



Time to shine

Spot gold surges to historic highs on back of strong demand, Fed cuts BIZ LIFE, PAGE 9



Under attack

Israel strikes heart of Beirut as fears grow of wider turmoil

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CHINA DAILY

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China-built supply chains to benefit all

Nation's efforts present opportunities for global businesses, experts say

By CHENG YU
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China's intensified efforts to build resilient industrial and supply chains and expand international collaboration will further drive global industrial development and unlock a wealth of opportunities for companies worldwide, experts and company executives said.

The comments were made in response to the central authorities' resolution to this end. The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China — a meeting key to the nation's reforms and modernization progress — said the country will move faster to build industrial and supply chains that are self-supporting and risk-controllable.

Meanwhile, China will further deepen reform and opening-up, and facilitate international cooperation in industrial and supply chains, the meeting said.

"China is both a participant and beneficiary of global industrial and supply chains, as well as a firm defender and builder of these chains,"

Zhang Qingwei, vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, said during a recent meeting.

He added that the country will integrate more deeply with the global industrial and supply chain system and firmly oppose protectionism and any form of decoupling, while maintaining the desired outcome of global public good.

Zhang Yansheng, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said that China has witnessed momentum in emerging sectors like new energy in recent years despite headwinds such as decoupling moves initiated by the United States and its relocation strategies.

"The US is leveraging new protectionism, industrial policies and government intervention to undermine the solid foundation of China's industrial and supply chains. This retrogressive approach is not only unfair to Chinese companies and global consumers, but also a step backward in the global transition toward sustainability."

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Making most of holidays

Above: Tourists, many of them holding national flags, make their way up Mount Tai in Shandong province on Wednesday to see the sunrise, on the second day of the seven-day-long National Day holiday.

Left: A performer dressed as a panda greets tourists on Wednesday during a cultural event in Leshan, Sichuan province.

LIU ZHONGJUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Adjusted policies motivate realty sales

By LIU YUKUN
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Fueled by favorable policies, China's residential real estate market witnessed an uptick in inquiries and viewings over the first three days of the National Day holiday. Experts have predicted a country-wide market revival marked by increased transactions, with first-tier cities leading the trend.

They said recent policy adjustments that eased restrictions on leveraging, along with previous measures such as ensuring the delivery of pre-sale properties and the 300 billion yuan (\$42.7 billion) loan to State-owned enterprises for affordable housing projects, are crucial for stabilizing the market. However, further support from the central bank may still be required to sustain the momentum.

"Our phones rang non-stop the day new policies were announced, as they captured the attention of numerous potential homebuyers," said Wu Libin, sales manager at house-letting agency 5i5j in Beijing, adding that inquiries are still coming in.

Another sales manager in Beijing E-Town told Beijing News on Tuesday that transactions worth 125 million yuan had been completed and more than 100 families had visited the development area since Beijing announced its policies on Monday.

There was a rush of inquiries elsewhere too. In Guangzhou, Guangdong province, a housing sales center in Liwan district extended its office hours and stayed open throughout the night following Guangzhou's policy announcement on Sunday.

By Monday noon, the number of visitors to the sales center had surged by 200 percent compared to usual levels, according to Jimu News. A staff member surnamed Liu said while some buyers jumped at the chance to buy following the policy announcement, others had opted for a wait-and-watch approach.

Shenzhen in Guangdong province and Shanghai also reported a rise in the number of visitors to various sales offices. Latest data from a research center of realty agency Leyoujia revealed a nearly 40 percent surge in pre-owned home transactions at Leyoujia sales centers on Monday compared to the previous day — the highest since February 2021. New home transactions also hit a two-year high. Xinmin Evening News revealed that multiple sales offices in Shanghai are fully booked for house viewings next week.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development said on Sunday that cities, especially first-tier cities, should utilize policies and adjust housing purchase restrictions based on local conditions.

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2 killed as Typhoon Krathon makes landfall in Taiwan

By ZHANG YI
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Typhoon Krathon made landfall on Thursday in Taiwan's major port city of Kaohsiung, bringing torrential rains and fierce winds to the island's south. Two deaths were reported from the affected region, while two people remain missing. Schools and businesses remain closed and hundreds of flights have been canceled.

Krathon made landfall around 12:40 pm. It packed maximum sustained winds of 126 kilometers per hour with gusts of 162 kph, affecting the areas of Taichung, Nantou, Hualien, Taitung and Penghu.

The meteorological department has issued strong wind warnings for parts of Kaohsiung and Pingtung. Across Taiwan, heavy to torrential rain is forecast, with severe downpours expected in some areas.

The typhoon is expected to move slowly north and weaken into a tropical depression by Friday before it reaches Taipei. It was expected to then head across the Taiwan Strait toward the Chinese mainland.

As of Thursday morning, the typhoon had claimed two lives and injured 123 people.

The Taiwan weather authorities warned that due to the slow progress of the typhoon, its impact could persist until the weekend.

On Wednesday, Typhoon Krathon's influence reached southeastern Zhejiang province and northeastern Fujian province on the Chinese mainland, leading to moderate to heavy rainfall in some areas. Fujian announced the suspension of most passenger ferry services on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a fire at a hospital in Pingtung county killed at least nine people early Thursday. The deaths were attributed to smoke and the cause was under investigation. It was not immediately clear whether the blaze was related to the typhoon.

Zhu Fenglian, a spokeswoman of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, on Thursday expressed deep sorrow over the tragic incident, offering condolences to the deceased Taiwan compatriots and sincere sympathies to the families of the victims and the injured.



A security guard inspects a booth damaged by powerful winds in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, on Thursday. DANIEL CENG / ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

Bulgaria keen to enhance bilateral ties

By MO JINGXI
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As Bulgaria and China celebrate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations on Friday, Andrey Tehov, the Bulgarian ambassador to China, expressed his nation's keen interest in fostering deeper and more pragmatic ties with China in areas ranging from trade and investment to people-to-people exchanges.

"Bulgaria was the second country to recognize the People's Republic of China, just three days after its founding," Tehov said in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

He noted that bilateral relations have been traditionally friendly, based on mutual respect and goodwill, and Bulgaria considers China a priority partner in Asia. "Bulgaria aims to continue developing bilateral relations in a balanced manner and in the interest of the prosperity of our peoples," he said.

Resuming high-level bilateral visits will be a key task during his term moving forward to strengthen political, economic and cultural ties.

"It is my understanding that this is also the wish of the Chinese side," he said.

The last visit by a Bulgarian president was in 2019 when Rumen Radev paid a state visit to Beijing and the two sides decided to elevate their bilateral ties to a strategic partnership.

Tehov, who arrived in China at the end of last year, also highlighted China's role in Bulgaria's trade as its second most important export partner outside the European Union.

He said that bilateral trade between China and Bulgaria reached \$3.98 billion in 2023 and that he hoped that it would steadily increase in the coming years.

The envoy said Bulgaria aims to expand exports to China, particularly of goods with excellent global credentials, such as agricultural products, essential oils and cosmetics.

"We see untapped potential for deepening economic cooperation beyond traditional trade, in sectors such as the food industry, high technology, healthcare and also tourism," he said.

At the end of 2022, China's cumulative direct investment in Bulgaria stood at \$142 million. The ambassador said the Eastern European country is seeking to attract more Chinese investment.

"We offer excellent conditions for Chinese investors and are also implementing specific measures and incentives to encourage foreign investment," he said.

In December, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the aviation authorities of China and Bulgaria, with the aim of strengthening bilateral cooperation in civil aviation and transportation.

Tehov said he expects both sides to fully utilize the MoU to enhance connectivity between the two nations through direct air services, as well as rail links, which he said is

another priority for Bulgaria.

The ambassador spoke highly of China's policy of reform and opening-up, which he said has delivered remarkable socioeconomic achievements, lifting millions out of poverty and turning China into one of the world's economic powerhouses.

Over the past decade or so, China has made spectacular advancements in various fields, he noted.

This year has also seen significant cultural exchanges between the two countries.

"Our bilateral cooperation in the sphere of culture and education, as well as our exchange programs, have both solid traditions and bright perspectives," the ambassador said, adding that this has contributed toward further strengthening friendly relations between the two nations.

The career diplomat said that he had personally observed the country's impressive achievements in many areas during his travels around China over the past nine months.

He added that he was genuinely impressed by innovative products developed by Chinese companies, especially in the areas of new energy technologies, smart electric mobility, fuel cell technology and hydrogen-powered vehicles.

As China deepens reform and advances its modernization drive, Bulgaria is ready to collaborate with China to translate these opportunities into tangible outcomes through mutually beneficial cooperation, aiming to bring prosperity to both peoples, Tehov said.

ETHNIC VLOGGERS POPULARIZE HIGHS AND LOWS OF RURAL LIFE

Videos about herdsmen, nomads attract growing number of city followers

By CUI JIA
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Uyinga has been sharing videos about the daily life of her family living on grassland in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region on social media for the past six years. Besides learning about herdsmen's daily routines such as grazing live-

stock and cooking traditional Mongolian food through the videos, viewers can observe the stunning scenery of the grassland while listening to the sound of the wind blowing.

"I don't have any scripts. I just record the herdsmen's normal life on the grassland in Xi Ujimchin Banner. And I think that's the rea-

son why people like them," Uyinga, from the Mongolian ethnic group, said.

In her latest videos, her family is seen busily cutting grass in September that had started to turn yellow, and then storing it to feed livestock in the winter.

"As you can see, the grassland isn't always green. Its beauty

varies in different seasons," the 29-year-old says in the video. "And we must get certain things done before winter comes, such as cutting the grass. As herdsmen, we have learned to respect nature and follow the rules of the grassland."

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NATION

Hong Kong stock trading frenzy calms

Experts cautiously optimistic after run of six days of gains comes to an end

By LIU YIFAN in Hong Kong
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Analysts voiced cautious optimism on the Hong Kong stock market after its stellar rally cooled off on Thursday, saying investors are anxiously waiting for more concrete signs that a sweeping stimulus package could lead to improvement in economic fundamentals.

The benchmark Hang Seng Index, the majority of which comprises the shares of mainland companies, retreated as much as 4.6 percent before narrowing down to a 1.47 percent loss on Thursday, ending a six-day winning streak. Property developers listed in the city led the drop while a measure tracking the tech sector ended 3.46 percent lower.

Kenny Wen, head of investment strategy at KGI Asia, saw it as a "healthy correction" for Hong Kong stocks as they had been extremely overbought in the past few days. The benchmark's relative strength index had risen to 95 — its highest level since 1970. Traders typically interpret a reading surpassing 70 as an indication of prices gone too far.

However, as the HSI only dropped by around 300 points on Thursday, it reflects that "the sentiment is still quite good and investors are willing to buy on dips", Wen added.

The Hong Kong market remained the standout performer over the past week, recording a rebound of over 20 percent. Elsewhere, the S&P 500 was almost unchanged over the same period, while Japan's Nikkei 225 Index rose 1.6 percent.

Hong Kong-based stock commentator Conita Hung Lai-ping said that it was reasonable to see investors profit-taking following such a trading frenzy, considering the years the Hong Kong market has been underweight.

The recent inflow of money has been largely driven by China's broader-than-expected stimulus package revealed last week. It includes a reduction in the reserve requirement ratio and existing mortgage rates as well as 800 billion yuan (\$114.9 billion) of liquidity

support tailored to the equity market. Four first-tier cities also eased curbs on purchasing property.

The market cool-off came as the Chinese mainland closed its markets during the National Day holiday period from Oct 1 to 7, which experts said could translate into an absence in southbound money via a cross-border trading mechanism that allows Chinese mainland investors to trade Hong Kong-listed shares.

On equity outlooks, Hung said that there is plenty of money on the sideline closely watching two factors — whether the stimulus package results in a recovery in economic fundamentals and whether there are more measures in the offing if the stimulus works.

