hospitals across China have opened outpatient departments for weight control, offering systematic services for obese patients. While many young people originally sought to lose weight for aesthetic reasons, more are now doing so for health, according to Liu Rong, head of the nutrition department at a leading hospital in Lanzhou, Gansu province.

The congress will also feature discussions on traditional Chinese medicine treatments for obesity, which are widely used in the country's public campaign to promote weight control.

Despite the development of weight-loss drugs providing more clinical options for those suffering from obesity, experts warned of challenges, including insufficient scientific research, a lack of professional training and social prejudice against obesity.

"Whether one relies on medication or surgery, it ultimately comes down to following a healthy lifestyle to achieve long-term weight control," said Chen Wei, a chief physician in the clinical nutrition department at Peking Union Medical College Hospital.

XINHUA

Two ex-soccer officials sentenced to 11 years

By ZHANG YI
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Two former soccer officials were each sentenced to 11 years in prison on Monday in Hubei province as part of China's ongoing crackdown on corruption in the soccer industry.

Li Yuyi, former vice-chairman of the Chinese Football Association, was sentenced to 11 years and fined 1 million yuan (\$140,000) by the Intermediate People's Court of Jingzhou. Prosecutors revealed that Li exploited his various positions from 2004 to 2021 in Shanghai's Jinshan district, the Chinese Football Association and the Chinese Football Association Super League to do favors for others, including assisting football clubs facing relegation and helping companies secure construction projects. He was found guilty of accepting over 12 million yuan in bribes for his efforts.

In a separate case, the people's court of Jiayu county sentenced Fu Xiang, former director of the Wuhan Football Sport Management Center, to 11 years in prison and fined him 1.4 million yuan for embezzlement and bribery. The

courts ordered the recovery of the embezzled funds and the confiscation of assets obtained through bribery.

The sentences are part of a broader anti-corruption campaign that has swept through Chinese soccer since November 2022, following the investigation of Li Tie, former head coach of the national men's soccer team. Over a dozen high-ranking officials have since been implicated.

In March, the trials of five corruption cases related to soccer were announced, including the sentencing of Chen Xuyuan, former chairman of the Chinese Football Association, to life imprisonment for accepting bribes worth over 81 million yuan (\$11.3 million).

Despite the progress made in the anti-corruption efforts, Xi Hua, head of the discipline inspection and supervision team stationed at the General Administration of Sport, said at a meeting in March that significant issues remain, including the exploitation for personal gain of opportunities in commercial cooperation, equipment procurement and event organization.

CHINA

A decade on, high-speed rail still delivering in western China

1,786-km Lanzhou-Urumqi line puts growth on faster track



A bullet train passes fields of blossoming rapeseed flowers on the Lanzhou-Urumqi High-Speed Railway in Menyuan, Qinghai province, last month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By YANG ZEKUN
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Each morning, the low, repetitive hum of trains on track is enough to send 50-year-old rail maintenance worker Ma Wanli to sleep in his makeshift bed in his on-site office, safe in the knowledge that his previous five-hour shift has ensured everything is running smoothly.

Ma and his colleagues, of China Railway Qinghai-Xizang Group, are responsible for a section of the Lanzhou-Urumqi High-Speed Railway in Qinghai province, stretching 218 kilometers.

Over the past decade, Ma has witnessed the transformation of various local cities from relative obscurities to tourist destinations, and attributes this to the opening of the Lanzhou-Urumqi High-Speed Railway.

The high-speed railway starts in Lanzhou, Gansu province, passes through Xining in Qinghai, and terminates in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, spanning a total length of 1,786 km.

The railway began operation on Dec 26, 2014, strengthening connections between Northwest China and other parts of the country. In nearly 10 years, it has transported over 140 million passengers and driven the rapid economic development of cities along the route.

Ma moved from his hometown in Henan province to live in Xining, the capital city of Qinghai, with his parents when he was 7, as his parents were also railway employees working in the province.

He majored in clinical medicine in college, but influenced by his parents, learned a lot about railways and passed the examination to join the China Railway Qinghai-Xizang Group in 1996.

Ma and his team are responsible for the inspection and maintenance of high-speed railway bridges, tunnels, culverts and other critical equipment. They usually work between midnight and 4 am when the train traffic is relatively light.

Despite working at an altitude of more than 3,000 meters for the past 28 years, Ma hasn't missed a single inspection or made an erroneous judgment.

The team needs to promptly identify and address problems and hidden dangers along the route such as whether drainage outlets within protective fences are blocked, if there is floating debris, or if local residents are engaging in activities like



Clockwise from top: Ma Xueting serves passengers on a train on the Lanzhou-Urumqi High-speed Railway earlier this month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Ma Wanli inspects the Gaojiawan Tunnel on the Lanzhou-Urumqi high-speed line in Ledu, Qinghai province, last month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Train driver Adil Turdi pilots the first high-speed train from Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Oct 11, 2020. SHADAT / XINHUA

burning waste or building sheep pens along the route's fence line.

The environmental issues along the rail line also fall within their scope. In the first few years, Ma and his team encountered villagers dumping piles of straw along the rail fences or burning waste. When they tried to dissuade them, the villagers often didn't understand and refused to cooperate, making the work difficult. They had to collaborate with village officials to address these issues.

The area is prone to strong winds, and debris on the tracks can affect train safety, Ma said. In recent years, increased rainfall and haphazard construction have led to poor drainage, also impacting safety.

After 10 years of operation, the residents around the railway tracks have developed a basic awareness of safety and understand the significant benefits of the railway's safe operation for the local community, he said.

"In maintaining the railway's normal operation, great responsibility, patience, a strong will to keep learning and a continuous spirit of innovation are required," said Ma.

Tracking change

The secret to maintaining his enthusiasm for the job after 30 years is seeing the changes brought about by the development of high-speed trains, making him feel that his work is very meaningful.

Tourism has expanded in Qinghai since the operation of the Lanzhou-Urumqi High-Speed Railway. Menyuan Hui autonomous county, located 150 km from Xining, has leveraged the rail to turn local attractions such as its rapeseed flowers, snowcapped mountains and forest parks into popular tourist destinations. This has helped residents find employment and increase their income. Last year, Menyuan's GDP reached 4.5 billion yuan (\$628 million), five times that of in 2013.

the number of tourists traveling to Qinghai by high-speed train has significantly increased, and the railway station in Menyuan has even had to be expanded, he said.

"Qinghai is a fantastic place known for its yak meat, highland barley, yogurt and wild medicinal herbs. The construction of the railway has spurred local prosperity, bringing visible and tangible changes," he added.

Ma Xueting, 31, of the Hui ethnic group, born and raised in Qinghai, started working for the railway in October 2014, and is currently a train conductor of a Fuxing high-speed train.

When talking about the development in her hometown, she said she felt very proud. She feels honored to participate in the operation of the Lanzhou-Urumqi High-Speed Railway and witness the changes it has brought to her hometown.

Chinese people often say, "To get rich, first build a road". In the past, with the construction of roads, it became much more convenient for people to travel short distances. Now, with the high-speed rail network in place, distances of hundreds or even thousands of kilometers can be covered in a single day, she said.

"Our vast northwestern region spans great distances, with cities often hundreds of kilometers apart. Relying solely on roads can still pose many inconveniences," she said.

Qinghai's resources are extremely rich, not only with unique natural scenery and profound ethnic culture but also as a food paradise. However, due to inconvenient transportation, these rich tourism resources remained largely undiscovered. The railway has allowed millions of visitors to explore this region. Now, passenger trains run on the high-speed railway, with direct trains from Xining to 27 provincial capitals and municipalities, she said.

"Every summer, especially during the peak tourism season from June to September, there is a shortage of train tickets and accommodation in many counties," she said.

Ma Xueting said many of her relatives and friends have started working in tourism, with their annual income being quite good.

According to official statistics, since the opening of the Lanzhou-Urumqi High-Speed Railway, Qinghai has received a total of 340 million tourists. In that time, 337.36 billion yuan has been generated in tourism revenue, with an average annual growth rate of around 10 percent.

Tianzhu connection allows locals to dream big

By YANG ZEKUN

Zhao Tao has always believed that high-speed rail would bring prosperity.

The deputy director of the Development and Reform Bureau of Tianzhu Tibetan autonomous county in Gansu province, now has proof that he was correct after witnessing the opening of a high-speed rail service in his hometown.

The Lanzhou-Zhangye High-Speed Railway's Lanzhou-Wuwei section began operations on June 29. It connects Wuwei to the national high-speed rail network, further improving rail transportation in Northwest China. The travel time between Lanzhou and Wuwei has been reduced from three hours to less than two.

The railway passes through Tianzhu Tibetan autonomous county, a small county with a population of 230,000 located between Wuwei and Lanzhou. The county is taking every step it can to adapt to the changes brought by the high-speed rail.

Long Haishan, 28, a Tibetan of Tianzhu descent, works as a train attendant for China Railway Lanzhou Bureau Group. She expressed her pride in being part of the inaugural run of the route through her hometown.

"Tianzhu boasts the beautiful Sanxia National Forest Park and the ecologically rich Qilian Mountains National Nature Reserve, as well as delicious white yak meat and yak yogurt. I hope more tourists will come to visit and learn about our ethnic characteristics and culture," she said.

Tianzhu is known for its coal, and produces 50 percent of the nation's silicon carbide, which is used in the production of semiconductors, according to the county government. The county is also known for its snowcapped mountains, forests, grasslands, temples, ancient cities, murals and for being the exclusive production area of China's white yak.

Wei Zhonghui, deputy director of the Agricultural Industrialization Service Center of Tianzhu, said that in recent years the county government has developed a rural industrial cluster focused on specialty agricultural products such as white yak, quinoa and mushrooms, with the scale of these industries gradually expanding.

However, due to inconvenient transportation, the products often faced high transportation costs and limited market access, bottlenecks that restricted high-quality and efficient development, he said.

"We've been looking forward to the high-speed rail bringing us traffic and helping us sell our products to more places," said Wei.

The Lanzhou-Wuwei High-Speed Railway has filled the gap in Tianzhu's high-speed railway infrastructure, improved the transportation network and greatly shortened the distance between Tianzhu, Lanzhou and Wuwei in terms of time and space, he said.

Zhao noted that residents in Tianzhu can now reach Wuwei or Lanzhou in less than an hour, bringing tangible benefits to the locals. Currently, there are eight daily trains scheduled at Tianzhu West Station.

Due to the establishment of the national nature reserve, there are restrictions on the county's industrial and agricultural lands. Instead, tourism resources are particularly abundant, which will be the focus of future development, he said.

"Outsiders are often not familiar with our high-quality agricultural products. We are confident that once people come, our products will sell well," he said.

Ma Zhala, 37, a yak breeder in Tianzhu, used to deliver his products to customers in other provinces via mail, incurring high delivery and storage costs. He is planning to open a specialty experience store near the station.

"Our yak jerky is handmade, with a fresh and natural taste. With the opening of the high-speed rail, more people will come and business should be very good," he said.

Embarking on an unforgettable journey to the west

This trip wasn't my first to Gansu province or the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, but it turned out to be the most unforgettable one yet as I journeyed by train from Lanzhou to Xinjiang.

It began in Lanzhou, Gansu, passing through Qinghai province, then heading west toward Zhangye in Gansu, and finally reaching Turpan in Xinjiang.

Heading westward, the continuous sight of snowcapped mountains, vast grasslands, herds of cattle and sheep, endless deserts and barren lands along the way, the

changing scenery reminiscent of scenes from a movie, kept me and my fellow passengers captivated, with expressions of surprise and joy filling our journey.

These breathtaking landscapes once felt like a mystery, almost isolated from the outside world due to poor transportation.

The Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Li Bai once expressed in his poetry his desire to swiftly return home covering a thousand miles in a day. Around a thousand years later, Li's longings have become a reality.

Heading westward, along the way, what I saw were orderly and

well-equipped waiting halls with modern facilities and a variety of shops.

I interacted with students and their parents who were on a study tour from Shanghai to Turpan.

They were no longer satisfied with the descriptions of the magnificent landscapes of the northwest in textbooks; instead, they were eager to personally travel and experience it. From their words and actions, it was even more evident how proud they were of the rapid development of high-speed rail.

The warmhearted locals in the bustling market at Turpan North

Railway Station, much like the scorching local weather, made me feel right at home. The aroma of steaming naan bread, pilaf, sweet raisins was irresistible and truly made me feel that this journey was worthwhile.

At the station, I encountered a 70-year-old couple from Guangdong province waiting for their train. They had long harbored a desire to visit Xinjiang and finally realized their dream after years of planning. "We want to visit the Flaming Mountain, Hemu, Kanas and other scenic spots. We've been looking forward to this for a long time."



I can relate deeply to the joy they experienced when a long-cherished dream suddenly came true, and their courage is something I greatly admire.

Many young individuals yearn for a spontaneous trip, but the pressures of life and work often hinder them from taking that leap. With modern transportation being so convenient, I hope that everyone will seize the opportunity to embark on their adventures at the right moment.

CHINA



Members of Lin Zhi-xun's baseball and softball association take a group photo with a baseball team from Taiwan after a game in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Baseball fan vies for Ningxia home run

Man from Taiwan pitches bat and ball sports in autonomous region

By LI PEIXUAN in Yinchuan
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A young man from Taiwan has stepped up to the plate in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region to introduce the autonomous region to his favorite sports — baseball and softball.

Despite being 2,600 kilometers away from Taipei, where baseball and softball are already popular, 37-year-old fitness manager Lin Zhi-xun aims to use the sports to bring people together in Ningxia and promote healthier lifestyles.

"Even though we only introduced baseball and softball here in Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia, in 2022, the development has surpassed our expectations," said Lin, who founded Ningxia's first baseball and softball association. "Not only men are enthusiastic, but women are also actively participating."

This year he led the association's women's baseball team to the national women's baseball club competition. They secured fourth place, which was "truly unexpected".

Before coming to Ningxia, Lin had only heard of its name from a night market in Taipei, which shares the region's name.

His life in Ningxia started in 2016 with a phone call from an investor who needed someone to manage a chain of fitness centers in the region.

Lin decided to take the opportunity, even though he initially thought he would end up working in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou or Shenzhen, "just as my Taiwan fellows did," he said.

He did an internet search for



Several members of a softball team coached by Lin take a group photo after a game.

Ningxia and found it to be a relatively unknown and seemingly underdeveloped region, which made him worry about the security there. Also, none of his acquaintances had ever been there.

However, upon arrival, he found Ningxia to be quite different from his expectations. Among all the appealing features, particularly, he loved the climate.

"It's much drier compared to the humid environment in Taipei," he said.

Also, clothes dry quickly without becoming moldy. The pleasant conditions in the city have made his acclimation relatively smooth and easy, he said. The city has also developed rapidly and significantly since 2016.

After coming to Ningxia, Lin briefly worked in Shanghai and Suzhou, a city in Jiangsu province, for less than a year out of curiosity about life on the Chinese mainland.

"I found the social interactions in Shanghai and Suzhou were a bit more distant compared to the straightforward and candidness here in Ningxia," Lin said. "People's honesty made interactions more comfortable, leading me to stay here."

my enthusiasm with others," he said.

Yinchuan has a climate that is particularly suited to playing baseball. The city's relatively high altitude and health conscious locals, combined with the predominantly sunny weather, make it an ideal place for outdoor sports, he said.

Unlike Taiwan, where frequent rain limits outdoor practice, Ningxia's climate allows for year-round training, with only cold winters requiring some adjustments, according to Lin.

The sport's development here has been faster than his expectations. While in Taiwan, where girls are reluctant to participate in baseball due to the fear of getting tanned, girls in Ningxia are eager to try out new sports.

This enthusiasm led his association's women's baseball team to take fourth place in a national competition in May.

At present, nearly 80 to 90 adult members of his association regularly participate in activities and practice sessions. When factoring in those who participate less frequently, the club boasts a membership of nearly 1,000 individuals.

"Promoting baseball and softball in Yinchuan is more than just introducing new sports. It's about fostering communication and building community," Lin said.