The National Day holiday will be an ideal indicator. "If the data coming out from the Golden Week turns out positive — say if there's increased spending or real estate transactions — then it could have a further boosting effect on investment sentiment and stock performance in both mainland and Hong Kong markets," she said.

In a sign of spending growth, the Chinese mainland is expecting 1.94 billion cross-regional trips to be made during the holiday, said Li Yang, vice-minister for transport. That means an average of 277 million daily trips, an uptick of 0.7 percent from 2023 and almost 20 percent higher than in 2019.

Strong headwinds remain nevertheless as Charu Chanana, head of foreign exchange strategy at Saxo Markets, raised questions about the sustainability of the stimulus package and difficulties in resolving the Chinese mainland's structural issues of debt, deflation and demographics.

"But the direction of travel is encouraging, and this can help to repair some of the confidence levels in the economy and policymakers," Chanana said.

What is still needed is the execution of the announced measures, coordination from other policies particularly on the fiscal side, and more follow-up measures to continue the momentum, she added.

Miao filial affection



Married women of the Miao ethnic group bear gifts as they return home to their parents in Rongshui Miao autonomous county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Thursday. It is a tradition in Miao culture that married women return to their family home with gifts during major festivals such as the National Day and Spring Festival. LAN KUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

German physicist in Macao receives nation's top award for expatriates

By STEPHY ZHANG in Hong Kong
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Erwin Neher, a German biophysicist from the Macau University of Science and Technology, has become the first expatriate scientist based in either the Hong Kong or Macao special administrative regions to receive the nation's top friendship award.



Erwin Neher

Neher, who was jointly awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine in 1991, was among 100 foreigners who were conferred with the 2024 Chinese Government Friendship Award at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on Monday.

Established in the 1950s, the award is China's top honor to commend foreign experts for their remarkable contributions to the nation's development.

State Councilor Shen Yiqin presented the awards to the honorees at Monday's ceremony.

Shen said that the Chinese people will always remember foreign experts' outstanding contributions to the nation's modernization drive, and pledged that the Chinese government will continue to provide a broader stage for foreign experts living and working in China.

"Receiving the Chinese Government Friendship Award, indeed, a

great and unexpected honor," Neher said in a written reply to China Daily.

The scientist said that beyond personal recognition, witnessing the applications of his discoveries bearing fruit in China was particularly gratifying.

Neher said he anticipates significant progress in the development of new drugs and therapies in collaboration with his Chinese colleagues.

MUST President Joseph Lee Hun-wei extended his warmest congratulations to Neher and his team. He commended the physicist's invaluable contributions to the university and to Macao, saying that the award is a well-deserved recognition of his work.

Lee praised Neher as a "role model" whose guidance has been instrumental in advancing research at MUST, believing that Neher will continue serving as a bridge to strengthen exchanges between China and Germany.

MUST will continue to collaborate with the Macao government and society to attract exceptional overseas talents to take part in propelling innovation and technology development in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Lee added.

A pioneer in biomedicine, Neher shared the 1991 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine with German cell physiologist Bert Sakmann for their discoveries of the functions of

single ion channels in cells. Their research has helped elaborate on the causes of heart diseases, diabetes and epilepsy, and has had a revolutionary impact on neuroscience and cell biology.

Neher joined MUST in 2016, when the university appointed him to lead a biophysics laboratory named in his honor.

The laboratory integrates ion channel research with medical research to advance the industrialization and application of traditional Chinese medicine.

Under Neher's leadership, the laboratory has achieved several research breakthroughs and acquired patents in China and Australia. The lab's research has also led to the development of a product designed to enhance antibodies for lung cancer.

The laboratory has organized several international conferences and academic lectures, and two professors from Neher's team have been recognized as top scientists in global rankings.

Neher has also led his team to engage in science education in Macao, including visiting local schools to ignite students' interest in scientific fields, and he has established in-depth collaborations with research institutions across the Greater Bay Area on high-precision physiological research methods, disease mechanism research and drug development.

Crackdown launched on illegal online news services

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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China's top cyberspace watchdog on Thursday announced a three-month campaign to crack down on illegal online news services, including those that actively spread disinformation.

According to a release on the official website of the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, the campaign aims to further regulate internet news service activities, enhance the influence of "mainstream news and public opinion", and create a "clean cyberspace".

The campaign will target a number of issues such as the fabrication and dissemination of false and misleading news, and the use of exaggerated headlines that are seriously inconsistent with the content.

Malicious alteration, distortion and forgery of news aimed at intentionally misleading the public will also be targeted.

A particular focus of the campaign will be on the practice of news content creators and media outlets that use the threat of publishing fake news as a form of blackmail for financial gain.

According to the release, the impersonation of news websites, newspapers, radio and television stations to illegally register accounts, set up websites and publish information will also be cracked down upon.

The release said the campaign will make sure that those posting news content online have the necessary licenses for internet news collection and publication services.

It added that the forgery, sale, leasing, lending, or transfer of internet news service licenses will also be investigated.

Departments of cyberspace affairs at various levels should guide website platforms to establish dedicated "news accounts" and require the verification of licenses or qualifications as a prerequisite for setting up such accounts, the release added.

All online channels providing internet news services to the public, including website platforms, social media, applications and livestreams, should prominently display the entity's name and license number in approved channels, according to the release.

For websites and content platforms, they will be required to optimize their algorithm models and information recommendation mechanisms, with a priority given to high-quality news information published by "news accounts".

The campaign will expand channels for complaints and reports, actively handle and verify clues related to illegal activities, and publicly expose typical cases, the release said.

Hook, line and sinker



Competitive fishing enthusiasts from across the globe try to snag the winning catch at a competition in Suqian, Jiangsu province, on Wednesday. The fishing pond, located near the Hongze Lake, was ecologically restored in 2016 in order to attract tourism to the area and improve the livelihoods of the locals. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Recovery: Major cities lift restrictions to attract homebuyers

From page 1

The same day, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen all made significant policy changes. Shanghai streamlined its purchase restrictions, notably reducing the threshold and initial payment costs. Among first-tier cities, Guangzhou was the first to completely remove home purchase restrictions. Shenzhen also lifted such restrictions in several areas.

On Monday, Beijing also announced measures such as further reducing interest rates on existing housing loans and lowering the minimum down payment for personal housing loans.

“China's real estate market is anticipated to witness a wave of transactions in the fourth quarter.”

Yan Yuejin, vice-president of the Shanghai E-House China Real Estate Research Institute

Yan Yuejin, vice-president of the Shanghai-based E-House China R&D Institute, said the new policies in the four major cities, in

conjunction with financial policies from the People's Bank of China, are timely, precise and comprehensive, playing a positive role in stabilizing the real estate market.

"All of the four first-tier cities have modified their purchase restrictions in response to new market demands, continuously optimizing relevant policies to better support the release of reasonable housing consumption demands. Other cities nationwide are expected to follow suit, indicating a period of comprehensive policy relaxation," Yan said.

"China's real estate market is anticipated to witness a wave of transactions in the fourth quarter,

potentially seeing a favorable trend of both increased sales volume and prices."

Charlie Zheng, chief economist at Samoyed Cloud Technology Group Holdings, took a more cautious stance. He said that while the property market had previously experienced an overall decline in sales, the introduction of positive policies could halt this trend in cities particularly with strong demand and population inflows. However, a combined effort of existing policies and potentially further increased loan support from the central bank could be necessary for a nationwide rebound in the realty market in the future.

Manufacturing: 'Working together' seen as key to unlock potential

From page 1

"What is to the benefit of all is that China will further deepen market-oriented reforms, expand high-standard opening-up, improve the legal system, and enhance the institutional framework for fair competition, green development and the advancement of clean energy domestically."

Zhang added that if there were no negative spillovers of geopolitical tensions and protectionism, the supply and demand of new energy

vehicles, photovoltaics and lithium batteries — areas in which the US unfairly accuses China of overcapacity — would achieve a dynamic balance at the global level.

Recalling that the US and China have both benefited tremendously from more bilateral trade, Neil Bush, chairman of the George H.W. Bush Foundation for US-China Relations, said while addressing a recent event that countries that rely solely on local manufacturing face significant challenges.

"Manufacturing is no longer con-

finned to national borders. Countries that embrace innovation while working together can unlock new potential and drive economic growth by sharing research and best practices in technical advancements," he said.

As Chinese companies continue to weave themselves into the fabric of global industrial and supply chains, Wang Yang, president of SinoEV (Hefei) Powertrain Technologies, a developer of electric vehicle power systems, said it is challenging for some countries to be independ-

ent of China's new energy industry supply chain in the short term.

"Developing a robust supply chain requires a long time and certain favorable conditions, such as comprehensive policy and a large market scale," Wang said.

"China's new energy industry supply chain is competitive on the global stage, thanks to its complete industry chain covering research and development, engineering design, manufacturing management and final assembly integration. It will bring benefits to

companies around the world."

According to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, China is the only country in the world that has all industrial categories listed in the United Nations Industrial Classification, covering almost all traditional and emerging manufacturing sectors.

Zeng Yuqun, founder of Contemporary Amperex Technology Co Ltd, a leading EV battery maker, said that countries can actually benefit from the new energy sector by sharing the industry chain.

"CATL has already taken some measures to diversify its overseas market and is willing to share its technology with the world," he added.

Citing challenges faced by the global industrial and supply chains, Xue Lan, dean of Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University, said China will not isolate itself, but rather integrate more actively into the global innovation system to avoid severe disruptions in the global industrial chain.

"With its position in the global industrial chain key to the world, China must continue to innovate and open up to reinforce this position," Xue said.

COVER



From left: A tourist takes photos of a stone layout of a "television set" featured in the hit series *To the Wonder* in Altay, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in August. LIU XIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE Uyinga prepares to make a short video in Xi Ujimchin Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, last month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Uyinga films camels and horses at a grassland park in Xi Ujimchin Banner. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Vlog: Sharing spurs pride in ethnic cultures

From page 1

Uyinga said she hopes the videos she has posted on social media can help more people gain insights into the life of herdsmen and bring members of different ethnic groups closer. She's also glad to see that more young women from the Inner Mongolia, Xizang and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous regions have started to share their stories about the beautiful pastures on social media. Their simple but colorful lifestyles have become increasingly popular in recent years with many people yearning to escape the grind of life in the country's major cities, she said.

Home on the range

In 1995, Uyinga left her home on the grassland to study at the Inner Mongolia University of Finance and Economics in the regional capital, Hohhot. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in land resource management, she immediately decided to return home as she believed the vast grassland has more opportunities to offer than big cities.

"I was born on the grassland, and I have a free spirit. And the infrastructure such as roads and telecommunication on the grassland has been significantly improved, so it can be just as convenient to start businesses at my home," Uyinga said.

Following the recommendation of a career adviser on e-commerce, she started to post videos about the life of herdsmen on social media in January 2018.

"There wasn't any influencer posting about the life of herdsmen in Inner Mongolia back then. And my first goal was to clear up people's misunderstandings about herdsmen," she said.

Like many people from the region, Uyinga is often asked if locals ride horses to school and work.

"Many people aren't familiar with life and culture on the grassland. In fact, the herdsmen's life on the grassland has also been improved and modernized. At the same time, we have kept our traditions alive," she said.

Besides enjoying the stunning sunrises and sunsets in the short videos posted by Uyinga, people are particularly interested in how her family prepares traditional Mongo-



A pair of tourists ride horses in a mountainside grassland in Habahe county, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in August. AMAN / XINHUA

lian food, such as dairy products, milk tea and boiled meat.

One of Uyinga's videos that went viral features her family storing meat for a harsh winter ahead. It has received more than 9 million views on social media platforms.

"I've never imagined people can be so interested in our normal routines. It has made me more determined to promote our rich culture and heritage," Uyinga said.

She now has more than 1.18 million followers on the short video platform Douyin, but she said she doesn't like to be called an influencer. "I am simply a recorder of the grassland and the lifestyle of the herdsmen," she said.