"Some members are demanding jobs and can only join occasionally. We organize events such as desert camping and paddleboarding by the lake. Many members find our weekend events particularly fun and engaging, making our club a vibrant and diverse community."

After living in Yinchuan for 8 years, Lin has built up a baseball and softball community and wishes more Taiwan friends can visit Ningxia to enjoy the sports together.

Lee Ching-an, director of the Yinchuan Taiwan Compatriots Investment Enterprises Association, said: "We hope more Taiwan entrepreneurs can explore opportunities in the region. The local government has provided substantial support, including land acquisition, reduced labor costs and tax incentives that have helped Taiwan enterprises thrive in various sectors, from education to agriculture and manufacturing."

How one man's effort made *duxianqin* popular

NANNING — A *duxianqin* musician only needs a single string stretched across an elongated sounding board and a feather-shaped rod to deliver a diverse repertoire, whether pop or classical, Chinese or Western.

In his folding screen-adorned Zen-style studio, Wei Qingbing, 39, sat on the bamboo mat-paved floor and plucked the string on his *duxianqin* — literally "a single-stringed zither" — with his right hand, in a vivid rendering of a melodic tune, his left hand sliding across the rod to heighten or lower the pitch and add vibrato to the note.

"Did you make this instrument yourself?" Since he first uploaded clips of him playing the single-stringed zither onto the popular social media platform Douyin in 2018, Wei, a freelance teacher and a PhD student of music who lives in Nanning, capital of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, started receiving many such questions and comments.

For a fairly large proportion of his over 150,000 followers, they were seeing a *duxianqin* performance for the first time through his clips.

Some of his followers are happily answering any newcomer's questions, commenting that the zither is a traditional instrument of the Jing ethnic group.

As one of China's smallest ethnic groups, the Jing currently number less than 30,000 and mainly live in Guangxi's border areas adjoining Vietnam, where the *duxianqin* is also played.

Wei thus made this otherwise anonymous instrument known to a wider audience in China through social media platforms.

Wei himself identifies as Zhuang, another ethnic group inhabiting Guangxi famed for its singing tradition. He stumbled across the instrument back in high school, while watching a traditional music band perform on TV. He was hooked.

After going to college, he began to learn to play the instrument from various teachers, including the Jing people and maestros from Vietnam.

The art of *duxianqin* was formally recognized by the Chinese government as an intangible cultural heritage in 2011, and Wei was named an inheritor of *duxianqin* for his proficiency in 2021.

After gaining recognition, Wei was sought out by people who aspired to learn the instrument, ranging from school kids to pensioners.

Xu Jing, a small business owner in Nanning, took her 8-year-old son

to Wei's studio for tutoring.

Speaking of her choice of the instrument for her son, Xu said: "I think it would be a pity if a kid in Guangxi does not play a folk instrument. Moreover, there are already too many students learning Western instruments."

"*Duxianqin* looks very special," added Xu, believing that the country's support for traditional instruments will benefit learners like her son.

For Wei, his love of folk instruments is not limited to *duxianqin*, but encompasses plucked string instruments from China and south-eastern Asian countries.

In his studio, several *guqin* zithers, a seven-stringed classical Chinese instrument, are placed on the bamboo mat floor or the antiquity-style furniture, and a Thai folk instrument, the Pin Pia, hung on the wall, amid tea cups and a variety of teapots.

Wei integrates his love for traditional culture into his life. Not only does his studio exude classical Chinese elegance, but he also retreats to a serene place tucked away in the mountains every week. He brings his *guqin* zithers with him and plays them by rivers or waterfalls, all filmed and posted on his social media account, attracting envious viewers.

"Modern life is fast-paced, and playing *guqin* quiets noisy minds," Wei said.

In his studio, Wei pulled out a volume of ancient *guqin* scores from a shelf and opened it, pointing with his index finger at the bizarre-looking characters, saying the ancient *guqin* scores feature only technique instructions for each note, but lack a well-defined pitch, rhythm or strength. "That leaves musicians space to improvise," he said.

Ancient China emphasized the concept of "Heaven and Man as One", and playing *guqin* requires performers to play music according to their state of mind, according to Wei.

For the same degree of artistic freedom, he loves other folk instruments as well.

"The performance of Western musical instruments strives for perfection, with no room for errors and the rhythm must be precise. In contrast, *duxianqin* and most ancient Chinese and Asian zithers allow ample room for performers to freely express themselves," Wei said. "I really enjoy the freedom to improvise, it's interesting."

XINHUA



An artist plays a *duxianqin* at a tourism promotion event held in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. ZHOU HUA / XINHUA

Singaporean engineers hail China's cutting-edge green technology

By CHEN YE in Hangzhou
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On Aug 16, during the 2024 Green Low-Carbon Innovation Conference, a delegation of 12 members from the Institution of Engineers Singapore visited several cutting-edge technology sites in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, including Merit Interactive Co, Alibaba Group, Hangzhou West Railway Station and Zhejiang Lab.

Chan Ewe Jin, president of IES, who was visiting Hangzhou for the second time, observed that China has made rapid advancements in sustainable green technology and has put a lot of effort in technological research.

He said: "I found it fascinating to see the many improvements made here. There is a lot that can be shared with other parts of the world. While Zhejiang provides a great platform for international dialogues, Singapore, too, has been advancing in green technology.



Singaporean engineers listen to a presentation while visiting Merit Interactive Co in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

However, we must learn from what China has achieved, especially the advanced and optimized innovations here. There are many aspects that we don't know before coming here."

He was particularly impressed by Merit Interactive's digital product, DIGS, and Alibaba's language model, Tongyi, which sparked lively discussions among the Singaporean engineers.

Merit Interactive is a leading data intelligence company that empowers industries with cutting-edge data technologies. Their product, the Data Intelligence Greenwave System or the DIGS, integrates dynamic data from traffic management departments, realtime road conditions and internet traffic perception data.

By intelligently coordinating traffic signals, the system ensures that vehicles traveling at a set speed encounter green lights at intersections, minimizing stops and improving traffic flow.

During the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games, the city's public security traffic police adopted the DIGS system to ensure the priority and smooth passage of vehicles.

This smart city management tool has been successfully implemented in several major provinces, including Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangsu and Shanxi. It has notably increased the average traffic flow efficiency by a remarkable 20 percent, significantly

reducing the stop rate and stop delay at intersections and red lights.

Daniel Tay, a Singaporean engineer, said: "While Singapore similarly has systems that control the timing of traffic lights, today at Merit Interactive, we saw something new. Their subsidiary, Wintoo Technology, offers intelligent monitoring, inspection and maintenance solutions for road conditions, which we don't have in Singapore."

Alibaba's language model, Tongyi, also left a strong impression. The model can transcribe and summarize audio and video files, distinguish between different speakers, and even create mind maps to quickly organize and visualize the content.

The Singaporean engineers were eager to know if these features were available internationally and pleased to learn that they were.

"Integrating AI into systems, as we see today, feels like something out of a movie. It's a new and exciting development. Using AI for traf-

fic modeling, powered by big data, is particularly promising for the transportation industry. So we have to share the development other countries have with my members," Chan said.

The visit of the Singapore engineers to Hangzhou was part of the international exchange activities of the conference. Additionally, the 96th Executive Committee Meeting of the World Federation of Scientific Workers was held in Huzhou on the sidelines of the conference where the Green Low-Carbon Development Initiative was launched.

Emphasizing the importance of international cooperation, Elies Molins, co-president of the World Federation of Scientific Workers, said: "Due to varying resources and developmental stages, countries will have different timelines for achieving carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals. International cooperation is essential, as individual efforts alone are inadequate to tackle global challenges, while collaboration leads to more efficient problem-solving. ... We are in the same boat and have to go in the same direction."

WORLD

African envoys expect deeper ties with China

Diplomats upbeat on upcoming FOCAC summit, emphasize new opportunities

By EDITH MUTETHYA
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African diplomats to Kenya have expressed strong optimism for the upcoming Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summit, viewing it as an opportunity to further deepen ties and chart new paths of cooperation toward building a China-Africa community with a shared future.

The diplomats, having toured key Belt and Road Initiative projects in Kenya, including the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway, lauded the initiative for transforming the continent's infrastructure network and consequently boosting economic growth.

Anouar Ben Youssef, Tunisia's ambassador to Kenya, said the FOCAC summit, scheduled for Sept 4-6 in Beijing, will provide a chance to reaffirm China's engagement with Africa across various sectors beyond infrastructure.

"The summit will also be an opportunity to exchange new views and opportunities for a stronger cooperation between China and Africa," he said.

Youssef emphasized China's readiness to support Africa and urged countries across the continent to align their needs with internal development plans.

Many BRI projects in Kenya reflect China's interest and commitment to help African countries develop in strategic fields such as communications and transport, he said.

Despite the West's unfounded accusations that China is burdening Africa with debt, the evidence of significant infrastructure development across the continent demonstrates China's role as a key partner.

"This is in addition to the interest shown by African countries in maintaining and furthering their relationship with China."

Sanyu Manday, counselor at the Uganda High Commission in Kenya, said she expects African countries to propose development projects at the FOCAC summit and hopes China can help explore ways to assist in their implementation.

"For Uganda, we are looking at constructing a Standard Gauge Railway to connect with the Kenyan one to further ease transportation and improve trade," she said.

Regional approach

Manday said she believes that African countries should seek financing and development for BRI projects as a region rather than individually.

This approach, currently being considered by the East African Community, could secure better investment rates and improve economies of scale.

Projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway could help in regional integration, improve transportation and foster collective growth among regional countries, she said.

Manday also thanked China for its practical engagement with Afri-



"We appreciate that Africa has a partner who understands us, can move with us and help us get out of our transportation constraints."

Sanyu Manday, counselor at the Uganda High Commission in Kenya

can countries through models such as public-private partnerships, as was the case with the Nairobi Expressway project.

At a time when Africa is facing high debt challenges and the pressing need for infrastructure projects to boost socioeconomic development, Manday said the public-private partnership model is the way to go.

"We appreciate that Africa has a partner who understands us, can move with us and help us get out of our transportation constraints," she said.

Engagement strategy

Dampety Bediako Asare, Ghana's high commissioner to Kenya, said each African country should go to the FOCAC summit with an understanding of their development needs and a strategy on how they want to engage China.

He said it should be clear to them whether they want to engage China as a continent or individually and whether the African Union should negotiate on behalf of the continent.

"To benefit fully from the BRI, African countries must prepare adequately, understand what they need, understand their development needs and be able to negotiate effectively," Asare said.

Andrew Sesinyi, Botswana's high commissioner to Kenya, said not only is China a good friend of Africa, but the level of bilateral cooperation is also on the rise.

"The relationship between China and Africa is not a scenario of a relationship between the wolf and the lamb. It's a true cooperation based on equity and mutual benefits," he said.

"The BRI projects visited by diplomats in Kenya reflect Africa's efforts to attract true partners and investors, he said.

"It's a global village; nobody is going to make it on their own. Whether the developed world or the developing world, we need cooperation," Sesinyi said.

Zhou Pingjian, Chinese ambassador to Kenya, said through the joint efforts by China and Africa, this year's FOCAC summit will be a great success.

"The summit will be an event to celebrate China-Africa friendship, explore cooperation and chart the course for the future under the theme of joining hands to advance modernization and build a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future," he said.



Pro-Palestinian protesters march in Chicago, Illinois, on Sunday, ahead of the Democratic National Convention that kicked off on Monday. JIM VONDRUSKA VIA AFP

Abbas to visit Gaza as polio fears grow

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' planned visit to Gaza has been welcomed amid worsening humanitarian conditions in the enclave, including fears of a polio outbreak, despite the resumption of cease-fire talks led by mediators.

Dina Yulianti Sulaeman, director of the Indonesia Center for Middle East Studies, said although Abbas' desire to come to Gaza is "a little bit late," it is "worthy of appreciation."

"This new development is related to the unity agreement of the Palestinian factions in Beijing (last month) and the escalation that is happening due to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh," said Sulaeman, referring to the July 31 assassination of the Hamas leader in Teheran.

"I hope that Mr Abbas, who has been known to have a more accommodating position toward Israel when meeting directly with the resistance factions in Gaza, will increasingly provide support to take a firm stance against Israel, namely demanding that Israel stop its attacks on Gaza and open up humanitarian aid channels."

Abbas announced his planned trip at the Turkish parliament during a visit on Thursday, the same day that the death toll in Gaza amid

Israel's military campaign surpassed 40,000.

There are also fears of a polio outbreak in Gaza.

On Friday, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed to all parties for a cease-fire so that humanitarian aid can safely reach more than half a million children in Gaza against polio.

'Restoring unity'

Palestine's Wafa news agency reported that Abbas and his government are preparing to travel to Gaza to "restore national unity" and emphasize that the State of Palestine and the Palestine Liberation Organization are the mandate holders responsible for the entire State of Palestine.

Abbas was in communication with the UN, Arab countries and Israel to ensure the success of the trip, Wafa reported. But UN spokesman Michele Zaccheo said the idea that the UN could provide security "is probably not so realistic at this stage."

He added that the principal responsibility for providing security in the occupied territories "lies with the occupying powers", Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency reported.

Negotiations on a cease-fire between Hamas and Israel are set to resume on Wednesday in Cairo,

Xinhua News Agency reported, citing Egyptian officials.

Also on Friday, British Foreign Secretary David Lammy and French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said in a statement that their countries "share a common interest in the security of the State of Israel" and the "stability of the region as a whole" and they have a responsibility to support ending the current escalation and securing a lasting peace to the benefit of Israelis, Palestinians and the whole region.

Muslim Imran, director of the Asia Middle East Center for Research and Dialogue in Malaysia, said the joint statement is "self-defeating" because it reads as if Israeli security is at stake, not the fact that Israel is "currently perpetrating one of the most heinous genocides in modern history."

On her X account, UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese called out Western powers on Friday for omitting civilian deaths in their statements.

Referring to a joint statement by the leaders of France, Germany and the United Kingdom last week, she said after 10 "catastrophic months", the three Western countries wrote a 21-line statement on the Middle East with "not a single word about the millions scarred by the ongoing atrocities."

Monsoon mayhem

Commuters drive through a flooded street after heavy monsoon rains in Larkana, Sindh Province, Pakistan, on Sunday. Torrential rains and flash floods starting last month have killed 187 people in different parts of Pakistan, the National Disaster Management Authority said on Saturday.

AHMED RAZA SOOMRO / AFP



Candidates emerge as LDP race heats up

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo
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More than 10 candidates have emerged in the Liberal Democratic Party's leadership race, after Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida decided not to seek reelection for the presidency.

The LDP is considering holding its leadership election on Sept 27, Jiji Press reported on Monday.

Kishida faced mounting pressure from LDP lawmakers who fear the party would face significant losses in upcoming elections under his leadership.

On Monday, Takayuki Kobayashi, former minister of economic security, officially announced his candidacy. That same day, Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa told reporters at Tokyo's Haneda Airport before her trip to India that she is preparing for her candidacy.

Unlike previous LDP leadership races, which typically featured a 12-day campaign period, this election will have an extended timeline to allow for more local debates, The Nikkei newspaper reported.

"Today's LDP lacks the kind of heavyweight politicians it once had," Takakage Fujita, secretary-

general of the Association for Inheriting and Propagating the Murayama Statement, a Japanese civic group, told China Daily.

"As a result, while more than 10 politicians have expressed their intention to run in the race, none of them have presented a grand vision or a comprehensive plan for Japan's future."

The Asahi Shimbun commented that Kishida's government has gone awry after losing public trust and failing to present concrete measures to regain it.

Satoshi Tomisaka, a professor at the Institute of World Studies at Takushoku University, said dissatisfaction has erupted among younger members of the LDP, who believe they cannot win the next general election.

Kishida failed to gain the support of LDP Vice-President Taro Aso, a key figure he had relied on, Tomisaka told China Daily.

"The most important factor leading to Kishida's decision seems to be the significant decline in his approval ratings. The LDP remains in power not because of its superiority, but as a result of elimination, with voters concluding that it is still better than the opposition," he said.