Nomadic lifestyle

Many people heard about Xi Ujimchin Banner for the first time because of Uyinga's videos. And many of her followers have come to visit the banner, which is famous for breeding white horses.

"A longtime follower of mine from Guangzhou city (Guangdong province) said everything seemed so familiar when she arrived in the

People's positive comments have made me more determined to make more videos and introduce my home via social media, which has made Zari no longer remote."

Tashi Chodron, herder in Zari township, Xizang autonomous region

banner because she has seen it all before in my videos," Uyinga said, adding her videos have boosted understanding among people from different places and ethnic groups.

In the future, she plans to include more content about the cultural heritage of the Mongolian ethnic group in her videos as well as local people's stories, she said.

Unlike Uyinga who has already mastered making and posting short videos, Gausar Kinnes from the Kazak ethnic group is a novice when it comes to using social media platforms to let more people know about the lifestyle of Kazak herdsmen in Xinjiang.

Earlier this year, the popular TV



Kazak herders move between the winter pastures, spring-autumn pastures and summer pastures throughout the year, she said.

Gausar said she decided to leave the city and return to the grassland because she wanted to be with her family.

"Also, I want people to know that we have still kept our nomadic life by sharing our life on social media," she said.

Besides sharing how her family grazes sheep and cattle as well as the tough trips moving livestock to different pastures, in her videos she also teaches people how to make traditional Kazak food and drink, such as milk tea. What's more, she also often teaches people how to speak basic Kazak phrases.

"Many people comment that they envy that we can live in such beautiful places. In fact, as herdsmen, we have a lot of work to do and go through many hardships. There is no easy life," Gausar said.

Rustling up views

Tashi Chodron from Zari township in Xizang's Lhunze county quit

her job in Lhokha city and returned to her home at the southern end of the Himalayas in 2023.

The 26-year-old said she saw the opportunities to develop tourism in Zari when more tourists started visiting the township after road conditions were significantly improved. Zari is perched on a high plateau and offers unique natural scenery.

"Many people in Zari have opened homestays and received more income, so I believe I can also start my own business," said Tashi Chodron, who is from the Tibetan ethnic group.

Her family owns a pasture and a hut that they stay in when grazing yaks near the Coga Lake with the backdrop of the glaciers, waterfalls and forests. Tashi Chodron said she is very familiar with the way to the lake, which has become a popular destination among hikers.

In August 2023, a social media influencer came to Zari and she served as his guide. Inspired by the influencer, on Oct 16 last year she started to regularly post videos on Douyin about her daily life on the pasture.

A video she posted in July featuring the scenery of the Coga Lake and the family pasture received a multitude of comments on the "stunning" views, which also said they were looking forward to seeing more videos about Zari.

"People's positive comments have made me more determined to make more videos and introduce my home via social media, which has made Zari no longer remote," she said. "Making videos while hiking to the Coga Lake is so much more difficult than grazing livestock."

Besides natural scenery, Tashi Chodron has also been posting videos on how local people celebrate different festivals and introducing different aspects of Tibetan culture. "I am still new when it comes to becoming an influencer, but I want to try my best to let more people learn more about Zari and our life," she said.

Tashi Chodron is currently building an eight-room homestay in the township to meet the increasing demand for accommodation from visitors.

"I hope my career can take off both online and offline thanks to the development in border areas of Xizang," she said.

Hit TV show sees droves of tourists flocking to prefecture

By ZHAO YIMENG in Altay, Xinjiang
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The popularity of the television series *To the Wonder*, which is set in Altay prefecture in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, has generated great interest in the area and made it a sought-after travel destination.

Since the show premiered in May, picturesque Habahe county has seen a surge in visitors eager to explore the stunning alpine meadows and landscapes featured in the series. In late August, tourists flocked to the area, swarming a reproduction of the show's iconic grocery store where some of the protagonists made a living.

The local culture and tourism bureau has accurately recreated the store with vintage beds, faded wall art, and cabinets with peeling paint. A nearby tree with hanging horse skulls echoes a touching plotline of the show.

Coffee truck operator Li Shiqi and his wife drove to the scenic spot from Southwest China's Yunnan province in mid-May when the TV series had just debuted.



From left: A band of the Tuva people plays traditional music for tourists in Kanas, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in August. Tourists visit an iconic willow tree featured in the hit TV series *To the Wonder* in Altay, Xinjiang, in August. PHOTOS BY LIU XIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

"As we had just arrived, the scene (from the show) hadn't been set up and few visitors came. Starting from May 20, more and more fans visited because of the drama," Li said, adding that they were also attracted to the spot by the TV program.

Li set up his business at the scenic spot, and at peak times sold 60 to 70

cups of coffee a day, with the nearby parking lot struggling to accommodate the influx of tourists.

Despite the increasing number of visitors to the prefecture, the profits from the coffee truck were not as good as they had been in Yunnan, as "people here prefer salty milk tea," Li said.



However, the couple plans to stay in Altay through the autumn to enjoy the seasonal views.

Sun Lin, who drove from East China's Zhejiang province to Altay in late August, said she couldn't wait to visit the prefecture after watching the show.

"Seeing the grocery store in per-

son has brought the show to life. The set design is so thoughtful," she said.

The number of daily tourists has soared, with an average of over 1,000 visitors on weekdays, and more than 3,000 on weekends or holidays, according to Su Quixia, deputy manager of a local tourism development corporation.

Travel agencies have capitalized on the show's popularity by offering themed tours, including day trips to pastures and two-day excursions to Kanas scenic area.

The tourism season in Altay has arrived two months earlier than usual this year thanks to the TV series, according to local authorities.

As of September, Habahe county has welcomed approximately 3.27 million tourists this year, a 69.5 percent year-on-year increase, and generated tourism revenue of 2.1 billion yuan (\$300 million), a rise of 57.9 percent, it said.

Delida Nabi, director of the bureau of culture, sports, radio, television and tourism in Altay prefecture, said last year the prefecture hosted 31.5 million tourists, a year-on-year increase of 74.8 percent. Revenue generated by tourism hit 27.5 billion yuan, marking an 80.7 percent rise.

"We will accelerate the development of a new model that integrates tourism with other industries to foster new growth momentum and advantages for high-quality development," she said.

WORLD

Israel strikes Beirut heart as attacks widen

Bombing intensifies as escalation fuels concern of deeper turmoil in Middle East

BEIRUT/JERUSALEM — Israel launched an airstrike in central Beirut early on Thursday, killing nine people, after its forces suffered their deadliest day on the Lebanese front in a year of clashes with Hezbollah, as the latest escalation fanned concern of a wider conflict in the Middle East.

Israel said it had conducted a precise airstrike on the Lebanese capital. Reuters witnesses reported hearing a massive blast, and a security source said it targeted a building in the district of Bachoura near parliament, the closest an Israeli strike has come to the central downtown district of Beirut.

Nine people were killed in the airstrike, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry on Thursday. "Another sleepless night in Beirut. Counting the blasts shaking the city. No warning sirens. Not knowing what's next. Only that uncertainty lies ahead. Anxiety and fear are omnipresent," UN special coordinator for Lebanon, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, said on X on Thursday.

Three missiles also hit the southern suburb of Dahiyeh, where Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was

killed last week, and loud blasts were heard, Lebanese officials said. In the past 24 hours, the death toll from Israeli airstrikes in different areas of Lebanon reached 46 while injuries stood at 85, the Lebanese Health Ministry reported.

The elimination of Nasrallah dealt a major blow to the movement. Hezbollah and Iran's other regional allies, Yemen's Houthis and armed groups in Iraq, have launched attacks in the region in support of Hamas' fight against Israel in Gaza.

The Houthis, who have been carrying out attacks in shipping lanes in and around the Red Sea that have disrupted international trade, said on Thursday they attacked Israel's commercial capital Tel Aviv with drones.

In a statement on Thursday, the Israeli military said that it killed a senior Hamas leader in an airstrike in the Gaza Strip around three months ago. It said that a strike on an underground compound in northern Gaza killed Rawhi Mushstaha and two other Hamas commanders.

The Israel Defense Forces, or IDF, urged residents of Lebanese villa-



A man stares at a building still smoldering after it was leveled in an overnight Israeli airstrike that targeted the neighborhood of Moawwad in Beirut on Thursday. AFP

ges who have evacuated their homes not to return until further notice. "IDF raids are continuing," spokesman Avichay Adraee said on X on Thursday.

A day after Iran fired more than 180 missiles into Israel, Israel said on Wednesday eight soldiers were killed in ground combat in south Lebanon as its forces thrust into its northern neighbor.

Iran said on Wednesday its missile volley, its biggest ever assault on Israel, was over, barring further provocation, but Israel and the United States promised to hit back hard.

However, US President Joe Biden said he would not support any Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear sites in response to its ballistic missile attack and urged Israel to act "proportionally" against its regional archfoe.

Amid fears of a wider conflict, Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, on Wednesday called on the UN Security Council to take urgent actions to de-escalate the Lebanese-Israeli situation.

Plea for peace

"The Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security," Fu said.

Warning that the current situation is "hanging by a thread", he said any passive procrastination would be irresponsible, and any rhetoric of condoning further military adventurism would send a wrong message and could cause serious consequences.

The ongoing fighting in Lebanon

is causing another humanitarian disaster, as the total number of displaced persons in Lebanon due to Israeli airstrikes has risen to nearly 1.2 million.

According to a report released on Wednesday by the Disaster Risk Management Unit at the Lebanese Council of Ministers, most displaced individuals have relocated to their homes in other areas, stayed with family, rented accommodations, or found shelter in public or private spaces, while thousands of others traveled by air or crossed into Syria.

From Sept 23 to 29, the crossing of 234,023 Syrians and 76,269 Lebanese citizens into Syrian territory was recorded, it added.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Greetings pour in on PRC's 75th anniversary

Leaders of European countries have sent messages or letters of congratulations to Chinese President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that China has set an example for and injected impetus into global development, and the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, the Belt and Road Initiative, while the three global initiatives put forward by Xi will promote the building of a more just, equitable and progressive world.

He said that Serbia is willing to work with China to jointly build a Serbia-China community with a shared future in the new era.

Hungarian President Tamas Sulyok said that China has become an important force on the international stage, and that Hungary is willing to continue to be China's partner, deepen cooperation in various fields and achieve common development goals.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that China actively responds to global challenges, including climate change, adding that it is more important than ever to carry out close and practical bilateral cooperation. He believes that Germany-China relations will continue to consolidate and deepen.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella said that as two ancient civilizations with thousands of years of history, Italy and China can contribute profound strategic wisdom for easing tensions and overcoming conflicts in the international community, adding that Italy is willing to further deepen practical cooperation with China and promote the development of bilateral relations.

President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd said that the Switzerland-China innovative strategic partnership is deep and stable, and that she firmly believes that the two sides can continue to deepen cooperation at the bilateral and multilateral levels in the future.

XINHUA

French PM vows to tax rich in first policy speech

By MOHAMMAD ARIF ULLAH in Paris
For China Daily

France's new Prime Minister Michel Barnier outlined his agenda on Tuesday in a major speech to lawmakers. His key proposals included taxing the wealthy, increasing the minimum wage and tightening immigration policies.

Barnier highlighted the importance of reducing France's budget deficit, which he aims to lower to 5 percent of GDP by 2025, with a target of reaching 3 percent by 2029, two years later than previously planned.

"The sword of Damocles hanging over us is our colossal financial debt," Barnier said in his speech, warning that France's growing deficit was weakening its position within Europe.

Barnier faces the challenge of leading a government without a parliamentary majority, requiring him to manage tensions within his coalition while trying to set a clear path forward for France.

"When you deliver a general policy speech, the main aim is to inform public opinion and outline the government's direction," said Roman Abreu, a communications expert, during an interview on the French public television channel LCP on Tuesday.

In his speech, Barnier emphasized the need for stricter immigration policies, expressing concern that France was no longer meeting its "integration objectives" due to a lack of control over migration.