Public support for Kishida's cabinet was 19.4 percent this month, below 20 percent for the ninth straight month, according to a recent opinion poll published by Jiji Press.

Public dissatisfaction with the Kishida administration and Japan's political scene is mostly directed at economic issues, Tomisaka said.

The LDP covering up problems associated with the issues of politics and money has also led to public disappointment, experts said.

Fujita said changing leaders is a tactic that the LDP has repeatedly used. "When facing a crisis, the LDP changes its party leader, who is also the prime minister, to instill a sense of renewal among the public, thereby making them forget about past money politics and corruption."

The LDP could potentially secure victory in the next general election, allowing the ruling coalition with the Komeito party to continue, he added.

Fujita urged the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, the largest opposition party, to avoid this outcome by fielding a capable candidate, energizing their leadership race and preventing the LDP from dominating Japan's television and newspapers for the next month.

Li to elevate relations with Russia and Belarus

By MO JINGXI
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Premier Li Qiang will visit Russia and Belarus from Tuesday to Friday, a trip expected to deepen political trust and promote beneficial cooperation with both countries, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Monday.

In Moscow, Li will chair the 29th regular meeting between Chinese and Russian heads of government with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Mao said.

Established in 1996, this annual meeting is crucial for delivering on the common understandings between the two presidents and coordinating practical cooperation in various areas. Li and Mishustin will have in-depth exchange of views on China-Russia relations, practical cooperation and issues of mutual interest.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and Russia and the inaugural year of the China-Russia Years of Culture.

Li's visit will be another high-level exchange this year, following two meetings between President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in May and July.

"Under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, the China-Russia relationship has overcome external interference and enjoyed sound and steady growth," Mao said.

Bilateral cooperation is continuously advancing, with bilateral trade reaching a record \$240.1 billion last year, making China Russia's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years.

Smooth development

Li's visit to Belarus will be the first by a Chinese premier since 2007.

In Minsk, Li will hold talks with Belarusian Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko, Mao said.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, China and Belarus have enjoyed a smooth development of bilateral ties featuring frequent high-level exchanges. In 2022, the two countries established an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership.

"In recent years, under the personal guidance of both presidents, China-Belarus relations have maintained sound momentum of growth," Mao said, noting political mutual trust has been consolidated and Belt and Road cooperation has borne fruitful results.

Belarus was among the first group of countries that echoed the Belt and Road Initiative and participated in its cooperation, yielding benefits in trade, investment, agriculture and other areas.

China is Belarus' second-largest trading partner, and Belarus is one of China's fastest-growing trade partners in Eurasia. According to the Foreign Ministry, bilateral trade exceeded \$8.4 billion last year, a year-on-year increase of 67.3 percent.

Briefly

BANGLADESH

Interim govt to arrange 'fair' national elections

Chief adviser to the Bangladeshi interim government Muhammad Yunus said on Sunday that a free, fair and participatory election will be arranged as soon as possible, after bringing necessary reforms in the state system. The top priority of the interim government would be to bring the law and order situation under control, Yunus said. Bangladesh will be close to normalcy "within a short period of time," he said.

UNITED STATES

Impeachment report on Biden released

House Republicans issued a report on Monday alleging that President Joe Biden committed impeachable offenses, but it was unclear whether they would push for a vote. The report by three House committees alleged that Biden profited from an influence-peddling scheme to enrich himself and members of his family through foreign business dealings beginning in 2014, when Biden was vice-president.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

BUSINESS

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Experts see economy stabilizing

Stimulus, consumption, new forces expected to be strong growth drivers

By OUYANG SHIJIA and LIU ZHIHUA

China's economy is likely to gradually stabilize in the third and fourth quarters, as policymakers are poised to step up stimulus measures aimed at stabilizing growth and deepening economic structural reforms, prominent economists said on Monday.

Consumption will remain a key growth driver in the remaining months this year, while the country's accelerated push for fostering new quality productive forces will inject fresh vigor into the economy, they said.

"While the broader economy is still facing several headwinds and challenges at both home and abroad, the country's stepped-up measures to deepen reforms, boost demand and support the development of the private sector will help inject vigor into the economic growth in the remainder of the year," said Chen Wenling, chief economist at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing.

Citing the issuance of the ultra-long-term special treasury bonds, she said the move will further boost domestic demand as the funds raised will be mainly used for supporting the implementation of major national strategies, building up security capacity in key areas, and driving large-scale equipment renewals and trade-in programs for consumer goods.

Chen also highlighted the country's accelerated push for fostering new quality productive forces, especially the substantial growth in the high-tech and green "new three" products, saying that will inject strong impetus into the world's second-largest economy.

Exports of the "new three" — electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells — registered a year-on-year increase of around 30 percent in 2023, said the General Administration of Customs.

When it comes to the traditional "troika" powering China's economic development — exports, investment and consumption — Chen believes spurring consumption will be the primary driving force boosting China's economic growth.

Figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics showed that

China's retail sales, a key measure of consumer spending, grew 2.7 percent year-on-year in July, up from the 2 percent growth in June. The cumulative year-on-year growth from January to July was 3.5 percent.

"The reason for the accelerated growth of total retail sales is due to not only a lower base but also the continuous expansion of new types of consumption, with digital, green and healthy consumptions becoming new trends," said Chang Haizhong, executive director of corporates at Fitch Bohua.

In July, retail sales of communication equipment, sports and entertainment products, and electric vehicles grew by 12.7 percent, 10.7 percent and 36.9 percent year-on-year, respectively, NBS data showed.

Late last month, China announced it would allocate about 300 billion yuan (\$42 billion) in ultra-long-term special treasury bonds to support large-scale equipment upgrades and trade-in deals for consumer goods.

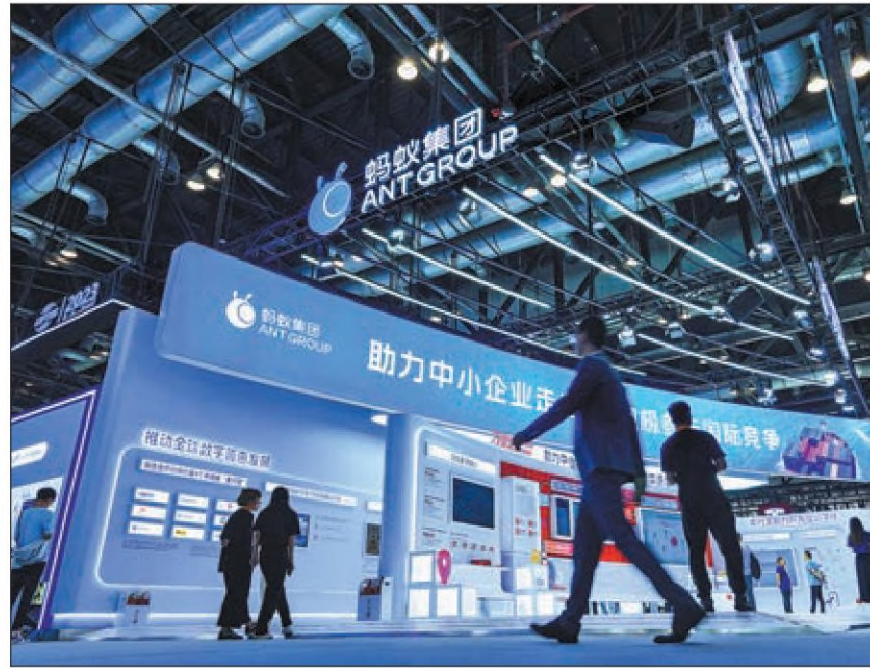
"That is expected to ultimately promote an increment of more than 600 billion yuan in consumption, effectively driving the growth of total retail sales in the second half of the year," Chang said.

Last month, the People's Bank of China, the nation's central bank, lowered the interest rate on seven-day reverse repurchase agreements or reverse repos — which serve as the short-term policy benchmark of interest rates — from 1.8 percent to 1.7 percent.

The seven-day reverse repo is a central bank tool to inject liquidity. The move demonstrated policymakers' strong commitment to strengthening macroeconomic policy support, experts said.

Looking ahead, Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said her team expects to see further rate cuts by the PBOC over the next two quarters, and the continued fine-tuning of fiscal policy easing toward the demand side, including signals from a recent meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee to increase household incomes via multiple channels.

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A view of the booth of Ant Group during an expo in Beijing. HUANG YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Ant Group to hike capital outlay for AI

By FAN FEIFEI fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Ant Group will step up investments in artificial intelligence and data elements in the next 10 years, with a key focus on distributed database, blockchain, privacy computing and green computing technologies, and provide AI-powered intelligent services for more enterprises, according to the Chinese financial technology company.

He Zhengyu, chief technology officer of Ant Group, said the company will strive for technological innovation and invest heavily in AI technology represented by large language models, while bolstering sharing of data and unleashing the value of massive data resources.

The company recently set up its innovation and technology headquarters in Beijing at a new campus called T-Space, marking a significant move in its expansion into the high-tech sector.

At the T-Space launch ceremony, Eric Jing, chairman and CEO of Ant Group, said the company will make full use of Beijing's advantages in talent and technological innovation, increase investments and usher in a new chapter for Ant.

Ant Group has also established a new subsidiary in Beijing which offers intelligent customer services, marketing, operation, and

technology research and development for enterprise clients.

This is aimed at helping these clients improve management efficiency and reduce costs via AI-powered technology.

The new subsidiary is part of Ant's heightened efforts to promote the commercialization and industrial application of AI technology, and help enterprises achieve digital and intelligent transformation and upgrade.

The company's technological research institute, which is also located in Beijing, mainly concentrates on making breakthroughs in core and cutting-edge technologies related to data elements and AI, such as intelligent robots, data storage and high-performance real-time graphic computing technology.

Technology is an important strategic direction for Ant. For instance, OceanBase, which was launched in 2010, serves as an open-source distributed relational database that Ant developed and uses in managing huge amounts of data collected through its mobile payment app Alipay.

As of the end of June, Ant employed more than 3,000 people in Beijing, with over 2,000 employees dedicated to technical research and development.

With the optimization of generative AI and deep learning algo-

gorithms, AI technology could be used to tackle more complex problems and is becoming an important tool to drive the innovation of enterprise service models, experts said.

According to a report by global market research company International Data Corp, China's spending on AI will likely hit \$38 billion in 2027, and account for about 9 percent of the global market, with a compound annual growth rate of about 25 percent from 2023 to 2027.

The consultancy noted that most enterprises will experience a notable shift in the weight of technology investments toward AI implementation and adoption of AI-enhanced products and services.

Kitty Fok, managing director of IDC China, said Chinese companies respond faster to AI deployments compared to their foreign counterparts, adding that generative AI technology is driving digital transformation across industries, including manufacturing, transportation, energy, healthcare and retail.

Jiang Han, a senior analyst at market consultancy Pangoal, said AI technology has huge application potential in the enterprise service segment as it can provide customers with more accurate and personalized services by analyzing their behaviors, help companies optimize and adjust strategies, and improve their business performance.

Briefly

PBOC conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 52.1 billion yuan (\$7.3 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.7 percent on Monday. The move aims to keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the People's Bank of China said. A reverse repo is a process in which the

central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

Shanxi foreign trade up 14.7% in Jan-July

Shanxi province's total imports and exports of goods grew 14.7 percent year-on-year to 101.2 billion yuan (\$14.2 billion) in the

first seven months of this year, official data showed. Exports from the coal-rich province in North China grew 12.5 percent to 61.05 billion yuan from January to July, while imports rose 18.2 percent to 40.15 billion yuan, according to the Customs bureau in the province's capital city Taiyuan.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Automakers 'gravely concerned' over any long-term EU tariffs

By ZHU WENQIAN zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese makers of battery-powered electric vehicles are "gravely concerned" over any European Commission move to levy long-term countervailing duties on imports of BEVs from China, as they are seriously considering Europe as a major investment destination, said the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electric Products.

A number of European countries have been hoping that Chinese BEV makers will invest and set up factories in Europe.

The EC's imposing of countervailing duties on Chinese BEV makers aims to hinder the export of Chinese products to Europe and thus encourage Chinese companies to invest in Europe and promote the development of the local automobile industry, help increase local employment and achieve green and sustainable development goals, the chamber said.

"Before it launched its anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese BEV makers, many Chinese companies had already started or planned to invest or operate in Europe," said Shi Yonghong, vice-president of the chamber.

"Since the EC decided to impose temporary countervailing duties, Chinese companies have repeatedly expressed their strong opposition, as they have been concerned about the investigation's result and the potential risks of investing in Europe," Shi said.

The preliminary ruling contains numerous judgments lacking objectivity and fairness, and some procedural practices lack transparency, said the chamber.

The subsidy label identified by the EC in the investigation is likely to become an excuse for it to conduct further investigations — namely Foreign Subsidy Regulation investigations — into Chinese enterprises investing in Europe in the future, and such potential has caused deep concerns and worries

among Chinese enterprises.

In October last year, the EC initiated an anti-subsidy investigation into imports of Chinese-made BEVs designed for the transport of persons. On July 4, it imposed provisional countervailing duties on BEV imports.

The duties applying to the Chinese producers range from 17.4 percent to 37.6 percent. The provisional countervailing duties would apply for a maximum of four months.

Within the period, a final decision has to be made on definitive duties through a vote by EU member states. Once adopted, the definitive duties will be in place for five years.

The chamber said the most important factor for attracting global investors, including China, to invest in Europe is that the EU could provide a friendly and stable business environment.

Frequently launching various unfair and unjust investigations against enterprises will obviously intensify companies' concerns



Export-bound battery-powered electric vehicles await shipment at Yantai Port, Shandong province. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

about the business environment and investment risks in Europe, the chamber said.

"It would be in the best interests of everyone concerned to avoid imposing the countervailing duties.

If the EC labels Chinese BEV makers as beneficiaries of government subsidies, it would have a negative impact on those companies, including power battery manufacturers," Shi said.

Bigger role for social security fund stressed

By SHI JING in Shanghai shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

The social security fund should play a bigger role in the capital market to help better nurture technological innovation and make due preparation for an aging society, said industry observers.

The National Council for Social Security Fund, which is an important participant in the Chinese capital market as well as a strong symbol of long-term and patient capital, will increase investment in technological innovation and new quality productive forces, Ding Xuedong, secretary of the CPC leading members group at the NCSF, wrote in an article in the State-owned Study Times on Monday.

Apart from increasing equity investment in strategic and basic sectors, the NCSF will step up support for the construction of the modern industrial system and the development of the real economy. It will team up with regulators and business organizations to further consolidate the links between technologies, industries and finance.

Technological innovation and the development of emerging industries usually face a long and bumpy road, said Yang Delong, chief economist of First Seafont Fund.

Patient capital, which should be also visionary, is thus needed to invest in the sectors representing economic transformation and technological advancements, he said.

Zhang Ming, deputy director of the Institute of Finance & Banking, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said provincial-level social security funds now face strict restriction in investing in A shares.

If the proportion of such capital investable for the stock market is gradually increased, the A-share market, whose current relatively lower valuation indicates it is a good time to enter the market now, will embrace more long-term capital.

More importantly, the provincial-level social security funds are not too much concerned about the stock market's short-term fluctuations. So, they will help stabilize the stock market and direct more capital to the undervalued industry leaders, he said.

On the other hand, the NCSF should give full play to its role as a strategic reserve fund to prepare for China's aging population, Ding said.

China, he explained, has entered a phase of moderate aging and is expected to confront deep aging around 2035. The country thus faces unprecedented urgency and pressure to build a bigger and stronger strategic reserve fund.

So, efforts will be made to complete China's multilevel social security system by exploring new sources of capital and expanding the scale of the strategic reserve fund. The NCSF will look for better returns via stable investment and capital management to consolidate the wealth foundation for the aging population, wrote Ding.

The total value of the equity assets managed by the NCSF has exceeded 6 trillion yuan (\$840 billion) by the end of 2023, Ding said.