He vowed to take a "ruthless" approach to tackling human trafficking, particularly in cases where traffickers facilitate illegal crossings over the English Chan-

nel and the Mediterranean Sea.

One of the central points of Barnier's policy agenda was an early increase in France's minimum wage. He confirmed that the SMIC, France's national minimum wage, would rise by 2 percent on Nov 1, two months earlier than expected.

On Thursday, Budget Minister Laurent Saint-Martin announced on France 2 TV that the government's request for an "exceptional" contribution from the "wealthiest" French citizens in the 2025 draft budget would impact only "0.3 percent" of households.

Economic reforms

"Michel Barnier comes across as very conservative, mentioning fiscal justice only two or three times. If he truly increases taxes on big corporations, I would applaud with both hands," explained economist Julia Cage on *This Evening* on France TV on Wednesday.

In terms of environmental action, Barnier highlighted a recent reduction in France's greenhouse gas emissions as evidence that progress could be made. He outlined a commitment to expanding the country's use of nuclear energy, with plans to develop new nuclear reactors.

Addressing the contentious issue of pension reform, Barnier offered to reopen discussions with trade unions.

"What's unfair is the lack of distinction between pensioners. We're hitting a pensioner with a small pension the same way as a wealthier one," said Cyril Chabanier, president of the CFTC union, on RMC Radio.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



Agonizing loss

A relative weeps in front of the portrait and coffin of a victim of a school bus fire at Wat Khao Phraya Sangkharam School in Bangkok on Thursday. Grieving families wept as they offered prayers for 23 children and their teachers killed in a school bus fire.

CHANKARN LAOSARAKHAM / AFP

US ports strike suspended until January

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

Dockworkers at US East Coast and Gulf Coast ports agreed on Thursday to suspend their strike for 90 days, averting a potential economic disaster a month before the presidential election.

The International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) — the union representing 45,000 striking US dockworkers at the ports — reached a tentative deal to suspend the strike until Jan 15 to provide time to negotiate a new contract, the ILA said on its website.

The deal will allow the union and the US Maritime Alliance, which represents the shippers and ports, more time to negotiate a new six-year contract.

The tentative agreement is for a wage increase of around 62 percent, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The ILA said in a brief statement

on its website that it will "return to the bargaining table to negotiate all other outstanding issues. Effective immediately, all current job actions will cease and all work covered by the Master Contract will resume."

For the highest-paid longshoremen, a 62 percent increase would raise hourly pay to just over \$63 from the current \$39 per hour, The New York Times reported. The \$63 hourly wage would put the pay of East Coast and Gulf Coast dockworkers slightly above their fellow longshoremen on the West Coast, who belong to a different union, the Times reported.

The union also has been demanding a ban on automation at the ports, which it sees as a threat to jobs. Both sides also have been divided on the issues of pension contributions and the distribution of royalties paid on containers that are moved by workers.

"With the grace of God and the goodwill of neighbors, it's going to hold," President Joe Biden said

Thursday of the tentative deal, adding that it "represents critical progress towards a strong contract."

The strike had fueled some pandemic-era-style panic-buying this week, even of items that don't arrive at the maritime terminals.

Among those goods was the household essential toilet paper, which there also was a run on in 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The US Department of Commerce said in a statement to CNBC on Thursday that the "work stoppage at East Coast and Gulf Coast ports will not have a meaningful impact on toilet paper supplies. Nearly 90 percent of toilet paper used in the United States is domestically produced, with the majority of imported supplies coming from Canada and Mexico over road or rail."

And while massive amounts of consumer products shipped to the US come from China — with decorations for the upcoming holidays a prime

example — most of those goods arrive at West Coast ports, in California cities such as Los Angeles and Long Beach, and Seattle and Tacoma in Washington.

Toy makers Mattel and Hasbro get most of their supplies from China via the West Coast ports, said Linda Bolton Weiser of D.A. Davidson.

At least 45 container vessels were unable to unload by Wednesday, up from three before the strike began, according to Everstream Analytics.

The strike had been the largest in the US since 1977 and had blocked unloading of container ships from Maine to Texas, threatening shortages of everything from bananas to auto parts.

"I'm definitely relieved," Daniel J. Barabino, chief operating officer at Top Banana, a fruit distributor at the Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx, New York, told the Times.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Storm leaves residents without water supplies

Tens of thousands of North Carolina residents remained without running water on Wednesday, six days after Hurricane Helene slammed into Florida and carved a destructive path through much of the US Southeast, killing more than 180 people. The storm inundated the western part of the state with catastrophic flooding, damaging water plants and cutting off power. One-fifth of the 1 million residents in the western half of North Carolina either had no water at all or low system pressure on Wednesday.

EUROPE

Starmer visits Brussels for UK-EU ties reset

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he would work in good faith toward resetting relations with Brussels after talks with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in which they agreed to work at pace to deepen cooperation. Starmer has said his government will not seek wholesale renegotiation of the Brexit deal that took Britain out of the European Union in 2020. But he is looking to tweak the relationship in a range of areas.

NIGERIA

60 passengers dead as boat capsizes

At least 60 people were killed after a boat carrying mostly women and children returning from a religious festival in Nigeria's northern Niger state capsized, a local official said late on Wednesday. About 160 people have been rescued after the wooden boat ferrying nearly 300 passengers sank on Tuesday night on the River Niger, said Jibril Abdullahi Muregi, chairman of the Mokwa local government area.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

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PEOPLE



SKETCH BY LIANG LUWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

TRAVELS WITHOUT INTERNET

It may sound hard to believe in this digital age but Yang Hao, a 32-year-old doctoral student studying in the United Kingdom, embarked on a solo trip the old-fashioned way last year, using a printed map, paying for everything using cash or a bank card, reading train timetables, and talking to strangers.

Over the course of 134 days, he visited 68 counties and cities in 24 provinces and regions across China, read 40 books, documented his experiences, and used two cameras to record what he saw.

"I realized that those 134 days were the most fulfilling, focused and productive period of my life. It was an experience of absolute concentration," says Yang, who was born in Taiyuan in Shanxi province.

Since his story was posted online, it has gone viral, triggering widespread discussion and reflection on the modern dependence on technology. One netizen from Hubei province named Yangbu'er, commented that "while technology makes the world smaller, and we seem to have more resources to hand, we also lose some things". Another from Fujian province, who goes by the online name of Silence, wrote that not having a phone equates to anxiety in modern society, because phones combine many functions in one; navigation aids, digital wallets, and social connectivity.

Ironically, even as it poses questions about how technology is woven into daily life, the internet has provided a medium for making Yang's trip known to more people.

Although he foresaw that it would trigger some discussion, the public attention his journey has drawn has exceeded his imagination.

He says that he has gained a great deal from his "experiment". Now, he keeps a degree of distance from the internet, and does not have Wi-Fi connected to his phone, or installed at home, and also limits his phone usage to 90 minutes per day. He tries to finish all his work at his art studio in the UK, which has internet access.

Yang's life was quite different before. His journey was inspired by a screen time notification from his iPhone informing him that he was posing difficulties. At a post office in Wuhan, Yang discovered they only

Started, he asked himself whether this kind of dependency was really what he wanted. The idea of leaving his phone and computer at home to face the uncertainties of a digital-free life and interact face-to-face began to fascinate him.

Bumps in the road

Pursuing a doctorate in contemporary arts at Lancaster University at the time, Yang put his academic work on hold, made preparations, and persuaded his parents that he wasn't placing himself in any danger.

Last Nov 27, he set off from Taiyuan with a 40-liter backpack, which contained clothing, two cameras, maps, his identification card, bank cards, cash, two writing brushes, a bottle of calligraphy ink, a pen, a notebook, and three books.

Standing at the Taiyuan Railway Station as his parents saw him off, he randomly chose to board a train to Linfen in Shanxi, paying for the ticket with cash.

"It was the first time in my life that both my parents saw me off together. They felt more distant from me without the internet," Yang says, adding that his parents were likely to worry more about him as they couldn't contact him by phone.

Arriving at Linfen that night, he encountered the first challenge, as without a phone, he couldn't book a hotel online. Although he showed his ID card and offered to pay cash at the hotel reception, it seemed that without a phone, he could not reserve a room. One of the receptionists recommended another hotel, and as Yang didn't have a navigation app, he drew a map for him in his notebook.

During the trip, Yang experienced lots of situations like this. At the entrance to the Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan, he wasn't allowed in because the museum required reservation in advance and he couldn't reserve a ticket online. He was finally able to get in with the help of an elderly man who had a fast pass for seniors, and was able to take a person in as a guest.

Writing letters was his only way of keeping in touch with family and friends. However, sending them posed difficulties. At a post office in Wuhan, Yang discovered they only

Leaving his smartphone and computer at home, doctoral student rediscovers the pleasures and pitfalls of navigating life offline, report **Wang Qian** and **Zhu Xingxin** in Taiyuan.



Yang Hao takes a taxi in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, during his 134-day journey across the country without a phone.



At a hotel in Nanjing, Yang checks a map to plan his journey. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

sold commemorative stamp sets, while in other places, they didn't sell envelopes. At a post office in Hotan in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, Yang was the first person to send a registered letter, and the staff members were not certain how it was done.

Along the way, people wondered why he didn't want to use a phone. Some thought he wanted to escape a bad relationship, some took him

for a sociologist or a reporter observing life, while some speculated that the trip was just a gimmick to attract attention.

Be more present

Yang was surprised by the many rewards of leaving his phone and computer behind. With no access to travel bloggers, books and museums became his guide.

In Hunan province, a book by

Shen Congwen (1902-88) served as his guide. Following *Xiangxi Sanji* (Random Notes on a Trip to the Western Hunan Area), Yang tried to retrace Shen's trip by boat along the Yuanjiang River about 90 years ago.

But upon reaching Changde, the starting point of the book, Yang found that the passenger boats he'd read about were gone, as dams and reservoirs had been built along the river, so he took buses to the places Shen mentioned, instead.

Besides the changes to the landscape, the names of many places in the book had changed, which made Yang's visit full of surprises. One local taxi driver in his 40s was confused by the names of the places in the book, and told Yang that he knew every corner of the city, but had no idea where these places were.

In Gansu province, Yang began buying books about archaeology in the Xiyu, or Western Regions, a Chinese term used to describe today's Xinjiang and Central Asia in the past. French Sinologist Paul Pelliot (1878-1945) and Russian explorer Nikolay Przhevsky (1839-88) were among the Western researchers, geographers and archaeologists that visited the region.

Following in their footsteps, Yang visited heritage sites in the Taklimakan Desert in southern Xinjiang. In the years between 1906 and 1913, German archaeologist Albert von Le Coq (1860-1930) visited today's Kizil Cave-Temple Complex and looted several caves. Yang discovered empty caves with photos of the murals that had been removed pasted onto boards. Some of the fragments are now at the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin and Yang says that he regretted their loss.

He also rediscovered the nostalgia of writing letters, and the pleasure of calligraphy, which he had studied at school as a child.

Yang wrote his first letter to his parents on the third day. Holding the brush, he struggled to find the right words to start.

"Through the traditional way of writing letters to convey my feelings and longing for my family, the distance and the waiting helped me reflect on my relationship with the world," Yang says.

He mailed 40 letters during his trip, and received five replies, which have become treasured memories.

Back to usual

Yang returned to Taiyuan on April 9. His mother welcomed him with a bowl of noodles in accordance with the Chinese saying "Dumplings for departure, and noodles for return". With the noodles warming his belly, Yang felt that his journey had come to an end.

When he first saw his phone and computer, which had been lying unused for more than four months, he didn't want to turn them on, because he had become used to a quiet, peaceful life without the internet.

A week later, he relented, knowing that it is difficult to live completely cut off.