Experts from China CITIC Bank said that most Chinese people still lack a clear understanding of how much wealth is enough to prepare for their twilight years. While their risk appetite is low, they have been eyeing too much from their short-term investments that see higher volatility. So, more investors' education, products and investment advisory are needed to nurture people's long-term investment acumen.

To better serve the goals of preparing for an aging population and boosting technological innovation, the NCSF will improve its capabilities of professional investment by strengthening its research and analysis of the macroeconomy and the capital market.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index gained 0.49 percent to close at 2893.67 points on Monday while the Shenzhen Component Index added 0.08 percent.

Zhou Lanxun in Beijing contributed to this story.

BUSINESS



The Adora Magic City docks at a port in Shanghai in May. WANG XIANG / XINHUA

Cruise operators sail on favorable winds

Companies launching more routes tailored to Chinese tourists' preferences

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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The resumption of cruise travel in China has not only offered big opportunities for international cruise operators, but also facilitated the rapid growth of domestic cruise companies through the launch of more cruise routes.

Adora Magic City — China's first domestically built cruise ship — is scheduled to make Shanghai its home port in 2025 and launch more than 80 trips lasting between four and seven nights.

The vessel will take guests to an array of destinations in Japan and South Korea in the coming year, according to the cruise itinerary of its operator Adora Cruises Ltd.

Since its maiden commercial voyage on the first day of 2024, Adora Magic City has successfully completed more than 50 trips as of Aug 12 and served over 200,000 guests at home and abroad.

"Being a flagship Chinese cruise brand, Adora Cruises will continue to explore the Chinese market via a wider range of cruise route offerings," said Liu Hui, CEO of Adora Cruises.

"We are committed to integrating the essence of Chinese culture into the brand experience, providing an innovative cultural tourism experience for passengers, offering cruise products tailored for Chi-

nese people, and exploring a Chinese paradigm for the global cruise industry," Liu said.

Adora Magic City and Adora Mediterranea will operate nearly 170 international cruise routes for both domestic and foreign guests throughout the year 2025, meeting the diversified travel needs of consumers," Liu said.

Liu Hui, CEO of Adora Cruises

nese people, and exploring a Chinese paradigm for the global cruise industry," Liu said.

Adora Mediterranea — another cruise ship operating under Adora Cruises — has just finished its brand upgrade, and is scheduled to launch sailings ranging from two nights to five nights, with Tianjin, Guangzhou in Guangdong province, Xiamen in Fujian province, Qingdao in Shandong province and Dalian in Liaoning province as its home ports next year, the CEO said.

The destinations will include Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines.

"Adora Magic City and Adora Mediterranea will operate nearly

170 international cruise routes for both domestic and foreign guests throughout the year 2025, meeting the diversified travel needs of consumers," Liu said.

Shanghai Blue Dream International Cruises Co Ltd is eyeing the launch of a 33-night cruise route on Nov 26.

The superlong cruise trip to be operated by Blue Dream Melody will visit 15 ports in 10 Southeast Asian nations.

"Paying tribute to the Chinese navigator and maritime explorer Zheng He's voyages to the Indian Ocean 600 years ago during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the new route will also fill the gap of super long cruise trips from Chinese home ports by offering a new option for cruise travelers," said Xu Ying, general manager of Shanghai Blue Dream International Cruises Co Ltd.

Thanks to the resumption of international cruise trips and China's policies facilitating international travel, cruise trips in Shanghai have recovered rapidly.

More than 840,000 passenger trips were made through Shanghai's cruise terminals in the first half of this year, according to data from the Shanghai General Station of Immigration Inspection.

Shanghai Wusongkou International Cruise Port has handled 736,500 passenger trips as of the end of July, and the port is projected to receive about 1.5 million inbound and outbound passenger trips throughout the year, accounting for 70 percent of the nation's total, according to Shanghai Securities News.

Further application of smart solutions in green energy sector seen as key

By LIU YUKUN
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While the energy demands of artificial intelligence present challenges to global climate goals, experts highlight the significant opportunities AI offers the energy industry, as the technology is poised to enhance the integration of renewable sources into the grid and optimize energy consumption.

Yu Xiaohui, head of the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, a Beijing-based think tank, said, "Further efforts are expected to actively integrate China's energy sector strengths — technologies and manufacturing — with data resources to explore and innovate AI applications across various scenarios in the energy industry."

Zhou Ranke, director of energy at Huawei's computing power division, said: "China is still in the exploratory phase of AI's role in the energy industry. Building large-scale AI models in the power sector is expected to address challenges from the wide adoption of unstable renewable sources like wind and solar, and ensure the stable operation of power systems in a way that leverages AI to predict power generated from unstable renewable sources and effectively coordinates across power generators, grids, users and electricity storage systems."

Zhou said the use of large-scale AI models in the energy industry currently focuses on three main areas: power grid inspections, operations

and maintenance, and customer service. However, there are still challenges, such as suboptimal performance in power scheduling including low accuracy levels. Innovations in top-level architecture are needed to enhance application efficiency.

Shi Hang, director of the Wind and Solar Resource Assessment Center at the CSSC Science and Technology Co Ltd, highlighted AI's crucial role in assessing, developing and utilizing offshore wind resources.

Shi Hang, director of the Wind and Solar Resource Assessment Center at the CSSC Science and Technology Co Ltd

and maintenance, and customer service. However, there are still challenges, such as suboptimal performance in power scheduling including low accuracy levels. Innovations in top-level architecture are needed to enhance application efficiency.

Shi Hang, director of the Wind and Solar Resource Assessment Center at the CSSC Science and Technology Co Ltd, highlighted AI's crucial role in assessing, developing and utilizing offshore wind resources.

"Future developments in AI technology in the wind energy sector will focus on enhancing data analysis capabilities and improving power generation prediction algorithms. These advancements will lead to better energy efficiency,

reduced operational costs, increased renewable energy applications and support for smart grid development," Shi said.

Shi added that offshore wind projects often involve large exploration areas with limited spatial coverage from single-point measurements, and typically short measurement periods. Additionally, the high costs and long construction periods of offshore meteorological towers, as well as limitations of current wind speed simulation methods also affect project development.

To address these issues, CSSC Science and Technology has introduced AI-powered Synthetic Aperture Radar to provide a basis for planning future offshore wind projects, with an anticipated reduction in costs by about 50 percent in 200 square kilometer sea areas.

"AI will significantly enhance data analysis capabilities in the wind energy sector, especially in predictive maintenance and fault detection. The complex operational conditions and environments of wind turbines require extensive data for monitoring and analysis. In the future, AI will be able to identify potential risks earlier, allowing for preventive maintenance before problems occur," Shi said.

"Additionally, AI can optimize wind energy equipment operations by analyzing extensive operational data to determine the best parameters and improve generation efficiency. This data-driven optimization will become a key trend in the wind energy sector," Shi added.

Sichuan all in on hydrogen energy

By HUANG ZHILING
and PENG CHAO in Chengdu

Hydrogen energy companies in Sichuan province are ramping up efforts to promote the research and development, production and application of the industry, aligning with the province's goal to further develop the sector's industry chain.

A hydrogen energy equipment industrial park project invested by Jinxing Group Co Ltd, a Sichuan-based clean-energy equipment supplier, is set to start construction in October in the Meishan zone of Sichuan Tianfu New Area, aiming to become the country's largest hydrogen energy equipment manufacturing base, said Gan Xinwei, assistant to the company's president.

With an investment of 1 billion yuan (\$139.4 million), the park will have an annual production capacity of more than 200 sets of hydrogen energy equipment, Gan said.

"After it becomes fully operational before October 2027, the park will have a workforce of more than 500 R&D personnel and industrial workers," he added.

Gan said the company also plans to establish a national-level hydro-

gen energy equipment research and testing center and a branch of a Sichuan provincial-level hydrogen energy equipment industry innovation center in the park.

"We are currently taking the lead in establishing the innovation center, to provide a solid technical support and innovation platform for the development of the province's hydrogen energy sector. It will bring together top resources and talent in the industry all dedicated to the R&D of its key common technologies, research achievement transformation and standards formulation," he said.

The company will also explore the application of hydrogen-powered vehicles and natural gas blending with hydrogen in Meishan, striving to make it a pilot project in the province, Gan said, adding that, "Our ultimate goal is to use the project as a platform to build the country's largest hydrogen energy demonstration base that integrates research and development, production and application."

Sichuan has seen a boom in the hydrogen energy sector in recent years. Statistics from the provincial government show that it is home to

more than 100 companies and research institutes involved in the industry, covering the entire process of hydrogen production, storage, transportation, filling and utilization.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of hydrogen energy application scenarios are being implemented in Sichuan, thanks to favorable local policies.

A hydrogen-powered smart tram, assembled at China Railway Rolling Stock Corp's rail transit industrial base in the province's Yibin, was put into service on the city's T1 smart tram line earlier this month, according to the city government.

Hydrogen-powered shared bicycles developed by Chengdu-based Qinglv Tech are also about to officially enter the market soon, said Yang Kun, the company's general manager.

Yang said this product has also received orders from overseas markets. "Clients from Saudi Arabia and Malaysia have ordered thousands of them. If the trial operation goes well, they will increase the orders to tens of thousands," he said.

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Working together for shared prosperity

The Belt and Road Initiative



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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.

China market remains big draw for most MNCs



Saravoot Yoovidhya
CEO of the Red Bull founding company TCP Group



Jamie Zhu
General manager of Ziwi Petfood Greater China



Victor Tsao
Vice-president of Red Hat and general manager of Red Hat Greater China



Karen Chen
Managing director and chairman of SGX 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?

YOVIDHYA: The recently concluded plenum showcased China's strong commitment to high-quality economic growth through continuous reforms and further opening-up. The session unveiled forward-looking and strategic policies, particularly in areas such as technological innovation, a unified national market, relaxed foreign investment access and enhanced legal frameworks. These measures inject new vitality into the business environment and create abundant opportunities for international investors operating in China. For TCP Group, these reforms present an excellent opportunity for transformation and upgrading within the energy drink industry. TCP Group has always been confident in the Chinese market.

ZHU: First, I have observed the ambitious goals of China's economic reform and opening-up, as well as the confidence in the rapid development of the Chinese economy. Among the various measures, building a high-standard socialist market economy provides a friendly, fair and secure development environment for foreign enterprises. As a foreign enterprise, seeing China's support and friendliness toward foreign companies present significant opportunities for our business development. Currently, our business focus is on first-tier, new first-tier and second-tier cities. With the continued opening-up of the Chinese economy and the ongoing improvement of the market environment, we have the opportunity to expand our market coverage into more cities and regions. The reform and opening-up measures have created a favorable environment for the development of digital marketing, accelerating the application of digital marketing technologies and strategies, enabling us to more effectively reach target consumers and enhance our market competitiveness.

TSAO: From the plenary session, we note the Chinese government's firm commitment to advancing reform and opening-up. The high-standard open economy and technology innovation policies will stimulate enterprises' demand for innovative technologies, presenting a tremendous opportunity for Red Hat. Over its 20 years in China, Red Hat has provided enterprise-level open-source technology and services to thousands of companies. Open Red Hat, for China and in China, is dedicated to becoming a catalyst for IT innovation and a bridge for internal and external communication, accelerating the digital transformation and technological upgrading of Chinese enterprises. By leveraging cloud computing, containerization, edge computing and AI, we aim to enhance the independent innovation capabilities and international competitiveness of Chinese enterprises.

CHEN: The plenary session underscored the importance of further deepening comprehensive reforms and broadening openness, as well as bolstering technological innovation, which will significantly enhance the global competitiveness of Chinese enterprises. Benefiting from China's open policies, Singapore Exchange stands as a pioneer and ardent supporter of cross-market connectivity, fostering a robust link between China and Singapore. As Asia's leading financial infrastructure and the gateway for global investors to Asia, SGX aspires to deepen its strategic collaboration with China. SGX seeks to fortify ties with Chinese partners across pivotal sectors, including fixed income securities, currencies, commodity futures and equities.

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?

YOVIDHYA: The reform and opening-up measures introduced at the plenum are comprehensive and significant. They aim to comprehensively promote industrial upgrades, boost innovation and improve market mechanisms, thus providing a solid foundation for long-term stable growth of the Chinese economy. These measures are clear and targeted, effectively enhancing China's overall efficiency and international competitiveness, steering the economy toward higher quality, fairness and sustainability.

From a global perspective, China's further opening-up will create more extensive cooperation opportunities and strong growth momentum for the global economy. As the Chinese market continues to expand and deepen, global companies can more thoroughly participate in China's economic development, fully sharing the benefits of China's reforms and achieving mutual gains. Additionally, China's reforms and openness will provide new ideas and effective models for global economic governance, contributing unique Chinese insights and practical solutions to complex global issues. China now serves not only as the "world's factory", but also as a "global market" and "R&D hub".

ZHU: The reform and opening-up measures introduced at the plenary session will strengthen the Chinese economy and enhance its modernization prospects through a variety of initiatives. By continuing to uphold open policies and align with high international economic and trade standards, these measures will undoubtedly contribute to the global economy.

As a foreign enterprise, we have experienced the numerous conveniences brought by these reform and opening-up measures, which have not only improved our business environment, but also increased our confidence in the Chinese market. Particularly, the simplification and acceleration of license application processes have greatly enhanced our business efficiency, allowing our products to reach the market more quickly and providing us with greater confidence and motivation in the research and development of new innovations.

TSAO: The reform and opening-up measures introduced at the plenary session will further stimulate market vitality and innovation, driving high-quality economic development. This will not only contribute to the modernization of China's economy, but also inject new momentum into the global economy. China's blueprint for reform and opening-up, through optimizing its market environment, enhancing technological innovation capabilities and expanding openness, is certain to bring about more high-quality products and services. Additionally, these measures will promote international cooperation and technological exchanges, providing strong support for the stability and development of global industrial and supply chains.

CHEN: The plenary session has stressed the importance of advancing comprehensive reform measures, which are set to significantly improve the operational efficiency of the economy and infuse it with new energy for growth. Furthering high-level openness will create more international collaboration opportunities for China's economy, favorably positioning it to attract foreign investment, technology and skilled personnel, thus facilitating industrial upgrading. These initiatives are expected to enhance the innovative capacity and international competitiveness of Chinese enterprises, propelling an economic shift toward higher-quality development.

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?

YOVIDHYA: I believe China's new reform initiatives aimed at fostering new quality productive forces and encouraging industrial upgrades and technological innovation are significant and positively impactful.

For foreign enterprises, these initiatives present more opportunities than challenges. First, these reforms create a more dynamic and innovative market environment. Foreign enterprises can leverage their technological and managerial strengths to collaborate with Chinese companies, driving industrial upgrades and technological innovation for mutual benefit. Second, China's vast market size and growing consumer demand offer broad development space for foreign enterprises. The new reform initiatives will further enhance the attractiveness and potential of the Chinese market. Third, the reforms promote technological exchange and integration, allowing foreign enterprises to introduce advanced technologies and ideas while gaining new inspiration and innovation insights from the Chinese market.

ZHU: These measures bring both opportunities and challenges for foreign enterprises. With the advances of China's technological and industrial capabilities, foreign companies may face increasing competition from local enterprises. In recent years, we have also seen a lot of new domestic pet food brands and technologies in the Chinese market. However, overall, the opportunities outweigh the challenges. The current generation of pet owners, nurtured in China's advanced digital environment, is younger, more progressive in their pet-keeping philosophies, and continuously demands higher quality innovative products. Ziwi's product philosophy, quality, and technology align closely with these demands, making this market environment an opportunity for Ziwi.

TSAO: The Chinese government's initiatives to encourage industrial upgrading and technological innovation have presented significant opportunities for foreign enterprises. These policies not only provide companies with a vast market space, but also create a fair, transparent, and predictable business environment. As a global leader in enterprise-level open-source solutions, Red Hat sees these measures as a way to drive local enterprises' demand for advanced technologies, enhancing the market's acceptance and recognition of open-source solutions.

CHEN: Innovation is at the heart of new quality productive forces, which includes innovation across various dimensions such as technology, industry, management and systems. For businesses, leveraging these new quality productive forces can lead to ongoing refinement and profound transformation of the industrial structure, thereby enhancing industrial competitiveness and elevating the international competitiveness and position within the global value chain for Chinese enterprises.

Foreign enterprises face a dual landscape of challenges and opportunities with the advent of new quality productive forces. The challenge is to step up their innovation to offer products and services that align with the trends, ensuring sustained market competitiveness. As China actively advances to a higher degree of openness and refines its business environment, foreign enterprises that capitalize on opportunities to build a modern industrial system will enjoy vast potential for growth and development.

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?

YOVIDHYA: In the next decade, China will remain a critical landing zone for our global business, being one of the world's largest consumer markets. As an investor in China, we believe to further enhance its attractiveness to foreign enterprises and effectively counteract the impact of the complex external environment, China can implement several practical opening-up measures.

First, to strengthen intellectual property protections and improve enforcement levels, allowing foreign companies to invest in innovation with confidence is key. Second, to further relax restrictions on foreign investment at the product entry level, creating a fairer and more transparent competitive environment to stimulate market vitality is necessary. Third, to promote open cooperation in emerging industries and cutting-edge technologies, fostering joint progress and development among domestic and international enterprises is advisable.

ZHU: The reform and opening-up measures introduced at the plenary session demonstrate China's proactive stance and methods for mitigating external environmental impacts. These measures, including enhancing market openness, reducing market entry barriers, promoting international cooperation and optimizing the business environment, reflect China's commitment and sincerity toward openness. The Chinese market is one of Ziwi's most important markets and is crucial to our global strategy. As our CEO Stuart Irvine has stated, "Deeply rooted in the Chinese market, we are dedicated to serving Chinese pet owners." In the next decade, we will continue to invest in the Chinese market, get closer to Chinese consumers and channels, and respond more flexibly and rapidly to market demand.

TSAO: The immense potential of the Chinese market and its continuously open policies remain opportunities that foreign enterprises cannot overlook. China's position and influence in the global supply chain remain highly significant. The Chinese market has always been very important to Red Hat. We have continuously increased our investment in the Chinese market. We believe that through further deepening reform and opening-up, and optimizing the business environment, China will continue to attract more foreign enterprises.

CHEN: Geopolitical dynamics are a crucial factor for businesses in the global operational landscape. China and Singapore, as traditional friendly nations, elevated their bilateral relationship to a "Comprehensive, High-Quality and Forward-Looking Partnership" in 2023. In the first half of 2024, Singapore's actual investment in China saw a 10.5 percent increase. The Singapore Exchange is very optimistic about the vast potential and opportunities within the Chinese market and continues to play a significant role in China-Singapore interconnectivity. Looking ahead, SGX aims to introduce more products linked to the Chinese market, enhancing its suite of Chinese financial products.

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?

YOVIDHYA: I am highly optimistic about the transformation of the Chinese economy under the new reform and opening-up measures over the next five years. These initiatives will enhance industrial innovation, competitiveness and consumer market expansion, driving high-quality development and fostering balanced, coordinated and sustainable growth.

To align with these changes, our company plans to increase R&D investments to introduce innovative products tailored to Chinese consumers. Strengthening partnerships with local companies will be key to jointly exploring the market and leveraging shared resources. Looking ahead to the second half, I expect the consumer market to remain dynamic, offering broader opportunities for our products.

ZHU: Over the next five years, the new reform and opening-up measures are expected to significantly transform China's economy by fostering a high-standard socialist market economy, promoting high-quality development and enhancing technological innovation. The focus on market-oriented reforms, combined with robust government regulation, will create a fairer and more dynamic market environment. In the second half, China's economy will continue its steady recovery and growth, driven by the ongoing implementation of reform and opening-up measures.

TSAO: In the next five years, new reform and opening-up measures will drive China's economy toward high-quality development and accelerate technological innovation. Red Hat will maintain consistency through the following strategies: First, continuously provide technologically advanced enterprise-level open-source solutions; second, align with national strategies to accelerate the intelligent manufacturing upgrades of enterprises; and finally, empower and integrate with the domestic AI ecosystem to accelerate AI application across all industries, truly bringing AI into enterprises with an open-source way. Looking ahead to the second half, I am full of confidence in the Chinese economy. Red Hat will seize opportunities in this environment and drive business development.

CHEN: We are delighted by the high-level prospect that China's economy, through key measures such as high-quality development, technological innovation, deepening reforms across various sectors, expanding openness to the outside world and building a modern industrial system, is on track to a future that is more prosperous, equitable, sustainable and secure. The risks and challenges have been acknowledged during the plenum, and we anticipate that the economy and investment will continue to exhibit growth, demonstrating resilience in fundamentals. SGX will continue to leverage its strengths in multi-asset coverage, efficient accessibility to Asia and solid risk management capabilities to expand mutual-market connectivity, support healthy flow of capital, and meet the needs of Chinese and international clients.

COMMENT

Editorials

China-Vietnam community with shared future cornerstone for regional stability

By stressing he would like to establish a good working relationship as well as personal friendship with his visiting Vietnamese counterpart during their meeting in Beijing on Monday, President Xi Jinping expressed Beijing's hope that Vietnam will maintain the stability of its China policy.

By choosing China as the destination for his first overseas visit since he was elected general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam on Aug 3 after the death of his predecessor Nguyen Phu Trong last month, To Lam, president of Vietnam, has indicated that Vietnam will continue to advance the road map drawn up by Beijing and Hanoi over the past decade.

Economic and trade cooperation is high on the agenda of Lam's visit as the two countries are seeking to expand their common interests and inject new vitality into bilateral ties. In describing the building of a China-Vietnam community with a shared future as having strategic significance for a new era of bilateral ties in his meeting with Lam, Xi reassured his Vietnamese guest that the Chinese side will actively do its part to help translate the promising vision agreed by the two sides into reality as long as Vietnam meets China halfway. Lam's visit can also be regarded as a message to those external forces that are trying to drive a wedge between the two neighbors for their own narrow geopolitical ends that the transition of the CPV leadership does not mean a change in Sino-Vietnamese relations featuring "camaraderie plus brotherhood".

Beijing has made it clear that it does not require Vietnam to choose sides, but simply to uphold its strategic autonomy. As long as Vietnam works together with regional countries, including China, to safeguard regional peace and stability and uphold true multilateralism and international fairness and justice, something Hanoi has reiterated in its long-term stance, China is willing to help its neighbor become prosperous.

That is also a commitment the whole region reaffirmed at a meeting of the foreign ministers of six countries, including China and Vietnam, under the Lancang-Mekong cooperation framework in Thailand on Friday, which produced a detailed to-do list for cooperation. Notably, China welcomes its neighbors to deepen cooperation in not only traditional sectors including trade and agriculture, but also high-tech research and development, aerospace, the digital economy and green development, demonstrating its earnestness to help the other countries upgrade their economy, industries and technologies.

It is meaningful that Xi told Lam that China is ready to accelerate the "hard connectivity" of railway, expressway and port infrastructure, enhance the "soft connectivity" of smart customs, and jointly build secure and stable industry and supply chains between the two neighbors, which will serve as effective bonds to strengthen the cohesion of the China-Vietnam community with a shared future. While some are building walls fending off their neighbors, China is building ways and bridges.

All these, along with the varied cooperation agreements signed during Lam's visit, indicate that while some external forces are trying to downgrade countries in the region to proxies in their geopolitical game, China is doing all it can to help bolster their competitiveness in the global industry and supply chains so the region can continue to be a dynamic economic powerhouse, which will help them exercise their autonomy.

Even before his ongoing three-day visit to China starting on Sunday, Lam had assured Xi's special envoy attending Trong's funeral in Hanoi last month that China is the only country that meets all the priority factors of Vietnam's foreign policy, a message he reiterated during his first stop in Guangzhou. With the building of a China-Vietnam community with a shared future that carries strategic significance, the two neighbors are set to make greater contributions to regional development.

Manila will have to bear the consequences

China has urged the Philippines to immediately stop intruding into its territorial waters and to cease its provocations, warning that it will be responsible for all the consequences arising from its actions if it doesn't do so.

The warning came after Philippine Coast Guard vessels illegally intruded into the waters adjacent to Xianbin Reef and Ren'ai Reef in the South China Sea early on Monday morning without China's permission.

According to the China Coast Guard, it took control measures after two Philippine Coast Guard vessels illegally intruded into the waters around Xianbin Reef. During the incident, there was a coming together of Philippine and Chinese vessels. After being turned away by the China Coast Guard, the Philippine Coast Guard ship, defying warnings from the Chinese side and disregarding route control, intruded into the waters around Ren'ai Reef several hours later.

To condemn and expose Manila's reckless moves, the China Coast Guard issued four consecutive statements and released video footage of the incidents on Monday morning.

Manila's latest antics show it is casting its greedy eyes on China's Xianbin Reef, making it a new flashpoint in the South China Sea, along with Ren'ai Reef and Huangyan Island. Since mid-April, the Philippine Coast Guard's BRP *Teresa Magbanua* has been illegally anchored in the lagoon of Xianbin Reef. The Philippine side has kept supplying it and sending other vessels to intrude into adjacent waters since then.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson responding to a question on the vessel on Friday said that China has protested through diplomatic channels and asked the Philippines to stop its infringement activities and to withdraw the vessel from the lagoon of Xianbin Reef. Developments are being closely monitored, and the authorities will take resolute measures to safeguard the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests, and uphold the sanctity of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

Just before Monday's incident, it was reported that the Philippine Coast Guard intended to send another large ship to reinforce its illegal presence at Xianbin Reef by turning it into a floating platform, from which it could continue its malicious attempt to seize the Chinese maritime territory. The Philippines is apparently trying to repeat at Xianbin Reef the old trick it played at Ren'ai Reef. In 1999, Manila deliberately grounded a World War II-era warship on China's Ren'ai Reef and stationed troops on it, thus beginning its more than two decades' illegal occupation of the Chinese reef.

Manila should be warned its malicious intention to infringe upon China's sovereignty and maritime interests will not succeed. The Chinese law enforcement authorities are stepping up their countermeasures in response to the escalated provocations from the Philippines.

The Philippine side's repeated provocations have violated the temporary arrangement between China and the Philippines on the supply of daily necessities to the illegally grounded Philippine vessel at Ren'ai Reef. What Manila is doing shows it has little sincerity in upholding the recent agreement reached between the two sides to reduce tensions in the waters.

Last week, Philippines' Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Maria Theresa Lazaro said the understanding with China did not compromise the Philippines' South China Sea position and could be re-evaluated if needed. Such rhetoric is not only an attempt to exploit China's goodwill but also erodes Manila's own credibility.

Since last year, the maritime disputes between China and the Philippines have heated up because Manila, backed by outside players, has gone back on its words and chosen to stage one provocation after another. Manila's antics are consuming China's patience fast and pushing the situation in the waters closer to breaking point.

The China Coast Guard will resolutely safeguard the country's core interests. And it has made clear that it will not hesitate to carry out law enforcement activities in China's jurisdiction as required.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

A win-win relationship that shows country size, population don't matter

The talks between Premier Li Qiang and visiting Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka on Sunday afternoon and the signing of multiple agreements on bilateral cooperation in fields such as trade and infrastructure construction are expected to raise the partnership between China and the Pacific island country to a new level.

Rabuka is also scheduled to meet China's top leader to jointly draw a new blueprint for the development of bilateral relations. The two first met in San Francisco, United States, last November on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting.

Fiji was the first Pacific island country to establish diplomatic ties with China, and China has always regarded it as one of its most important partners in the South Pacific region. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1975, bilateral relations have always been renewed with fruitful exchanges and cooperation in various fields, and the trade volume between the

two countries reached \$530 million in 2023.

China firmly supports the Fijian people in pursuing the development path they have independently chosen, and Fiji actively supports the initiatives put forward by China, including the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative. Fiji is also an important partner of the Belt and Road Initiative and has joined the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative.

Since China began to build a fungus technology demonstration center and carry out training in Fiji in 2014, Chinese agricultural experts have cultivated a variety of fungi in Fiji, including oyster mushroom, and ganoderma lucidum, and mushroom planting has become an important means for local people to improve their income. The "Peace Ark", a Chinese navy hospital ship, visited Fiji twice, in 2014 and 2018, enabling a 6-year-old Fijian girl to get surgery to correct deformity in her hands and feet.

As of 2020, Chinese direct investment in Fiji was \$183 million, and China is now Fiji's fifth-largest trading partner. The two sides should further leverage their complementary advantages and deepen cooperation in infrastructure, agriculture and fisheries, light industry, education, tourism and poverty reduction under the framework of Belt and Road cooperation to better promote common development.

On the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties next year, the two countries should implement the consensus reached by their leaders to strengthen exchanges and cooperation at all levels, and push forward the sound and steady development of the comprehensive strategic partnership to bring more benefits to the two peoples. Fruitful China-Fiji cooperation also sets a successful example for friendly cooperation between other big and small countries irrespective of their size and population.

— WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

Expedition shows Xizang's improving biodiversity

A team making a scientific expedition to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau has announced 10 findings regarding the region seven years after their expedition started. The expedition shows China's achievements in preserving and promoting biodiversity as well as the urgency with which the world must curb climate change.

With many of its areas more than 3,000 meters above sea level, the plateau is home to many unique species and large stretches of wilderness. That over 3,000 new species have been found there shows the ecology of the plateau is improving.

The achievement is commendable considering the fact that the population of the Xizang autonomous region has risen from 2.92 million in 2008 to 3.65 mil-

lion in 2023 while the region's GDP has risen from 39.8 billion yuan (\$5.49 billion) to 239.3 billion yuan during the same period. The autonomous region has also become a popular tourist destination. From July 2006, when the Qinghai-Xizang railway opened, till March this year 36.8 million passengers had traveled on the railway.

In other words, the biodiversity of the plateau and tourists' pursuit of happiness are both promoted in a mutually harmonious way without coming at the cost of each other, which is also the most sustainable way of preserving biodiversity because the residents also have their interests ensured.

The Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau has

long been known as the Asian water tower because of its rich water reserves and it being the source of multiple rivers. However, at the moment with the glaciers melting and other causes, the region's ability to reflect sunlight and heat is being reduced. This, in turn, might lead to more heat being absorbed and more glaciers melting, increasing the frequency of extreme climate events.

At a time when the necessity to curb global climate change is becoming imperative, the disappearing glaciers should ring an alarm and make the world redouble its efforts to put the brake on climate change.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Multilateralism and practicality hallmarks of IPU

The commemoration of the 40th anniversary of China's National People's Congress' affiliation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union is being held in Beijing from Monday to Aug 28.

The IPU, headquartered in Geneva, is dedicated to promoting peace through parliamentary diplomacy and dialogue. Since its founding in 1889, it has grown to be a truly global organization with 180 members and 15 associate members. Over the past 130 years, the organization has promoted exchanges and cooperation among parliaments of various countries, enhanced mutual understanding and trust, and provided an important platform for countries to jointly meet challenges.

Multilateralism is an effective way to maintain peace and promote development. The IPU itself is an important achievement in practicing

multilateralism.

The NPC, China's top legislature, plays an indispensable role in promoting the rule of law and good governance in the country. It supports the IPU in further exerting its influence to promote parliaments of various countries to strengthen dialogue among the parliaments of different countries and achieve more practical results adhering to the principles of consultation, joint construction and sharing.

The NPC also supports the IPU's efforts to promote sustainable development, and is willing to strengthen cooperation with the parliaments of other countries to contribute to narrowing the North-South development gap and promote the common prosperity in the world.

Together with the IPU and parliaments of other countries, the NPC looks forward to further promoting mutual understanding and friendship among people of all countries, and accelerating the building of a community with a

shared future for mankind.

China appreciates that the IPU has long been upholding a fair position on issues involving its core interests and major concerns, and hopes to further enhance friendly relations with the IPU.

China has always actively supported the work of the IPU in many aspects, such as poverty reduction and promoting inclusion and the sustainable development goals. The country is committed to making new contributions to support parliaments in developing countries to perform their duties through the IPU. The close cooperation between China and the IPU has enhanced the ability of parliaments in many developing countries to perform their duties.