Setting aside a day to deal with all the messages he expected to find on his phone, Yang switched it on and waited for an hour but not a single message appeared, not from WeChat, social media platform Sina Weibo, or even from Alipay. When he'd left the internet behind, the online world seemed to have abandoned him, too.

Later, he found out that in China, if a recipient doesn't open a message within 72 hours, it is gone forever.

"The messages that I would never see left me with the somewhat regretful feeling that I had missed something. But upon further reflection, there was nothing to miss," Yang says.

His old life soon returned. During a recent 90-minute trip from Nanjing to Shanghai by high-speed train, he spent most of the time choosing a hotel on his phone, comparing prices on different apps only to realize that his choice was no difference to the hotels he'd picked randomly during their loss.

A book, *No Mobile: A Happy Excursion Against the Digital Leviathan*, will be coming out next year and he is busy making a documentary about his journey.

"I hope to offer a different perspective on seeing the world, whether on screen or through my words," Yang says.

With the internet influencing every aspect of life, Yang seeks to use his experiment to prompt greater reflection on the eternal connectivity of the modern world.

Contact the writers at wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn

READ



Left: American missionary doctor Edward Lydston Bliss rides a mule on his way to see patients in Shaowu, Fujian province, in the 1890s. **Above:** Edward Bliss and his wife May Bortz in their advanced age. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Below: Foreign and Chinese families enjoy afternoon tea together in Shaowu. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Young Edward Bliss
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A missionary, a healer and a friend of China

A doctor from faraway Massachusetts is loved by people in Fujian even after more than a century

By ZHANG YUNBI
and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

American missionary doctor Edward Lydston Bliss landed in China in 1892, and spent the next 40 years in Shaowu, a remote mountainous area in Fujian province, treating the sick and helping build a hospital.

On June 28 last year, President Xi Jinping, in a congratulatory message to the "Bond with Kuliang: 2023 China-US People-to-People Friendship Forum", noted the fact that the last words of Bliss before death were "I love the Chinese".

One year later, on June 28, 2024, an exhibition dedicated to Bliss officially opened to the public in Shaowu.

Bliss's granddaughter Anne Bliss Mascolino was unable to attend the event due to personal reasons, but she thanked everyone for honoring her grandfather.

"What an honor! And so beautifully done!" she wrote in a message to another American guest who was present at the brand new exhibition hall.

Edward Bliss was born in Newburyport on the northern coast of Massachusetts in 1865. In the 1890s, the young Bliss earned his doctorate from Yale School of Medicine.

But instead of practicing medicine in the United States, he chose to travel to faraway China and serve the people as a doctor, because he believed that in the not too distant future, China will regain its rightful place on the global stage and spread its influence worldwide.

In the winter of 1892, Bliss sailed through the Pacific Ocean to reach Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province.

After a short rest, he traveled by ship up the Minjiang River in Fujian and arrived at Shaowu three weeks later in January 1893.

Bliss gave himself the Chinese name Fu Yihua — Fu means "happiness", and Yihua "be helpful to China".

He realized that learning the Chinese language was necessary to work in China, and hired a Chinese teacher as soon as he arrived in Shaowu. He learned not only standard Chinese but the Shaowu dialect as well.

Soon he was able to greet patients in broken Shaowu dialect and enquire about their ailment.

Back in the 1890s, people in the mountainous area of northern Fujian, in most regions of China for that matter, had little knowledge about Western medicine. To convince people that it is a modern form of medical treatment, Bliss had to patiently explain a lot of things to them. He had to use his special skills and persuasive power to convince the locals of the effectiveness of Western medicine, in order to save people's lives.

Two months after Bliss arrived in Shaowu, a woman fell seriously ill following a difficult labor. Bliss had to perform a surgery to save the woman's life. When he walked out of the house after packing up his medical instruments and medicines, he found some local people bowing to thank him.

A few days later, Bliss rode a mule up a mountain for several hours to help a pregnant woman with a difficult labor. The woman's father, an old man in his seventies, was deeply moved, and gifted a big fat duck to Bliss three weeks later.

"In the villages of Shaowu, it (the big fat duck) was a very valuable asset and a sincere present," said Cai Youqun, former deputy director of the Standing Committee of the Shaowu Municipal People's Congress and an expert in Shaowu's history.



Top: Members of a China-US exchange group visit an exhibition hall, dedicated to Edward Bliss, in Shaowu, Fujian province, on June 28. WANG XIAOYUN / FOR CHINA DAILY
Above: The former residence of Edward Bliss and May Bortz on the Shaowu No. 4 Middle School campus. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Dr Bliss was not just an expert in delivering babies. He had his own methodology in treating people suffering from diseases such as malaria," Cai told the Fujian Daily. In this way, he built his career and reputation, and convinced the local residents of the effectiveness of Western medicine.

As a result, many people from the neighboring counties and villages traveled on foot to Shaowu to avail of Bliss's services, with some coming from as far as Lichuan in the adjacent Jiangxi province after crossing several mountains on the way.

Preach and teach is the motto

Bliss's clinic received on average 70 patients a day, sometimes twice that number a day. Aside from treating malaria and rashes, he also performed cataract and dental surgeries.

In order to improve the conditions of the clinic, Bliss used his own earnings and collected funds to build the first Western medicine hospital in Shaowu in 1898. The hospital is now called the Shaowu General Hospital, the best hospital in the area.

Chen Zewen, deputy secretary of the hospital's Party committee, said "the history of

this hospital starts with Dr Bliss". Bliss had a profound impact on the development of medical care in Shaowu. He taught as many Chinese people as possible medical skills. He took on a group of students and taught them pharmacology and anatomy, in addition to training them in basic nursing.

Feng Yizhong, an 83-year-old Shaowu resident, said his grandfather, Feng Jinqi, had a painful ulcer on his ankle that had spread close to the bone after suffering an injury. The ulcer was fully cured thanks to Bliss's careful treatment. Since Feng Jinqi could not afford to pay for his treatment, he began working for Bliss as a gardener, while also doing some other chores.

Bliss observed Feng Jinqi closely, and was impressed by his intelligence, diligence and kindness. He took him in as an apprentice.

Feng Jinqi completed his studies and, with help from Bliss, built Shaowu's first Western medicine hospital, which was run by the local people, in 1924.

"My grandmother told me that Dr Bliss never forgot to comfort the patients he treated, telling them not to worry because everything would be alright," Feng Yizhong

said, adding that "Bliss even treated patients for free".

Pioneer of dairy farming

During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the infant mortality was high in Shaowu due mainly to malnutrition and unhygienic feeding habits. Bliss prescribed infants cow milk, but milk was not easily available in Shaowu.

So he began rearing cattle in 1913. The cattle barn, complete with the wooden structure, has been well maintained till now. "This is where Dr Bliss kept the cattle. The breeds were introduced from abroad," said Feng Yixin, another grandson of Bliss's apprentice Feng Jinqi.

Bliss hired a local man called Ao Xila to help him herd the cows. Ao Xila's son Ao Guohe, 84, who grew up drinking cow milk, said Bliss trusted his father and taught him how to take care of cattle and differentiate between breeds.

Narrating the story of Bliss and his father, Ao Guohe said that when a massive flood hit Shaowu one summer, sweeping away a large number of animals and people's belongings, his father jumped into the gushing stream of water to save about a dozen cows.

Later, with the joint efforts of Bliss and the local people, the dairy business gradually started making profits. By 1920, the number of local households with cows had increased from three to seven, with the number of cows increasing significantly.

"Because of the remarkable health-enhancing effects of milk, the dairy industry flourished in Shaowu," said Cai Youqun, the local history expert.

One of the toughest challenges in raising cows is the fight against rinderpest, and Bliss tried every possible means to prevent a rinderpest outbreak.

He traveled to big cities such as Shanghai and Nanjing, consulting with and seeking the advice of dairy farmers, veterinarians and professors on how to tackle rinderpest. He even used goat serum and rabbit serum to tackle rinderpest.

After a slew of experiments, he developed his own prescription for immunization against rinderpest.

"While reading about Shaowu, I came across many articles on him. His dedication, high ethical standards and outstanding medical techniques won him the

respect and trust of the people," Cai said. "The local people paid tributes and expressed their gratitude to Bliss. Even after growing old, they kept retelling Bliss's stories to their grandchildren," he said.

Strong bond with Kuliang

Kuliang, a summer retreat on the outskirts of Fuzhou, has been a popular tourist destination for both locals and foreigners for over a century.

The town, which turns emerald green in summer, had a special place in Bliss's life, even though he spent most of his time in Shaowu, because it is in Kuliang that he met the love of his life and spent some wonderful time with his family.

In the summer of 1901, while on a vacation in Kuliang, Bliss met a young American woman. Her name was May Bortz.

To win May's heart, Bliss persuaded his close associates to fund the construction of a tennis court in Kuliang. Then he invited May to play tennis with him. Perhaps their love blossomed on the tennis court, and became one of the most romantic tales of Kuliang.

The two got married on Sept 22, 1902, following which May accompanied Bliss to Shaowu, where she worked as a teacher at a girls' high school and taught English at a boys' school.

In 1932, as times changed, Bliss left Shaowu and returned to the US. Although he could not return to China, he continued to love the country and its people till the end.

May too returned to the US, and in their later years, the couple lived in Boston, where Bliss's family gave them a room facing the west on the second floor. Bliss spent the rest of his life feeling happy, thinking the west-facing room brought him closer to China across the Pacific.

Bliss passed away peacefully in his sleep on Jan 22, 1960. But his story has been passed down from generation to generation in Shaowu and Kuliang.

Bliss's youngest son, Edward Bliss Jr., has compiled his father's letters and conversations into a book titled *Beyond The Stone Arches*.

"China was my father's life," Edward Jr. wrote in the book's preface. The Chinese translation of the book was published by the Central Compilation and Translation Press in 2015.

But before that, in 2001, nearly 70 years after Bliss departed from China, his grandchildren traveled from the US to Shaowu to visit the places their grandfather had lived and worked in during his 40 years in China.

Shaowu residents still refer to Bliss as "Mr Fu" with respect and awe, and many edifices in Shaowu and Kuliang remind people of Bliss. For instance, when you enter the Shaowu No. 4 Middle School, the first thing you see is the former residence of Bliss and May — a beautiful Western-style building the couple built in 1906.

The two large banyan trees in front of this building appear vibrant with lush green leaves. "My grandfather and grandmother devoted almost their entire life to building a profound friendship with the Chinese people," said Anne, Bliss's granddaughter.

"More than a century has passed, and the world has undergone radical changes. What hasn't changed is that people can still have true friendship... with each other," Anne told the local media in Fujian earlier this year. Indeed, she spoke the truth, just like her granddad.

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IMAGE



Technology promotes control of mosquito-borne diseases

Sun Yan, a doctoral student at the Zhongshan School of Medicine, Sun Yat-sen University, shows the larvae (white) and the shed shells (black) of mosquito eggs at the storage room of SYSU "mosquito factory" in Dongguan, South China's Guangdong province, on July 8, 2024. PHOTOS BY PAN SONGGANG AND YANG SHIJA / FOR CHINA DAILY



An irradiated sterilized male *Aedes albopictus* (bottom left) mates with a wild female *Aedes albopictus* (top left) at the Guangzhou north campus of Sun Yat-sen University on July 9, 2024.



Researchers at the Zhongshan School of Medicine, SYSU, release 200,000 irradiated sterilized male *Aedes albopictus* at the SYSU Guangzhou north campus on July 9, 2024.



Chen Xiaoguang, director of the Institute of Tropical Medicine, Southern Medical University, explains gene editing through microinjection in Guangzhou on July 10, 2024.



Researchers work in a rearing room at the SYSU "mosquito factory" in Dongguan on July 8, 2024.

With the help of nuclear technology and genetic technology, Chinese scientific researchers have made progress in the mass eradication of *Aedes albopictus*, also known as the Asian tiger mosquito, a mosquito native to the tropical and subtropical areas of Southeast Asia and a major vector of Zika and dengue viruses that can cause birth defects and death.

Radiation makes male mosquitoes sterile

The China Atomic Energy Authority founded a research center for sterilizing insects in partnership with Sun Yat-sen University in South China's Guangdong province in 2020.

A "mosquito factory" of SYSU in Dongguan, Guangdong, mass produces sterile male *Aedes albopictus* that mate with female mosquitoes without producing offspring. Therefore, the transmission of mosquito-borne diseases can be reduced.

Researchers rush mosquito pupae into glass sieve-like equipment to separate slimmer male pupae from females and use irradiation sterilization when the males hatch out.

According to Zhang Dongjing, an associate professor at the center, the team has released nearly 30 million sterilized male mosquitoes in the past three years, showing positive results in controlling the mosquito population and mosquito-borne diseases.

Gene editing turns female mosquitoes into males

Chen Xiaoguang, director of the Institute of Tropical Medicine at Southern Medical University, leads a team to produce male *Aedes albopictus* from females through gene editing in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

Because only female mosquitoes transmit pathogens when feeding on blood, converting female mosquitoes into nonbiting males can be a pathway for the control of disease vectors.

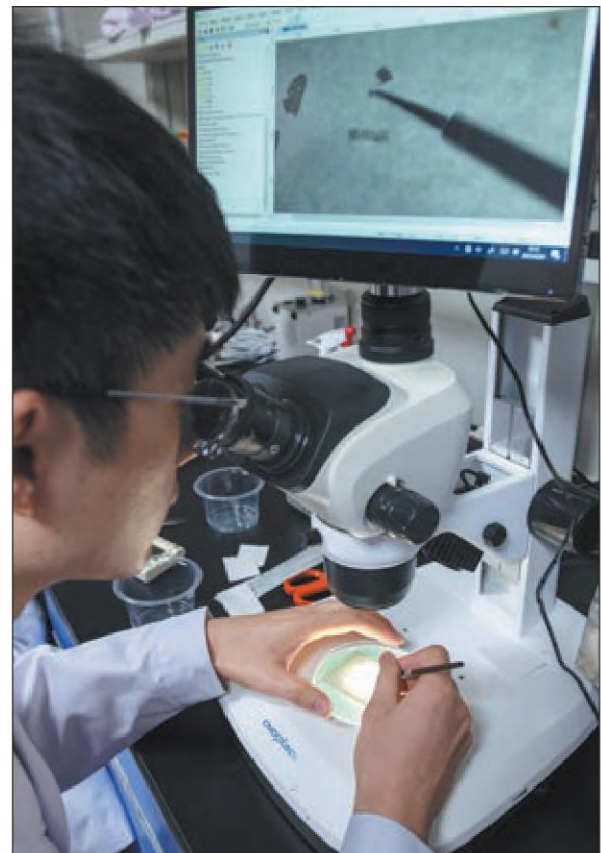
Through microinjection, researchers can insert a male-determining factor into female mosquito pupae to hatch precisely edited masculinized progenies. The converted male mosquitoes can pass on the male-determining gene so as to breed more male offspring.

The genetic manipulation is expected to rapidly reduce the number of female mosquitoes in the wild.

The team at the mosquito vector laboratory, SMU School of Public Health, has successfully changed female mosquitoes into males and is conducting lab tests.

"This is expected to provide a new weapon in the prevention and control of mosquito-borne diseases. Of course, I'm not after the total eradication of mosquitoes, just to keep their population at a level that is not harmful to humans," said Chen Xiaoguang.

— CHINA DAILY



Ren Yi, a doctoral student at the School of Public Health, Southern Medical University, places mosquito eggs in rows on a wet filter paper with a liner brush under the microscope on July 10, 2024.



A research fellow at the Zhongshan School of Medicine, SYSU, releases irradiated sterilized male *Aedes albopictus* at the SYSU Guangzhou north campus on July 9, 2024.

TREND



Yang Man, a 23-year-old woman, practices yoga with the help of the AI technology. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Feng Xiaomei, a 33-year-old woman, does exercise with the help of the AI technology. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Lu Tianmei, a 21-year-old woman, practices yoga with the help of the AI technology. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Yao Yao, a 5-year-old girl, does body exercises with the help of the AI technology. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By ZHANG ZHOUXIANG
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"Please lift your right leg by 20 degrees ... Yes, a little higher, a little more... Good! Now please hold on for five seconds, five, four, three, two, one, good. Now take some rest."

The moment she heard the female voice on her smartphone say "rest", 23-year-old Yang Man breathed easy and opened a bottle of water to drink. She was practicing high knees, a cardio-intensive exercise that involves springing between the ball of each foot (the padded portion of the sole between the toes and the arch), flexing one's knees and hips on one side to raise the other knee as high as possible. Guiding her on this exercise was a coach on her smartphone, the way health coaches at gyms provide one-to-one advice. However, there was one fundamental difference: her coach on the smartphone was not a real person, but one generated by artificial intelligence.

Coach on smartphone

Being a health freak, Yang is particular about gymming. Therefore, if she cannot go to the gym, she makes it a point to do what the AI fitness coach tells her. However, like many others she has one minor issue with the technology. "The e-coach tells me to lift my limbs by a certain angle, but who has so big a protractor to measure it," she asks. "Even if I had one, how can I measure the angle of my arm against the floor while doing high knees?"

If one has money to spare, a real fitness coach can be of much help here, but they involve high costs. At gyms in Beijing, the price of one-to-one coaching ranges from 4,800 yuan (\$673.4) to 12,800 yuan a month, while the average annual income of residents in the metropolis was 81,572 yuan in 2023. "The price is reasonable," said a Beijing-based fitness coach who wished to remain anonymous.

But for Yang, a university student, it is clearly not practical to shell out so much money. In 2022, a friend recommended to her a lite WeChat-

based program that could guide her to exercise. On running the program, a female model pops up on the smartphone screen to help users exercise, often telling them to lift their limbs higher if the user is reluctant. The AI fitness coach can see, so there is no scope for cheating. "It feels like a real female coach is teaching me how to exercise," said Zheng Hong, a 27-year-old female user of another fitness app. "It always feels good to have someone standing by and it is even better if it

does not cost too much."

On WeChat, Apple and android phones will find many such fitness apps, and there is fierce competition among them, forcing them to improve performance by adding extra features; they are improving the AI coach's voice and interaction style to make them look more and more human.

The one Yang uses is a typical example — it not only tells her what to do but also compliments her when she does it well. "I have tried

several apps and selected the one with the most friendly female coach," she said, "which makes me feel rather safe."

Image capture and tutor

According to Zhou Xin, an associate researcher on AI studies at the Institute of Software, Chinese Academy of Sciences, what such apps use is multimodal radar and three-dimensional vision technology, combined with non-contact sensing techniques and high-sensitivity

wearable sensors, which are capable of deeply analyzing users' motion data and physiological signals through deep learning and AI.

In simpler words the smartphone camera "catches" the movements of the user, turns them into models in which the limbs are represented by virtual sticks, analyzes whether they match the standard movements and sends feedback to the user, Zhou said.

"The technology is not very new. It has long been used in animations

that catch an actor's movements, make a model out of it and give it a new skin so that on screen it looks like a bear," he said.

Even *Black Myth: Wukong*, the newly developed game based on Chinese classic literature that is making waves in the international game market, has utilized the same technology to build models for its characters. For example, the agile movements of General Tiger, one of the game's characters, were lifted from a real cat.

It's because of the rising popularity of smartphones that the technology can be accessed by everybody at his/her home. However, Zhou explained, the feature requires that the user's smartphone have a High-Density (HD) camera that can capture the user's movements accurately in time, and a fast chip that can process the captured images and video clips in an efficient manner, so that the user can receive feedback in real time.

Besides, the AI technology is constantly improving so that the user feels he or she is facing a real person, not AI. To achieve that, the app manufacturers record a set of movements carried out by real models and design the algorithm in such a way that when a user wants to see how to twist his frame to one side, the model on his smartphone telling him how is actually reenacting what was first recorded on a real model.

But don't forget the potential legal risks, says Cui Zhendong, a senior lawyer based in Zhengzhou, capital of Henan province. As any user concerned about his/her privacy should worry, it is worth asking what exactly happens to the images captured by the app.

"To use these apps, the user needs to authorize the apps to access the camera, which will take pictures and make videos of him/her," Cui said, "It's necessary to minimize the risk of them getting leaked."

The user agreements of several such apps promise to keep the collected information secret, but more protection is needed for the user, Cui said.

Look who's telling you to lift your leg higher

Many people are using apps in which a beautiful girl with a beautiful voice tells them how to exercise. But how can she see them and what does she do with the users' videos?



Yanina Wu, a 42-year-old woman, exercises daily with the help of technology in her studio. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

There's a little bit of AI in everything you do

By ZHANG ZHOUXIANG
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With the advancement of chips, improving algorithms and progress of Large Language Models, artificial intelligence is now playing increasingly larger roles in various fields.

Below are some of the fields in which AI plays a role:

Customer service

AI has revolutionized the customer service industry by providing efficient and consistent support to customers. AI-powered chatbots can handle a large volume of inquiries simultaneously, providing quick responses. These chatbots use natural language processing to understand and respond to customer queries in a conversational manner, mimicking human interaction.

AI can also analyze customer data to provide personalized recommendations and offers, enhancing the customer experience. It can assist in managing routine tasks such as scheduling appointments or processing basic transactions, freeing up human agents for more complex issues. Additionally, AI systems can learn from each interaction to improve responses over time, thus continuously enhancing performance.

In the realm of problem-solving, AI can quickly identify patterns and offer solutions based on past cases, which can significantly reduce issue resolution time. For example, if a customer reports an issue with a

product, AI can scan a database of known faults and provide immediate troubleshooting steps or direct the issue to the appropriate department.

People often complain that AI customer service can seem impersonal and lacking in empathy, or be seen struggling when handling complex or unusual queries. There can be misunderstandings because of limited context awareness, and frustration when AI cannot resolve the issue, necessitating human intervention.

Hospital

One of the key roles of AI in hospitals is in aiding diagnostics through the analysis of medical images such as X-rays, MRIs, and CT scans. Advanced algorithms can detect subtle anomalies that a human eye might have missed, thus assisting physicians in making accurate and early diagnoses.

Moreover, AI is revolutionizing patient monitoring and treatment through real-time analysis of patient data, including vital signs and laboratory results. Machine learning models can predict patient deterioration with a high degree of accuracy, allowing for preemptive interventions that can prevent critical events. This proactive approach not only improves patient outcomes but also reduces the burden on hospital staff.

In addition to clinical applications, AI is streamlining administrative tasks in hospitals. It can optimize scheduling of appoint-

ments and procedures, manage inventory for better resource allocation, and even assist in billing processes. These improvements reduce overhead costs and increase the overall efficiency of hospital operations.

Lastly, AI facilitates remote consultation and monitoring, expanding the reach of specialist care to patients in remote or underserved areas. Telemedicine powered by AI allows for virtual consultations, which are particularly important during times of pandemic or in regions that have limited access to healthcare facilities.

Travel

AI significantly enhances travel experience by streamlining the booking process for flights, hotels, and rental cars through intelligent algorithms that sort and present the most suitable options based on travelers' preferences. It also optimizes itineraries by providing personalized suggestions for activities, dining, and attractions aligned with the traveler's interests. Further, AI assists during trips with real-time updates on traffic, weather, and flight statuses, ensuring a seamless journey.

At the destination, AI-powered translation apps and navigation tools help travelers navigate new environments and cultures with ease. Overall, AI personalizes the travel planning and execution process, making it more efficient, convenient, and enjoyable.

Home appliances

AI has significantly transformed home appliances, making them more intelligent and energy-efficient. Smart refrigerators can now monitor content and alert users when some food is nearing expiration date, and even suggest recipes based on the available ingredients.