As climate change has become an existential challenge to mankind, it is hoped that the IPU and China can deepen their practical cooperation so as to further promote the sustainable development of the world.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Martin Lampter

China's rise drives Global South development

The Chinese economy is transitioning from quantitative growth to qualitative development, powered by new quality productive forces. Many of the countries that are now considered developed and advanced, too, underwent this transition, but what makes the process for China different is that it is the largest developing country and has trade relations with not only developed but also developing countries — in fact, with most of the countries in the world.

It is thanks to reform and opening-up that China has reached this critical stage of economic transformation and become the world's second-largest economy. In my eyes, China's reform and opening-up can be divided into four distinct phases.

The first phase began in 1978, following the third plenary session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, while the second phase, which started in 1992, marked the institutionalization of the market's significant role and the genuine integration of market mechanisms with development policies. The third phase unfolded in 2001 when Beijing joined the World Trade Organization, and started integrating the Chinese economy with the global economy, becoming an important player in global production and trade.

The fourth phase and a new era began in 2013 when China launched a new round of comprehensive reform policies and proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (later, China proposed three more initiatives focused on security, development and civilization). The Global Development Initiative advocates for social and economic development while calling for global efforts to develop a healthier and greener world in line with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. Throughout these phases, China has been able to overcome many challenges to integrate with the global economy and reshape global production and trade.

Since the third plenum of the 20th CPC Central Committee, which was held in July, said the overall objectives of further deepening reform comprehensively are to continue improving and developing the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, advancing Chinese modernization, modernizing the national governance system and governance capacity, and achieving high-quality development, the need to develop new quality productive forces has

become even more important.

Externally, rising global tensions have increased the need for devising a new development paradigm, especially to achieve self-reliance in strategic fields such as science and technology. At the same time, China has vowed to deepen cooperation and expand trade with other countries, and attract more foreign investments to the country. While some foreign enterprises have decided to shift their investments to other economies, the number of foreign-invested enterprises newly registered in China increased by 14.2 percent in the first half of this year. This trend goes against the US-led West's attempts to "decouple" or "de-risk" from the Chinese economy.

Yet the importance of continued trade with the United States and other Western economies should not be overestimated. True, expanding foreign trade is impor-



tant for China and other economies, especially Western economies which have a relatively high demand for goods and services by virtue of their wealth, and offer high-quality goods with high added value for exports. But the West has three inter-related disadvantages in this regard.

First, the West represents only about one-eighth of the global population — less than 1 billion of the global total of more than 8 billion people.

Second, in the medium term, the performance of Western economies, in terms of GDP, is declining relative to the performance of the developing countries of the Global South.

And third, Western countries amassed astronomical amounts of wealth during the colonial period and have been controlling the global financial and governance systems by exploiting the developing countries. But the scenario is now changing thanks to the growing economic and political influence of the Global South. In other words, the Western countries can no longer exploit the developing countries like they did in the past.

Here, it is important to highlight the relationship between China and the other developing countries, keeping in mind that China is the most influential country of the Global South. For many in the West, the Global South is represented mainly by BRICS+. Untrue as this assumption may be, there is no denying that BRICS+, of late, has been playing an increasingly important role in other institutions, including in the G20, not least because the G20 chair is rotating and hence is held by developing countries such as China, India and Brazil after regular intervals. For example, this year's G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in February.

As the largest economy in Latin America and a founding member of BRICS, Brazil is positioning itself as one of the leaders of the Global South. The G20 Summit, scheduled for November 2024 in Rio de Janeiro, will be the first to be held in Brazil. While India held the G20 chair last year and Brazil is the current chair, next year will see another BRICS member, South Africa, holding the G20 chair.

Also, the Third South Summit of the Group of 77, held in Kampala, Uganda, in January, underscored the rising significance and influence of "G77 and China". Established as a group of 77 developing countries at the UN Conference on Trade and Development in 1964, the group has since expanded to 134 members. China has been participating in the group since 1994.

The Third South Summit issued a document highlighting the multi-dimensional problems and new challenges that plague international relations. Emphasizing the importance of South-South cooperation and promoting economic development while working within the UN development system to close the SDG financial gap and support the UN 2030 Agenda, the Third South Summit vowed to uphold multilateralism and improve relations with all countries. China's pursuit of high-quality development is expected to play a significant role in this strengthening movement of the Global South.

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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Yang Zhiyong

Gain insights into economic resilience via plenum

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, held in July, focused on further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization. The third plenary session also said that measures would be taken to better balance development and security, in order to mitigate major risks, ensure high-quality development and realize the goal of transforming China into a great modern socialist country in all respects.

Some foreign commentators wrongly assume that the third plenum merely reiterated past statements without initiating substantive changes, because they have misjudged the steady progress China has made in implementing reform.

During the early stages of reform and opening-up, China adopted a gradual approach, of "crossing the river by feeling the stones", to address numerous issues, making reform relatively easy and effective.

However, reform can't always be easy, because after addressing the simpler issues, reform is implemented to address more challenging problems. Despite being the world's second-largest economy, China still needs to increase its per capita GDP. The victory in the battle against poverty was historic, yet China must consolidate these achievements and continue to overcome various challenges. Recognizing this need, the Party has decided to adopt a step-by-step approach to reform.

Since the third plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, China has been taking measures to deepen economic reform across economic, political, social, cultural and ecological fields. And despite the many difficulties, the Chinese people have overcome numerous challenges, thereby raising the country's global standing.

However, China's growing strength has made it a target of criticism, especially from those who cannot accept a non-

Western politico-economic system achieving such economic success. They wrongly assume that China's economic reform can't succeed, because they have never seen a country of such an economic scale undertake such a comprehensive reform. Despite their prejudice and criticisms, however, China will continue its steady pace of reform.

Some critics misinterpret China's broad and steady economic reform as being never-ending, and have even coined a term, "reform fatigue", to describe it. But China's comprehensive reform is aimed at making institutions more mature and well-defined, although reform can't achieve everything in one stroke.

The 20th CPC National Congress in 2022 proposed a two-step strategic plan to build a modern socialist country: achieving basic modernization by 2035 and becoming a strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and beautiful socialist country by the middle of this century. The comprehensive deepening of economic reform aligns with this strategy.

The 20th CPC Central Committee's third plenum has launched a new phase of reform, crucial for advancing Chinese modernization. And balancing development and security, and preventing and mitigating major risks, remain critical tasks, which in turn require further comprehensive reforms.

Development and security are intertwined. Reform promotes development, development fosters stability, and stability boosts security. However, further deepening reform requires more solid institutional support for development. This is where the third plenum of the 20th CPC Central Committee holds immense significance, because it has charted the course for further comprehensive reform.

The domestic and international economic landscapes are becoming increasingly complex, with many pressing global issues requiring urgent resolution.

Despite economic globalization benefiting all economies, some economies are pushing for de-globalization to fulfill their own narrow goals.

In contrast, the Chinese government's goal is to help the Chinese people lead a better life, as well as promote global development. And it has been deepening reform and opening-up to realize that goal. After all, it is because of reform and opening-up that China has performed an economic miracle.

Yet some Western politicians and media wrongly assume China's economic situation is unsustainable, because their assessments are based on absurd logic. No wonder their "China collapse" predictions have proven to be a myth.

Critics of China's economy come in different forms and shades. Some outrightly declare that the Chinese economy is on a decline. Others suggest China's economic miracle is driven by investment, implying China's economic growth has been "bought". Such misconceptions are the result of gross misjudgment of China's painstaking efforts to achieve economic development against all odds.

Economic growth characteristics vary at different stages. In the early stages, capital and investment-driven growth play significant roles in economic growth. However, as growth progresses, technological advancement becomes crucial. China has long recognized this aspect, especially since the beginning of the new era and, as a result, implemented an innovation-driven development strategy to improve total factor productivity so as to realize high-quality development. Apart from economic development, China is also advancing ecological civilization and embracing green development.

No country or economy can sustain high-speed growth indefinitely. Understanding China's economic situation requires acknowledging growth patterns. Transitioning from high-speed to medi-

um-high-speed growth is natural after a period of rapid economic expansion. As economic aggregates and per capita GDP reach certain levels, an economy is bound to experience lower rates of growth. And China is no exception.

China's large population, vast domestic market, robust infrastructure and technological advancements across fields provide immense potential for sustained medium-high-speed growth. More importantly, China remains unwavering in implementing comprehensive reform and opening-up while developing the socialist market economy.

China realizes the economic challenges it is facing, including the major economic risks — the problems faced by the real estate sector, local debt, and the risks faced by small and medium-sized financial institutions. Accordingly, it is taking effective measures to mitigate these risks. For example, it is building a new model to promote the healthy development of the real estate sector, and trying to improve local governments' fiscal health by implementing a new round of fiscal and tax reforms.

Besides, by mitigating risks while accelerating the development of new quality productive forces and fostering new economic growth drivers, China aims to promote high-quality development.

In summary, understanding the significance of the third plenum of the 20th CPC Central Committee will give people a deeper insight into China's reform and opening-up and the health of the Chinese economy. And the plenum will boost people's confidence in the economy and ensure institutional stability, thus advancing Chinese modernization.

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Kang Bing

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Time to proscribe 'bride price' to help address 'bachelor problem'

The "bachelor problem" in rural areas has been a subject of heated online discussions since the publication of a study on the marriage situation of older single men in rural areas some months ago. The study, by a team from the Central China Normal University in Wuhan, Hubei province, found that single men in 42 percent of Chinese villages have trouble finding a spouse.

The report, I found out after further scrutiny, is based on a survey of 1,785 rural households from 119 villages in 26 provinces and regions. To me, the survey is based on a pretty small sample and the researchers reached a hasty conclusion. This is not advisable, especially when dealing with any subject, let alone a serious issue like the "bachelor problem" in rural areas. China has more than 2.5 million villages which are different in terms of environment, local culture and tradition. Yet I appreciate the survey team's efforts, and suggest the government departments to take the report as a starting point for further research on the issue.

The report has drawn widespread public attention because it echoes people's impression that more and more men are either choosing to not marry or cannot find a life partner, not only in rural areas but also in urban areas. The reason for that can perhaps be attributed to the country's male-female ratio of 104.49:100, which means there were more than 30.97 million more males in China's total population of more than 1.40 billion in 2023.

Since the practice is against gender equality, China's laws prohibit the exchange of huge amounts of money or gifts at weddings.

Although the gap between the male and female population has been narrowing over the past few years, it would take a long time for the country to achieve gender equality in terms of population ratio. Many villagers still want a son, because they believe only a male child can carry forward the family line, inherit the family business and take care of parents in the latter's old age.

As such, better social and medical insurance policies, as well as targeted eldercare services should be made available in rural areas to prevent villagers from excessively worrying about their well-being in advanced age. In fact, such insurance programs have been introduced, but the pension amount is relatively small — from less than 100 yuan (\$13.95) to more than 1,000 yuan depending on the local government's financial capacity. The good news is that the central authorities have pledged to improve the rural social insurance program in terms of both quality and quantity.

Some district administrations have even established special match-making platforms to help single men in rural areas to find a life partner, with a few offering free "vocational training" to single men so they can earn more money, which would make it easier for them to find a life partner.

However, taking measures to reduce, if not altogether abolish, "bride price" would help single men more than vocational training in finding a life partner. Traditionally, before a couple tie the knot, the groom's side has to pay the bride's side "bride price" as a thank-you gift. In the past, the price could range from a goat to a few hundred kilograms of food grain.

Since the practice is against gender equality, China's laws prohibit the exchange of huge amounts of money or gifts at weddings. But the laws do not forbid "bride price", they only require the "bride price" to be fixed through mutual agreement. This is the loophole some parents of marriageable age women use to demand exorbitant amounts as "bride price" — a practice which had almost disappeared when I got married 40 years ago.

Now, a typical bride price in poorer rural areas of western China would be about 100,000 yuan while in the better-developed eastern region it could be about 300,000 yuan on average — equal to a rural family's three years' income. The fact that the high bride price, along with the fact that the groom's family has to build or purchase a house for the young couple, which many rural families cannot afford to do, leaves many marriageable-age sons single.

Perhaps it's time to review and revise, if necessary, some sections and clauses of the existing laws and abolish the "bride price" practice once and for all. And society as a whole should take all possible measures to solve the "bachelor problem" in rural areas.

GLOBAL VIEWS

EPHRAIM ABEL KAYEMBE

Building work

China is a key partner for Africa not just for infrastructure development, trade and investment, but also for skills and technology

In an era of economic and trade protectionism, neoliberalism and geopolitical confrontations, developing countries are increasingly becoming geopolitical and economic pawns in the zero-sum game of great power competition. To protect themselves from the zero-sum game, countries in Africa need to deepen relations with powers that focus on generating tangible win-win outcomes for all parties involved.



Through a number of initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, both China and Africa are attempting to strengthen their ties to deepen the strategic win-win engagement.

The FOCAC, established in 2000, promotes solidarity and cooperation between China and African countries based on the principles of equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. Through regular FOCAC engagements, both Africa and China have opportunities for collective dialogue within the framework of South-South cooperation, and this has guided well the strengthening of China-Africa cooperation. China's strong economy and technological expertise have driven the development of the win-win situation, with China as a key partner for Africa in different socioeconomic sectors such as infrastructure development, trade and investments, as well as capacity building.

Through initiatives such as the BRI, China has invested in building roads, railways, ports and energy facilities across the continent. The Tanzania-Zambia Railway that connects Zambia to the port in Tanzania has been extensively rehabilitated. The Kenyan government took an advantage of the commencement of the BRI to construct a standard gauge railway from Mombasa to Nairobi, coupled with modernized road networks. These projects not only facilitate trade and economic growth but also contribute to Africa's long-term connectivity infrastructure development.

The Mombasa-Nairobi-Malaba Standard Gauge Railway serves as a prime example of the connectivity infrastructure that brings myriad economic benefits to the East Africa communities. For example, through this railway, the Kenyan sea port at Mombasa has been connected to Eastern Uganda; and further construction from Uganda to Rwanda and Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo would cut the transportation costs for imports from these countries.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

The future direction of the FOCAC requires that it encourages deeper engagements on policy dialogue, coordination and collaboration. Supported by regular and timely disbursements of funds for various projects under FOCAC commitments, Africa is on track to register tangible progress in infrastructure development, and in skills and technology transfers.

For Malawi, a landlocked country, railway infrastructure development projects are a priority as they promote strategic economic connectivity. Under the BRI cooperation, a railway has been rehabilitated from Marka at the boundary with Mozambique in the southern part of Malawi up to Blantyre and Nacala Port in Northern Mozambique. Another stretch of railway from Salima to Mchinji has also been rehabilitated and is operational now. Projects of this nature are very important from an economic point of view because they contribute toward reducing transportation costs of imports and reducing fuel pump prices. For instance, in the past three weeks, a trainload of diesel arrived in Malawi for the first time after 21 years, essentially giving hope that the fuel shortages have come to an end.

For the past two years, Lilongwe was in discussion with Beijing to consider financing the construction of a railway that would connect Lilongwe to Mbeya in Tanzania. Taking practical steps toward providing funds on this project, the Malawi government recently signed a 2.4 trillion kwacha (\$1.37 billion) agreement with the Chinese government. This important step signals the commencement of a rail network in Malawi connecting Lilongwe to East Africa through an ocean port at Dar es Salaam in Tanzania which is expected to reduce the cost of imports. It is also important to mention that the new railway to be constructed will position Malawi as a connection passage to Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In addition to infrastructure development, China has also been investing in supporting African countries develop their human resources and institutional capacities by placing a strong emphasis on training African students and senior government technical officials in Chinese universities, thereby promoting and enhancing skills and technological transfer in its engagement with Africa. For example, in an area of education infrastructure development as linked to skills and knowledge transfer, the Chinese government has supported construction of the Malawi University of Sci-

ence and Technology where national and international students are being trained in geological engineering and climate change management. Currently, this university is establishing a special economic zone based on the experiences of the zones China has established in Guangzhou, Shanghai and Shenzhen. Further to this, Malawi University of Science and Technology is now able to assemble drones that are being used to respond to natural disasters such as floods.