AI washing machines and dishwashers adjust their cleaning cycles to match the size and level of dirt in their load, optimizing water and power consumption. Smart thermostats learn users' habits and preferences to manage heating and cooling systems efficiently, reducing unnecessary energy use while maintaining comfort.

Additionally, AI-integrated ovens can precisely control cooking times and temperatures, ensuring perfectly cooked meals. Such advancements not only enhance the performance of home appliances but also contribute to a more convenient and eco-friendly home environment.

Smartphones, tablets

AI has significantly transformed smartphones and tablets, enhancing their capabilities and user experience. Voice assistants like Siri and Google Assistant, powered by AI, allow users to interact with their devices through voice commands for tasks such as making calls, sending messages, scheduling events, and controlling smart home devices. AI technology also improves camera functions through advanced

features like autofocus, image stabilization, and facial recognition, resulting in higher quality photos and videos.

Moreover, AI algorithms optimize device performance by managing background apps and memory more efficiently, leading to extended battery life and smoother operation. Additionally, AI provides personalized content recommendations for entertainment, news, and app suggestions based on user behavior. Overall, the integration of AI in smartphones and tablets delivers a more intelligent, efficient, and tailored user experience.

Driving

AI has revolutionized driving with the advent of autonomous vehicles and advanced driver-assistance systems. These technologies rely on AI algorithms to process vast amounts of data from sensors, cameras, and GPS, enabling vehicles to perceive their environment and make split-second decisions. Features like adaptive cruise control, lane keeping assist, and automatic emergency braking enhance safety by assisting drivers in maintaining safe distances, staying within lanes, and avoiding collisions.

Moreover, AI improves traffic management through real-time analysis of traffic patterns, optimizing signals and reducing congestion. Connected vehicle technology allows cars to communicate with each other and road infrastructure, further enhancing safety and efficiency by warning drivers of potential hazards and improving route planning.

In the future, fully autonomous vehicles promise to eliminate

human error, a leading cause of accidents, and provide mobility solutions for those unable to drive. AI's role in driving not only aims to increase safety and efficiency but also to transform transportation as we know it.

Security

AI can significantly enhance security across various domains by leveraging its ability to analyze vast amounts of data, recognize patterns, and perform real-time monitoring and decision-making. In cybersecurity, AI algorithms can detect and respond to threats more quickly and accurately than traditional rule-based systems. They can learn from new attack patterns, adapt to evolving threats, and automate routine tasks such as patch management and vulnerability assessments.

In the realm of physical security, AI-powered video surveillance systems can recognize suspicious behavior or unauthorized access attempts in real time. This not only aids in rapid response but also reduces the need for constant human monitoring. AI can also enhance biometric authentication systems by improving accuracy and reducing false positives or negatives.

Moreover, AI can be integrated into internet of things devices to monitor environmental factors like temperature, pressure, or sound levels, which might indicate a security breach or an impending safety risk. Overall, AI's integration into security systems not only improves their effectiveness but also enables a more proactive and anticipatory approach to risk management.

BIZ LIFE

Yellow metal prices continue to surge

Spot gold recently surged to historic highs on strong demand, Fed cuts

By LIU YUKUN
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Gold prices have consistently reached all-time highs this year, yet this hasn't dampened consumers' eagerness for the precious metal.

What sets this year apart is the stark contrast in demand between gold jewelry and coins/bars since the year began, as consumers are gravitating toward investment-oriented products with little processing charges.

Meanwhile, many consumers opted to liquidate their holdings, leading to a thriving market in gold recycling and trade-ins, said industry observers.

Influenced by factors like geopolitical tensions, US Federal Reserve rate cuts, and global central banks' increase of gold reserves, they also forecast that gold prices may continue to rise. Against this backdrop, they indicated that the divergence between Chinese gold jewelry and gold coins/bars consumption may persist in the latter half of the year.

This trend will continue to benefit upstream gold mining firms while creating challenges for downstream retail sales, they said, adding that companies need to innovate products with smaller weight increments and new features to attract consumers.

Elevated prices

Data from the World Gold Council reveals a 12 percent increase in gold prices in the first half of this year, with prices predominantly exceeding \$2,300 per ounce in the second quarter.

The upward trajectory continued into the third quarter. On Sept 25, spot gold prices surged to a historic high of \$2,670 per ounce, and may continue to keep hitting record highs, while gold prices denominated in Chinese renminbi on the Shanghai Gold Exchange also witnessed an uptick. On Sept 25, Shanghai Gold Au 99.99 contracts closed at 595.66 yuan (\$85) per gram, with the peak price hitting 599.28 yuan per gram.

Accordingly, gold retail prices in China have also seen a rapid increase this year, with various gold jewelry brands like Chow Tai Fook and Chow Sang Sang pricing their products above 750 yuan per gram in September. Other brands like Chow Tai Seng, Lao Feng Xiang, and China Gold, set their gold jewelry prices mostly ranging between 730 yuan and 770 yuan per gram.

Wang Lixin, regional CEO of the World Gold Council (China), noted, "Last year, the primary drivers of rising gold prices were robust investment demand and heightened geopolitical risks. These factors continue to play an important role in driving up gold prices this year. Additionally, the inflow of Western gold exchange-traded funds and the initiation of the Federal Reserve rate cut cycle have contributed to declining interest rates and a weaker dollar, further propelling



An employee arranges gold jewelry at a store in Renhuai, Guizhou province, in April. CHEN YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Investor enthusiasm for gold investment remains robust, with recent price surges accompanied by investors' sustained long positions."

Liu Yuxuan, a precious metals researcher at Guotai Junan Futures

gold performance."

Liu Yuxuan, a precious metals researcher at Guotai Junan Futures, said, "Investor enthusiasm for gold investment remains robust, with recent price surges accompanied by investors' sustained long positions. Many investors view gold as a hedge against risks associated with other assets and as a secure long-term investment option. This trend reflects a pessimistic outlook on the global economic situation, where investors seek stability in an uncertain economic environment."

"The current scenario suggests that despite Fed's 50 basis points rate cut this year, there is potential for another 50 basis points cut in November or December, and anticipated cuts of 100 basis points in 2025 and 50 basis points in 2026, totaling a potential 250 basis points cut. While gold prices have already surpassed \$2,600 per ounce as some markets may have factored in the 100 basis points rate cut for the year, the expectation of a 250 basis points cut is likely not fully priced in. This provides strong momentum for gold



A consumer (right) tries on a gold bracelet at a shop in Shanghai in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

prices to continue their ascent at elevated levels," Liu said.

Furthermore, a recent report from the World Gold Council highlighted that central banks' gold purchases have and will continue to contribute to the uptrend in gold prices. In July, global central banks' net purchase of gold reached 37 tons, marking a 206 percent increase from the previous month, the highest monthly increase since January. The WGC has forecast a continuation of this trend among global central banks in the near future.

Choices impacted

Against the backdrop of soaring gold prices, a divergent trend has emerged in the demand for gold jewelry, coins and bars since the year began.

Investment in gold bars and coins surged to 80 tons in the last quarter, marking a 62 percent increase year-on-year and the strongest second-

quarter performance since 2013. The rise in gold prices and investor interest in safe-haven assets propelled total investment in gold bars and coins to 190 tons in the first half, a significant 65 percent surge from the previous year's first half, according to the WGC.

Conversely, demand for gold jewelry in China hit a second-quarter low not seen since 2009, at 86 tons. First-half jewelry consumption in China dropped by 18 percent year-on-year to 270 tons.

Wang of the WGC said, "The motivation for investors to purchase gold bars and coins is relatively straightforward, primarily for investment purposes as gold has outperformed other forms of investment in general, delivering impressive returns at over 22 percent in Jan-Sept period, which is undeniably eye-catching. Moreover, there was an unprecedented surge in saving intentions among

Chinese. Compared to the fluctuating Chinese renminbi, gold's role as a store of value is favored by savers."

"While gold jewelry does offer a store of value function, consumers primarily purchase it for personal use, weddings, or gifting, with value preservation being an 'added' value. With continually rising gold prices and a slowdown in disposable income growth, gold jewelry is displaying characteristics of a typical consumer product, where consumers are more price-sensitive, resulting in a decline in gold jewelry consumption. However, it's worth noting that despite the overall decline, gold jewelry, compared to other jewelry types (platinum, diamonds, etc.), remains significantly ahead, with gold continuing to be the primary revenue generator for jewelry retailers," he said.

Wang predicted that the divergent purchase trend for gold jewelry, gold coins and bars in China observed in the first half may persist throughout the year.

"Gold jewelry may witness a slight uptick in the upcoming peak season, which is October as gold demand for wedding use may grow, but its overall performance may still be relatively subdued compared to previous years, primarily due to high prices and expectations of slowing economic growth. While investment demand may have been impacted by volatile gold prices, the environment for gold investment — lackluster performance of other assets, ongoing decline in interest rates (domestic and foreign), and economic growth uncertainties — is likely to bolster gold investment demand," he added.

Divergent fortunes

With gold prices remaining at ele-

vated levels, companies across the gold industry chain are encountering varying fortunes, with upstream mining firms enjoying sustained profit growth while downstream gold jewelry retailers confront escalating operational challenges.

A study by media outlet Caijing revealed that as of Aug 23, out of the 12 A-share listed gold mining companies, 10 companies had reported their first-half performance results, with a collective net profit of around 19 billion yuan, a 48 percent increase from the same period last year. Several companies achieved their best performances since going public.

Zijin Mining, one of China's leading mining companies, reported an increase in first-half net profit of 46.42 percent year-on-year to 15 billion yuan. The company attributed this performance boost to higher production volumes of gold, copper, and silver, along with increased sales prices compared to the previous year. During the period, the company's gold production volume reached around 35.4 tons, a 9.5 percent increase year-on-year, surpassing the growth rates of copper production volumes.

In contrast, several gold jewelry retail companies experienced a decline in performance in the first half. For instance, Chow Tai Seng's net profit decreased by 18.71 percent year-on-year to 601 million yuan. In the first half, Chow Tai Fook reduced its mainland store count by 180.

Many retailers are employing promotional strategies such as 20-60 yuan gold price reduction by grams and free trade-ins to entice customers.

Song Yu, a salesperson at a gold store in Chaoyang district of Beijing, said many customers inquired about gold during their visits but hesitated to make purchases due to the high gold prices. "Consumers are concerned about buying at high prices, fearing potential losses if gold prices drop."

"While the surge in gold prices may encourage some consumers to buy gold for preservation purposes, such consumers typically favor products like gold bars. Jewelry items, due to brand premiums, craftsmanship costs, depreciation, and other added values, are not as cost-effective as bars and coins for value preservation," he explained.

To sustain profits for retailers, Wang of the WGC suggested that while introducing products with high profit margins, such as intricate designs and various inlays to cater to buyers with greater purchasing power, jewelry makers and sellers need to ramp up efforts in developing cost-effective pieces as well as lower-cost items such as Hard Pure Gold.

Hard Pure Gold is a new form of 999 gold (24K) with extra hardness and durability. It involves adding a certain amount of rare elements, commonly known as hard gold powder, enabling enhanced craftsmanship with the most lightweight items.

Wang suggested innovating existing business models and development strategies, transitioning from scale-based expansion to high-quality development that caters to segmented markets and diverse demands among consumers.

All that glitters is in fact gold for newlyweds, though they're more cost-conscious

By LIU YUKUN

Gold rings, earrings and necklaces have always been the go-to trio for traditional Chinese weddings. However, breaking away from tradition, Zhou Xiao and his wife are turning heads by considering gold bars for their upcoming wedding.

Their reasoning? "It's a smart choice — no extra fees and they hold their value," they said.

Shuibei community in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, also stood out as a favored destination for engaged couples seeking budget-friendly wedding gold. As the wedding season approaches, particularly the week before the National Day holiday (Oct 1-7), a surge of customers, predominantly young couples, flocked to buy items like dragon- and phoenix-themed bracelets, necklaces and other bridal jewelry. Local shop owner Li Yang said there was a notable uptick in customer traffic leading up to the holiday period.