In the agricultural sector, the Chinese government has supported Malawi to develop and construct irrigation schemes under the presidential greenbelt initiative. At the moment, this is expanding to include mega-farm development financed by China, thereby contributing to the strengthening of Malawi's food security and increasing the country's agricultural exports. In a number of areas, China is supporting micro-projects too so as to spread its win-win initiatives with local and national communities. This is more evident in Thyolo and Mulanje where micro-irrigation schemes have been supported by China.

In conclusion, both the FOCAC and the BRI have been core Chinese engagement mechanisms through which China has been effectively redesigning and strengthening the architectural construction of China-Africa relations. By implementing a number of infrastructure projects that promote and enhance the connectivity of regional economies in Africa, China is pursuing win-win cooperation, an approach that is building a community with a shared future.

The future direction of the FOCAC requires that it encourages deeper engagements on policy dialogue, coordination and collaboration. Supported by regular and timely disbursements of funds for various projects under FOCAC commitments, Africa is on track to register tangible progress in infrastructure development, and in skills and technology transfers. It is therefore incumbent upon both Africa and China to effectively implement projects that generate win-win outcomes. Joint reviews, monitoring and evaluation of projects under FOCAC and the BRI should be prioritized and guided by technical think tanks on China-Africa relations.

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YUAN XIAOHUI

Strength in numbers

More BRICS members mean more development funds and more demands for local currency settlement, deeper monetary cooperation and a broader integrated market

Since its inception, the BRICS cooperation mechanism has made significant progress both in terms of managing external relations as a collective force and internal cooperation.

On the one hand, upholding the interests of emerging markets and developing countries, BRICS advocates for reform of the unjust and unreasonable global governance system.



BRICS members have strengthened coordination on major international and regional issues, expressed objective and fair collective positions, and proposed solutions and countermeasures different from those of Western developed countries.

On the other hand, BRICS countries have continuously enhanced internal cooperation across a wide range of economic, social and cultural areas. Among them, economic cooperation and joint development, which are the purpose and priority of BRICS cooperation, show the greatest potential, most diversity and best results.

First, a comprehensive and multi-layer economic cooperation mechanism has been established among BRICS countries to support practical cooperation.

Centered on the leaders' summit, BRICS countries have formed a regular meeting mechanism comprising over 30 ministerial meetings and 60 working groups to discuss, decide and advance cooperation in various fields. Relevant departments of BRICS countries have maintained stable and close contact to exchange concerns and positions, as well as share policies, best practices and experiences.

Based on the broadest common ground among them, BRICS countries have developed a series of consensus, cooperation frameworks, road maps and action plans. Corresponding actions are pledged and implemented on a voluntary basis at the national level, in full respect of the economic sovereignty of member states. In 2015

and 2020, BRICS countries set out five-year plans for BRICS economic and trade cooperation, which defined the cooperation framework and priority areas for the partnership.

BRICS has set up several platforms and entities to promote day-to-day cooperation. For example, China established the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution Innovation Center and the China-BRICS Science and Innovation Incubation Park for the New Era in Xiamen, as well as the BRICS Future Network Research Institute in Shenzhen.

Besides, BRICS countries have held regular business forums and council meetings and launched the BRICS Women's Business Alliance to promote direct dialogue and collaborations among companies and business groups.

Second, BRICS countries continuously enrich economic cooperation based on global trends and their own needs.

Energy, agriculture, industrial development and the digital economy are the focus areas of BRICS cooperation. Energy cooperation includes encouraging companies to jointly develop technologies and equipment to drive efficiency; establishing energy research platforms for joint research in energy cooperation and efficiency; stepping up supply chain cooperation and investment to support energy transition; and consulting on energy-related global hot topics to safeguard BRICS countries' interests.

Agricultural cooperation under the BRICS framework prioritizes strengthened cooperation in food security, with the focus on agricultural technology innovation, the impact of climate change on agriculture and food security, and promoting trade and investment in the sector.

Industrial cooperation began with manufacturing and mineral processing. Later, more efforts were made to reinforce cooperation under the framework of the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution. Since 2020, BRICS countries have priori-

tized the digital economy as a key area of cooperation and they have proposed establishing a digital economy partnership. Artificial intelligence was added to this cooperation agenda in 2023.

Third, unlike binding custom unions or free trade areas or bilateral cooperation, BRICS countries have created a new model of multilateral economic cooperation.

Under the new model, BRICS countries have strengthened their policy coordination and strategic alignment, exchanged views and communicated positions on issues of common concern, formed consensus and frameworks, and encouraged the implementation of cooperation commitment through demonstration and pilot projects by member states.

Moreover, to promote information exchanges, BRICS countries have set up databases and conducted joint research to enhance understanding, explore areas of mutual interest and cultivate cooperation opportunities. They have also been sharing experiences, best practices and solutions to provide references for solving each other's development challenges. Through standards alignment, skills exchange, capacity building and joint project implementation, they have built a network of firms to promote supply chain cooperation.

On Jan 1 2024, BRICS exercised its largest expansion in history by admitting five new members — Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Ethiopia. With the new members have come new funds, technology, resources, markets and experiences, which have further enhanced economic complementarity within the group. Stronger internal economic cooperation among BRICS members will further reduce dependence on developed countries and explore new models for the sustainable rise of developing countries and emerging economies.

After the expansion, more members will join the leaders' summit, ministerial meetings, and working group meetings, creating a broader multilateral platform for member



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

states to resolve their differences and ease tensions, strengthen identity recognition and mutual encouragement. The flexibility of the BRICS cooperation mechanism allows new member states to quickly participate in cooperation after joining it.

Agriculture and energy continue to be the focus areas of economic cooperation after BRICS' expansion. The expanded bloc includes major exporters and importers of agricultural products, as well as providers of agricultural technology and development solutions. The pairing will accelerate the transfer of agricultural technology, promote experience sharing, foster closer agricultural trade and investment, balance supply and demand of agricultural products, and enhance food security through cooperation.

In the energy sector, the inclusion of Middle Eastern oil producers will ensure more stable supplies to BRICS countries, expand "energy plus" cooperation and accelerate energy transition.

With strong aspirations for industrial transformation and economic diversification, the new BRICS members are expect-

ed to actively participate in the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution cooperation and leverage the complementary advantages of funds, technology, labor, and markets of the group. BRICS countries will have a more stable and diversified supply of critical minerals to support the new industrial development.

With more funds for development and more demands for local currency settlement and monetary reform, there will be deepened financial and monetary cooperation and a broader integrated market. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises will have more opportunities to collaborate and help build more resilient industry and supply chains.

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LIFE



Over nearly three years, directing duo Chan Kin-hi and Li Jiakai devoted themselves entirely to producing the animated film *White Snake: Afloat*. However, they often grappled with the weight of its archetype *Legend of the White Snake*, a household tale established in folklore that has been reinterpreted over centuries.

Its earliest legend may date back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907), where the titular snake demon was consistently depicted as a malevolent character throughout the Song Dynasty (960-1279). However, it was retold in writer Feng Menglong's *Jingshi Tongyan* (Stories to Caution the World) during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). That's when the tale took its current form — a poignant love story between the snake-turned-woman and a handsome man.

In the modern era, the story has been adapted into multiple movies, TV dramas, animated series and stage shows. Some of the most popular titles include the 1992 costume drama *New Legend of Madame White Snake* starring Hong Kong actress Angie Chiu, and director Tsui Hark's 1993 movie *Green Snake*, which casts more light on White Snake's sister-like maidservant, Xiaoqing, a green serpent demon.

The dilemma for Chan and Li was simple: How could they achieve a breakthrough in retelling a story familiar to Chinese people for generations?

They traveled to Hangzhou in October to seek inspiration.

During the over-one-week stay in the picturesque and verdant city, Chan says, they visited famous historical sites, iconic landmarks and scenic spots, such as the Southern Song Imperial Street, and the Nine Creeks and Eighteen Gullies.

Li adds: "We also spent several days strolling along the West Lake, observing how the light changes from morning to noon and night. This was particularly significant as one of the most highlighted scenes takes place on the lake."

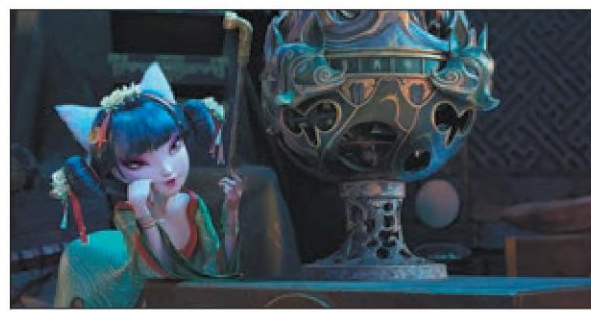
"During the final days of conceiving the script, I suddenly realized — it is simply a love story depicting a man falling in love with a snake-turned-woman and how this unusual couple overcomes difficulties to be together," said Li, with Chan, during an interview with China Daily.

The two directors delved into the preparation work, especially the meticulous research of Song Dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan's masterpiece *Qingming Shanghe Tu* (Along the River During the Qingming Festival).

The over 5-meter-long scroll features numerous figures, cattle, houses and ships, making it a

White Snake holds a sting in the 'tale'

Latest offering sees end of trilogy as love takes center stage, **Xu Fan** reports.



Top left: The two snake demons with Xu Xian struggle against Fahai, a Buddhist monk who stubbornly holds the belief that humans and demons should not coexist. **Top right:** A poster for the film, *White Snake: Afloat*. **Middle:** A scene features Bai Niangzi, the white snake-turned-woman, encountering Xu, the man she has fallen for, on the Broken Bridge on the West Lake in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. **Above left:** The fox spirit, a popular supporting role, ponders on assisting Bai. **Above right:** Xu, Bai and her sister-like maidservant, Xiaoqing, among the crowd. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

detailed record of the landscape of the dynasty's capital city of Bianjing (today's Kaifeng in Henan province), and the lives of people from various walks of life. It provided a good reference for the animators to re-create the story's backdrop, set in Lin'an, which is now Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, during the Song Dynasty.

The film premiered in theaters nationwide on the Qixi Festival, also known as Chinese Valentine's Day,

the seventh day of the seventh month on the Chinese lunar calendar, which fell on Aug 10 this year. As of Thursday, it had grossed more than 245 million yuan (\$34.2 million) at the box office, making it one of the highest-grossing blockbusters of the summer, according to tracking platform Maoyan PRO.

White Snake: Afloat marks the conclusion of the White Snake trilogy. The first movie was released in 2019, and the second installment,

centered upon the green snake, was released in 2021.

The first film, which grossed an impressive 470 million yuan at the box office and fictionalizes a brand-new romance set 500 years before the original folklore, is widely viewed as a turning point for the success of Light Chaser Animation, one of the country's largest studios that focuses on producing animated movies inspired by Chinese history and culture.

Taking place around 500 years after the events of the first film but before the second installment, the new fantasy romance *White Snake: Afloat* follows the journey of Bai Niangzi, or Madam Bai, a white snake demon, who has taken on the form of a beautiful woman.

Accompanied by the green snake demon, Xiaoqing, the protagonist travels to Lin'an in hopes of reuniting with Xu Xian, her beloved. Now becoming a skilled polymath in

medicine and patient care, Xu once again falls in love with Bai and gets married but their peaceful life is soon disrupted by Fahai, a powerful and stubborn Buddhist monk who is adamant in his belief that humans and demons should not coexist.

Spanning 133 minutes, the film has a crew of almost 1,000 people — consisting of 300 from Light Chaser Animation and 700 recruited from other companies.

Linda Jaivin, an Australian Sinologist who assisted in the English subtitle translation of Light Chaser Animation's successful film *Chang'an*, joined the team for *White Snake: Afloat*. She has added a unique touch to some poetic lines inspired by classic literature, according to the two directors.

In Chinese mythology and legends, wild beasts are often portrayed as monsters, demons or spirits, with vixens being among the creatures known for their ability to transform into beautiful women. Influenced by such legacy, the White Snake trilogy features a fox spirit with two faces, who has become a popular supporting character due to her captivating appearance and mysterious identity.

In the new movie, Li says, she transitions from being the owner of a weapon workshop in the first film to operating a magic house, helping customers retrieve lost memories in the second film, to becoming the head of an opera troupe, where she performs a work based on Tang Dynasty writer Yuan Zhen's *Yingying Zhuan* (Yingying's Biography).

"We live in a land saturated and nurtured by cultures thriving over thousands of years. While embarking on a journey to reexamine the historical corners once overlooked, we, as creators, are excited to find numerous inspirations," Li says.

According to Yu Zhou, president of Light Chaser Animation, the studio is scheduled to produce more Chinese culture-based films, with an upcoming adaptation from Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) novelist Pu Songling's *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio).

"Over the last decade, China's animation film industry has experienced rapid growth, with audiences showing a surging interest in stories that embody traditional cultural elements. This trend may be attributed to the cultural confidence exhibited by young people born after 1995 or the post-2000 generation," Yu says. "However, their expectations for film visuals and animation technology have also increased, necessitating greater efforts from domestic filmmakers."

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Young Africans embrace benefits of martial arts

ABIDJAN — "One, two, three, four," a young man in a Shaolin Temple training jersey commanded, as he demonstrated movements and postures to students in a gymnasium at the Felix Houphouët-Boigny University in Abidjan, the economic capital of Cote d'Ivoire.

"I'm a member of our university's Chinese martial arts club, where students of all grades can train. We have three sessions a week, and about 50 students come to learn kung fu and Chinese culture," says Jean Philippe N'Dri, who is responsible for instruction at the club.

Like many young Africans, his interest in martial arts and Chinese culture began with martial arts movies.

"My love was born of watching great actors like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan," he says, adding that they

taught him to appreciate martial arts.

As children, he and his friends would imitate characters from the martial arts movies they watched, but it wasn't easy to master the movements.

In 2014, he enrolled at the Felix Houphouët-Boigny University. During his second year, he joined the martial arts club out of an interest in kung fu.

With the assistance of the Confucius Institute at the university and the support of the club, he was given the opportunity to visit the Shaolin Temple in China's Henan province.

"It was a beautiful discovery and a great dream come true," he says.

On the way to China, he and his companions were curious how the Shaolin Temple would look, and wondered what they would see

when they arrived.

"We saw people dressed the way they had been in the movies. They were wearing Shaolin attire and practicing techniques properly," he says of his first impression of the temple.

The group underwent three weeks of training, but the first two weeks were really challenging.

"It was so tough that we wanted to go back home. We understood then why Shaolin monks have such a reputation," he says. "It wasn't just physical training, but also mental fortification that we received."

With his kung fu dream coming true, N'Dri was keen to pass on what he had learned to people at home.

"We have set up the Shaolin Training Camp, which is the first of its kind in Africa. It allows us to give the same training we received at the



Jean Philippe N'Dri demonstrates his martial arts technique at the Felix Houphouët-Boigny University in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. ZHANG JIAN / XINHUA

temple to young people who are not able to go to China, but who share the same dream," he says.

"We organize several competitions in which all of our students, some of whom are preparing for the Shaolin championship in China, participate. The competitions allow them to gauge themselves nationally."

He says that martial arts have become the backbone of his life.

"Before, I used to love to fight, but I never won," he says. "When I began practicing martial arts, my initial idea was to learn techniques to protect myself from people who wanted to hurt me."

But during the nine years he has been practicing martial arts, he has found the opposite to be true.

"As other people will tell you, I have become wiser. I can channel my anger, and have developed a

spirit of sharing with my brothers," he says.

He adds that he hopes China will offer more support and opportunities to his compatriots, so that they can promote martial arts at home after returning from their studies.

"We are ambassadors of Chinese culture and also of African culture. We have these two advantages to enable Africans to get what Chinese and African culture are meant to offer," he says.

N'Dri is keen to convey to martial arts enthusiasts that practicing martial arts is an inner journey.

"You will develop extraordinary discipline. You will cultivate long-lasting health. You will also achieve peace of heart, which is the most essential," he says.

XINHUA

LIFE



Top: Qingyu Tufei, a renowned Shanghai delicacy of stir-fried guts with wild rice shoots. **Above:** Squirrel-shaped mandarin fish. The dish requires intricate knife skills in preparation.

Culinary culture serves up rich Sino-French exchange

TV show highlights similarities in ingredients and presentation of both countries' cuisine, as **Xu Fan** takes a bite.



Top: Bouillabaisse, a classic fish soup from southern France. **Above:** Red mullet with potato scales, a dish created by a legendary French chef in the 1960s. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In a tantalizing display that entices both the taste buds and the eyes, Qin Zhuonan — a 45-year-old chef from Shanghai — uses a pair of scissors to separate the belly of a black carp, extracting the liver with precision to avoid rupturing the gall bladder and spoiling the flavor.

She carefully repeats the process on 10 fish to make Qingyu Tufei, a renowned Shanghai delicacy, stir-frying the innards with wild rice shoots.

Within a tension-paced 30 minutes, the highly skilled chef completes the dish, earning praise from the four judges: Li Bo, a professor at Nanjing Normal University; renowned French chef Glenn Viel; Zhou Xiaoyan, vice-president of the China Cuisine Association; and Guillaume Gomez, a celebrated chef who has served four French presidents over 20 years.

The scene is featured in the third episode of *The Peak of Cook — Chinese-French Chef King's Competition*, a television program aimed to boost the culinary cultural exchanges between the two countries. It was created as a tribute to mark the 60th anniversary of China-France diplomatic ties.

Produced by China Media Group, the program — which began airing on CCTV-2 on July 20 — brings together 20 Chinese and French chefs, with four participating in each of the 10 episodes, engaging in culinary competitions themed on 10 ingredients ranging from fish to chicken and animal innards.

Tang Lin, the chief producer, tells China Daily that the major creators, after rounds of brainstorming, realized that culinary culture remains one of the most intriguing subjects to engage audiences from both countries.

Recalling that the production team was assigned to produce the program in early February, Tang reveals that the 20 chefs are 29 to 55 years old, with most of them being culinary veterans with rich experience.



Clockwise from top: A scene from the TV program *The Peak of Cook — Chinese-French Chef King's Competition*. The program is aimed to boost culinary exchanges between the two countries. Corentin Delcroix, a food influencer from France, prepares red mullet with potato scales. French chef Franckelie Laloum and his Chinese counterpart Guo Ke (left) exchange ideas during the program. Shanghai chef Qin Zhuonan cooks the renowned dish Qingyu Tufei.

Filed between late April and July, the program invited various judges for different episodes, including French TV host Olivier Grandjean and Chinese actor Liu Ye. On-site simultaneous interpretation was set up to facilitate real-time communication between the guests and participants.

Yang Zhongwen, the show's chief director, explains that they have selected the ten ingredients, which are the theme of each episode, based on a single criterion — ingredients

that are commonly used in the local kitchens of both China and France.

Aside from widely cooked ingredients for most families, such as chicken, duck, fish, pork and beef, the program also includes shellfish such as shrimp and crab, as both countries have long coastlines, Yang adds.

"One ingredient that deserves special attention is innards. Despite the common belief that Western cuisine tends to avoid using animal organs, French restaurants have incorporated innards as a key ingre-

redient, especially in their renowned dish Foie Gras," explains Yang.

The show also delves deep into the historical archives and artistic works behind all these foods. For example, the episode focusing on animal innards reveals that the culinary technique and flavor of innards were elevated during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), a result of foreign traders importing various spices, such as pepper, to the country through the Silk Road.

Another example is the episode

focused on chicken which explores why the fowl is considered a fundamental and essential source of nutrient for the general public. Its opening sequence reviews famous quotes from historic figures, such as King Henry IV's wish for every peasant in France to have a chicken in his pot every Sunday, and Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai's lines depicting a prosperous countryside scene with chickens.

"In addition to exploring how these ingredients have cemented their place in the history of both

countries, we have conducted extensive research to uncover their depictions in literary works," says Tang.

He gives the example of Bouillabaisse, a classic fish soup from southern France portrayed in the classic novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* by French author Alexandre Dumas.

"From historical texts and cultural masterpieces to scientific works, by exploring various records or depictions about these ingredients, we can uncover how they have transformed lives in different eras and influenced the world," Tang explains.

The Chinese and French culinary cultures share a common pursuit of meticulousness and delicacy in cooking techniques, as demonstrated in the program.

Illustrating this pursuit, in the fish-themed episode, Tao Xiaodong, a chef from Yangzhou in Jiangsu province, prepares a signature dish that involves deboning and carving the fish into an ornamental shape resembling a squirrel.

Corentin Delcroix — a popular food influencer born in Lille who is followed by 6 million Chinese fans online — prepares red mullet with potato scales, a dish created by a legendary French chef in the 1960s that requires intricate cutting skills to transform the potato into thin slices resembling fish scales.

"Audiences will notice that both China and France share a culinary pursuit, which is to make the dish presentation as exquisite as possible. We hope the audience will discover how food can serve as a platform for cultural exchanges and enhance mutual understanding about life," says Yang, the chief director.

Tang, the chief producer, concludes that by sharing human-interest stories from the judges, the program aims to ignite the audience's curiosity and inspire them to embark on a journey of exploration into the rich history and culture of both countries.

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Distinctive Chinese wines pour into global market

YINCHUAN — Much ingenuity has been dedicated to the label designs of the sparkling wine made by DEVO Winery based in China's premier wine region. The splash of light green — resembling a brush stroke — turns dark as the temperature falls, indicating the best time to pop the cork.

The back label has two layers — a Chinese label on top with English beneath it. The Chinese label can easily be peeled off, making the bottle ready for export. The winery, based in Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region, expanded its list of export destinations in July by adding Japan.

The company's export expansion is part of a larger trend of Ningxia wines gaining international recognition. According to Yinchuan Customs, in the first half of 2024, Ningxia exported 50,500 liters of wine valued at over 5.75 million yuan (\$802,893), marking year-on-year increases of 24.79 percent and 70.16 percent, respectively.

As the Fourth China (Ningxia) International Wine Culture and Tourism Expo kicked off this month



Left: Wine tasters sample the product at Yuanshi Chateau in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. **Right:** At the chateau, which is situated in the eastern side of the Helan Mountains, workers are busy collecting the ripe Chardonnay grapes this month. PHOTOS / XINHUA

in Yinchuan, Ningxia's capital city, they were immediately impressed and placed an order," says its founder Zhai Liang. In July, nearly 90,000 yuan of sparkling wine was exported to Japan.

There are two wineries in China specializing in the traditional method of making sparkling wines.

The traditional method produces finer bubbles, giving the company a unique market position that helps

attract customers from Mexico, Singapore and Japan.

"Traditionally made wines from China are still rare in international markets," Zhai adds. "We're also in talks with customers from Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States."



Decanter, a highly regarded wine magazine, highlighted the winery's potential in its May edition, noting:

"From the eastern foothills of Helan Mountain in China's Ningxia, new producer DEVO's first vintage releases hints at the sun-drenched region's potential to make sophisticated sparkling wines."

Another winery benefiting from the Helan Mountain area is Kanaan Winery. While DEVO is just beginning to make its mark internationally, Kanaan has been exporting its

still wines for years.

In December 2021, over 10,000 bottles from Kanaan were sold to Liberty Wines, a wine dealer in the UK, making the deal one of Ningxia's largest wine export orders that year.

"Liberty Wines has continued to reorder from us, which speaks volumes about their approval of our wines," says Wang Zhaoyue, assistant to the general manager of the winery.

Since June 2016, its wines have been exported to Germany, the UK, Switzerland, Austria, Singapore and Australia. The winery has exported over 9,000 bottles of wine this year with an export value exceeding 690,000 yuan.

"Our wines match the taste preferences of foreign consumers, offering balanced flavors and high cost-effectiveness, making them ideal for everyday drinking," Wang says. "Our wines also exhibit good age-ability."

"Our goal is to achieve 40 percent exports or even a split between domestic and international markets," says Zhai about the winery's long-range targets.

XINHUA

LIFE

Ailing father jogs family memory

Play examines the heartbreaking decisions a daughter must make, a dilemma actress fully understands, **Chen Nan** reports.

In the rehearsal room, where the boundaries between reality and performance blur, veteran actress Tian Shui grapples with an intense personal struggle that she had never experienced before.

It was a day in July when Tian was in rehearsals for the Chinese stage adaptation of *Le Pere* (The Father), the award-winning work of one of France's most popular young playwrights, Florian Zeller.

Le Pere is the winner of the 2014 Moliere Award for Best Play. A film by the same name, which was adapted and directed by Zeller himself, gained six Oscar nominations in 2021 and won in Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Actor categories.

The role she plays is Anne, a middle-aged woman whose father, Anthony, suffers from Alzheimer's disease. Reality gradually dissolves in the father's mind, creating many problems between the father and the daughter. Shouldering filial love and responsibility to her family, Anne is under tremendous pressure. She is forced to make an "appropriate" decision — whether to take care of her father or send him to hospital.

This role resonates deeply with Tian because she lost her own mother to the same debilitating illness last year. As Tian steps into the character's shoes, she is compelled to relive the pain and sadness she has worked so hard to overcome.

The actress shared the experience in Beijing on Wednesday, when the Chinese play, *Le Pere*, was going to be staged at the National Centre for the Performing Arts on that day with shows running till last Sunday. After 14 consecutive shows in Shanghai from July 28 to Aug 11, the Chinese play, produced by Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, has launched a nationwide tour.

"I usually can put my personal feelings aside when I perform onstage or in the rehearsal room. However, that day I went through a profound emotional journey that required me to confront a past that I was trying to forget," says Tian, whose acting career spans the past three decades from movies, TV dramas to theatrical productions.

The scenes involving her character's interactions with her father in the Chinese play mirror the raw, unprocessed grief she carries from her own experience. The script's poignant moments about memory loss and the slow erosion of a loved one's identity strike a familiar chord, evoking memories of her mother's decline and eventual



Top: A scene from the Chinese stage adaptation of French playwright Florian Zeller's award-winning work, *Le Pere* (The Father), featuring Tian Shui who plays the role of Anne, and the father, played by King Shih-chieh. **Above:** (From left) Director David Weiguo Jiang, actor King and actress Tian at the NCPA in Beijing on Wednesday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

death. It's a painful but necessary confrontation.

"It's like opening a wound I thought had healed," Tian admits. "Sometimes it feels overwhelming, but it's also a way to channel that pain into something meaningful. My own experience helped me to interpret the role of Anne."

She also notes that through her portrayal, she hopes to shed light on the profound impact of Alzheimer's disease, both on individuals and their families.

In the Chinese play, Taiwan actor King Shih-chieh plays the role of the father, an aging man who struggles to accept that he is

losing his memory and cognitive function.

"One moment he seems completely lucid and the next (he) cannot recognize his apartment or his daughter — the man dips in and out of memory and presence," says King, 72. "When I read the script, I was intrigued by the writer's approach of depicting the old man's world, which falls apart due to the disease."

To portray the character, King did research to understand the disease's progression and symptoms. He also consulted medical professionals and individuals with firsthand experience to grasp the

emotional and cognitive challenges of Alzheimer's. He uses subtle changes in demeanor, memory lapses, and confusion to convey the character's struggle.

"I developed the habit of reading the script of *Le Pere* every day after we started doing rehearsals. Even now, after the play has been staged, I have kept up the habit. When I read the script, maybe just a few lines, I have new ideas about the character," says the actor. "Ultimately, the goal is to present a portrayal that is both respectful and

authentic, shedding light on the complexities of living with Alzheimer's while evoking empathy and understanding from the audience."

King adds that for the Chinese play, he spent over two months in Shanghai working with the creative team members. "I am very careful about accepting invitation from theatrical productions because unlike movies and TV dramas, performing in theaters means the most connection between an actor and the audience. I have to be fully prepared," says the actor who has performed in movies and TV dramas. In King's decades-long career as an actor, one of his most well-known roles is that of Jiang Binliu, the leading man in the play, *Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land*, by Taiwan director Stan Lai in 1986.

"Aging is a passage of life that everyone must experience. What happens when someone afflicted with Alzheimer's approaches the end of their life? What changes occur to their body and mind? What difficulties and dilemmas does the family face? We spent a long time discussing the script before we did rehearsals," says director David Weiguo Jiang. "The writer explores these phenomena from the perspective of the patient, chronicling first-person details of symptoms, taking the audience through the entire process in finding resonance in the emotions, pressures and pains of those involved."

The director also designed stage settings to go with the characters' changes, physically and mentally. For example, in the beginning, the apartment where the father lives seems to be normal, comfortable and full of furniture. However, as his health situation declines, the apartment becomes empty, leaving only a bed on stage.

He also mapped out a space on stage for a corridor, where the actors and actresses walk from one end to another. As they pace quickly on the corridor, they become anxious. They cannot find an exit on the corridor just like they cannot figure out a way to solve their problems.

"It's a tragic story but it is also filled with surprise, suspense, fantasy and mind-bogglingly hilarious moments. As we stage it in more cities, I'm delighted to continue sharing the message of this play," the director says.

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Wonders of wandering off beaten path in Zhejiang

On the summit of a mountain over 1,000 meters high in a Zhejiang nature reserve, I glimpsed a work of art on the horizon. Beyond the outstretched boughs of Huangshan pines, silhouettes of mountain upon mountain were painted across the sky in striking blues and grays. The scene belonged in a museum, yet it hung in the sky before us, challenging every notion I had of what a mountain should look like in nature.

How did we encounter such an extraordinary view on a trail so ordinary that it was largely empty, even on this holiday weekend? In the three-plus hours we spent hiking there that day, we saw only four other small groups of hik-

ers. The trail wasn't even marked on the maps; we wouldn't have known it existed, had we not passed it during a drive in late January earlier this year. Yet, somehow, this

forgotten place possessed a quiet magic of its own, revealed in resplendent moments that took us by surprise.

This was the same trail where, months earlier, my husband Jun and I nearly sighted a "phoenix". While trudging up a steep climb, there was a loud shriek, followed by long, white tail feathers that flashed through the woods. We stopped, ostensibly to catch our breath, as we attempted to reassure ourselves it was not a hallucination. I proffered a curious explanation: that legendary bird in Chinese mythology. We laughed, even as we declared the sighting a blessing. The bird, which we later identified as a silver pheasant, was said to have inspired its fabled counterpart. Yet the experience inspired us to return to the trail, which we hadn't finished hiking, and discover the other wonders it held.

The artistic mountain vista we saw that day was one of the many unexpected delights during our hike. There was the mystery bird that serenaded us from deep in the forest, as if a hermit had decided to play a simple seven-tone melody on a flute; the tune was so lovely I hummed it back in response. A tiny neon green walking stick parachuted down onto Jun's arm, giving me my first close encounter with this curious insect that mimics vegetation. A dark brown laughing thrush, with a Zorro-like mask across its eyes, alighted for a moment on the branch of a pine tree just feet away from us, as if posing, before it flitted away. On our descent, a cacophony of bird calls erupted from the underbrush, culminating in one of the most raucous avian gatherings that I've ever heard in the wild. Each of these moments sparkled like gems, which we tucked in the corners of our minds to cherish long afterward.

Who says you must jostle with the crowds to enjoy a day filled with treasures? For every popular sight that demands a place on your bucket list, there are many more you've probably never heard of, just waiting to be discovered — perhaps on a chance drive through the mountains. They may not have the glamour of their more famous counterparts, such as Hangzhou's West Lake. But despite that, you might just have a transcendental experience anyhow, from being wonder-struck by the beauty of a mountain vista, to wondering if you just saw a white phoenix.

The writer is a freelancer for China Daily.

“One moment he seems completely lucid and the next (he) cannot recognize his apartment or his daughter — the man dips in and out of memory and presence.”

King Shih-chieh, Taiwan actor