Despite the backdrop of escalating

gold prices, industry insiders noted a growing proportion of gold being utilized in weddings, as demand for wedding and gift-related jewelry is often viewed as essential in traditional Chinese culture, though with consumers now increasingly prioritizing cost-effectiveness.

Despite weaker gold jewelry sales since the year began, the World Gold Council predicts that the yellow metal will continue to dominate China's looming jewelry retail sector, with the proportion rising from 59 percent in 2020 to 66 percent in 2024.

The share of gold used in weddings is also expected to climb from 19 percent in 2022 to 24 percent in 2024.

Nevertheless, these figures do not necessarily signify an increase in demand, the WGC said in a recent report. The report suggests that amid the overall cooling of gold jewelry consumption, consumers tend to prepare stable budgetary allocations for jewelry for essential uses like nuptials, and such consumer behavior is driving up such use of



Visitors check out gold jewelry for weddings during an expo in Beijing in March. ZHANG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

gold's proportion in overall gold jewelry sales.

The wedding gold market is in a state of continual evolution, joint research by the WGC and China Gold News showed. Their research results underscored a shift in pur-

chasing dynamics for wedding jewelry. Unlike in the past, where decisions were largely influenced by parents and elders, the current trend sees newlyweds taking charge of purchases, with individuals aged 18 to 35 assuming primary decision-

making roles in wedding consumption scenarios. This shift is expected to significantly impact jewelry retailers' marketing strategies.

Zijin Mining's wedding gold brand Zijin OG highlights the significant shifts in consumption habits among the younger generation. It said such individuals seek novelty, unique experiences, self-expression, personalized tastes and active participation in the production process, all while closely tracking market trends. Businesses are urged to focus on delivering customized products and premium services to engage effectively with the new generation of young consumers and delve deeper into the market, it said.

"I prefer purchasing gold bars from the bank over paying hefty premiums to brands. When I need jewelry such as for wedding use, I engage my preferred designer to craft it. The cost for a simple design typically ranges from 10 yuan (\$1.4) to 35 yuan per gram, proving to be a cost-efficient approach. I often

invest in gold to save money, opting for small-weight gold bars or gold nuggets," Zhou said.

Zhou and his wife are part of a growing trend. Instead of buying jewelry directly, many young individuals opt to accumulate gold nuggets or bars, as the price of gold nuggets combines the spot gold price with minimal labor costs. Once a certain weight is reached, they visit a workshop to melt the gold nuggets and fashion them into desired jewelry styles. This approach allows them to meet their consumption needs while retaining the value of their investment as gold prices rise.

The WGC report hints at a cautiously optimistic future for the gold jewelry market. Amid intense competition and closures of stores with weak product competitiveness and shrinking profit margins, there lies an opportunity for industry-wide advancement that needs product innovation, improved digital marketing and promotion, it said.

TRAVEL



A tourist tries snorkeling at Dadonghai Bay Scenic Area in Sanya, Hainan province.

PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Exploring Hainan's Sand and Sea

Whether it's combing the beach or snorkeling in the depths, the tropical island province offers adventurous ways to connect with nature.

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
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Immersing oneself in the ocean and getting up close and personal with marine life are popular activities in the tropics as people yearn to connect with nature. So it's only natural that Hainan province is emerging as a go-to destination for intimate marine adventures — whether it's beachcombing along the shore or snorkeling in the depths.

During a visit to Hainan, a balmy island in the South China Sea, visitors can make warm memories — visiting pristine beaches and exclusive beachcombing spots. It's a delightful battle of wits to find some of the many treasures hidden in the sand.

The picturesque mud flats of Beigang Island in Haikou are a bustling hub of activity for beachcombing enthusiasts, both locals and tourists alike. As the sun rises and falls, thousands of oysters, razor clams and mantis shrimps can be harvested by those with the requisite skills, providing a unique and lucrative source of income for the community.

One of the local beachcombers, Weng Qiongyu, has been honing her craft since the tender age of 6. Now 62, she not only gathers shellfish for sale but also serves as a “beachcombing aunt”, guiding small groups of tourists on thrilling natural treasure hunts.

Under the guidance of experienced beachcombing practitioners, visitors from near and far are treated to an unforgettable experience, losing themselves in the rich biodiversity of Beigang Island's mud flats.

Weng said understanding the tidal patterns is crucial when beachcombing in Hainan. The tide shifts in a rhythmic, repetitive cycle, and visitors must

plan their trips with the tidal clock in mind to ensure they go out to dig in the sand at optimal times.

The first to 15th day of the Chinese lunar calendar is the spring tide period. High tides are followed by low tides, when water recedes significantly to reveal a larger seabed for beachcombing. The so-called low-tide season occurs from the sixth to 12th day of the lunar calendar.

Essential tools for beachcombing include a shovel, tongs, a headlamp or flashlight, gloves, nonslip shoes and a bucket.

Yang Chen, a visitor from central China's Hubei province, expressed his admiration for the lifestyle of beachcombing: You work at sunrise and rest at sunset, a stark contrast to nonstop urban hustle and bustle. But there's a catch. The seemingly idyllic life on the beach is filled with uncertainties.

Beachcombers never know what they will catch each day, whether they return empty-handed or with a bountiful harvest. An element of luck is part of the charm of nature, offering a sense of the primitive and facing the unknown.

“While modern times have reduced our survival pressures, life has become increasingly mundane and routine, like lines of code running smoothly day after day, lacking excitement. The activity of beachcombing brings us the element of surprise,” Chen said.

“This is where the allure of the sea lies — in the thrill of exploration, with a mix of awe and curiosity. Humans will always belong to nature and will constantly seek to reconnect with it. Only nature can fulfill our deepest inner needs.”

To bridge the dialect barrier and enhance the tourist experience, local guesthouse owner Zhu Weidong pro-

vides Mandarin training to the beachcombing aunts, who are used to speaking the Hainan dialect in their daily life. Visitors are not only accommodated in his cozy establishment but are also treated to informative beachcombing tutorials, guaranteeing a fruitful and delightful experience on the island.

The charm of Beigang Island has not gone unnoticed by outsiders. More than 50,000 visitors flocked to its shores last year. The island's popularity has continued to soar, with hundreds of tourists and vehicles arriving during peak travel times this year. As the area thrives with fun activities, visitors are drawn to the allure of beachcombing and the warm hospitality of locals like Zhu, creating lasting memories of their time on Beigang Island.

Chen Fengliang, Party secretary of the Shayutang village in Changjiang Li autonomous county, said that with the increase of visitors who come to comb the beaches, accommodations have grown to four local homestays with 42 rooms available. Two more homestays are under construction, and it is believed that they can meet the tourist demand for a while, providing guidance on beachcombing activities and assisting with seafood cooking.

While beachcombing is simple labor for local commercial workers, it captures the imagination of thousands of tourists every year. But there's more: Hainan province invites people to participate in many other marine adventures. Each year people from around the world flock to the sun-kissed shores of Sanya for a thrilling snorkeling adventure in which they immerse themselves in a vibrant underwater world teeming with life.

A visitor from Chongqing sur-

named Shen, accompanied by her daughter, likened the experience to “disturbing a hermit crab's sanctuary”. As they dived, they were astounded at the array of fish, crabs, mantis shrimps and coral reefs.

Equipped with basic snorkeling gear — masks, snorkels, wet suits and fins — the Shen family made their first foray into snorkeling at a beach in Sanya recommended by online reviewers. Despite her initial fear of snorkeling because she never learned to swim, Shen decided to give it a try. To her surprise, she discovered the underwater world to be a tranquil expanse of emerald and sapphire, a delightful surprise that enchanted the entire family.

Another visitor, surnamed Wu, from Henan province embarked on a snorkeling adventure with her family and a seasoned diving instructor. They explored an underwater realm filled with zebra fish and various fry. Despite some challenges — water clarity, for example — the group reveled in the experience, with Wu's mother enjoying the activity with the aid of a life jacket.

“Even if one cannot swim, they can still try snorkeling,” said diving instructor Bao Zhongli, a veteran in the industry in Sanya.

Snorkeling is a surface activity typically done when the water is calm. For first-timers, it's important to choose a location with gentle currents and swim under the guidance and supervision of an instructor to enhance safety.

For tourists, it is necessary to undergo basic training to learn breathing techniques, how to use the equipment and stay safe while enjoying the underwater beauty, Bao said. He emphasized the importance of health checks before going out, particularly for individuals with underlying health conditions.

As a Level 1 diving instructor, Bao

ensures that guests are well-prepared with essential gear and safety instructions. He guides up to 25 snorkelers daily.

Shu Kai, an executive at Dadonghai Bay Scenic Area, highlighted the safety measures implemented in Sanya, including the “one person, one code” initiative for diving instructors. This approach allows tourists to access detailed profiles of instructors, which enhances safety and provides a positive experience for visitors seeking to explore the underwater wonders of Sanya, he said.

Sanya has assigned codes to more than 500 diving instructors, according to the Sanya municipal bureau of tourism. If any diving instructor is found to engage in illegal or irregular activities, their individual code is promptly disabled to prevent tourists from hiring them. “This approach helps to better regulate the behavior of diving instructors and ensure service quality,” an official from the bureau said.

Jiang Chengshan, 21, traveled from Hebei to Sanya to experience snorkeling at Sunny Bay in April. On this trip, he ventured out alone, confident in his swimming and diving skills. Jiang said that his passion for snorkeling began after he learned to swim, as he found pure delight in exploring natural aquatic environments.

He said he is captivated by the thrill of discovering the underwater world and the sense of venturing into the unknown.

“The snorkeling experience at Sunny Bay totally surpassed my expectations,” he said, noting that it rivals even the renowned diving sites of Hawaii.

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Visitors comb the beaches of Beigang Island in Haikou, Hainan province. PHOTO BY ZHOU PENG/FOR CHINA DAILY

SPORTS

SOCCER



Members of the Oltalom Sports Association soccer team practice during training in Budapest in June. Most children and young people training with Oltalom come from deeply impoverished backgrounds, with around 85 percent of teenagers currently playing coming from state foster care institutions. REUTERS

Giving underprivileged kids a goal in life



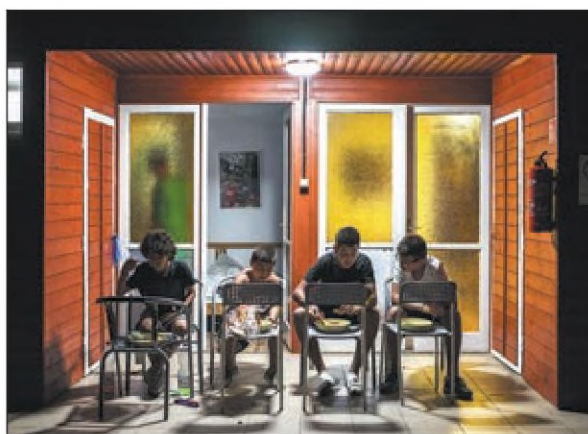
David Simonics, 26, waits to join an Oltalom Sports Association team training session in Budapest in 2021. REUTERS



Hungarian side offers a sense of belonging and stability to those on the fringes of society



Hungary team members huddle before playing Italy at the Homeless Euro 2024 tournament in Hamburg, Germany, in June. REUTERS



From left: Afghan, Palestinian and Brazilian members of the Hungarian team have dinner at a soccer training camp in Balatonalmadi, Hungary, in 2020; Patrik Paladi, 22, does pull-ups on the goalposts during training in Budapest in June; Paladi rests between matches at the Homeless Euro 2024 tournament in Hamburg, Germany, in June. REUTERS



Playing soccer for the last decade has given 22-year-old Hungarian Patrik Paladi friends, a chance to travel, and above all, stability, which has helped him finish secondary school and overcome his family's financial hardships.

A highlight on the pitch for Paladi was winning a silver medal with his team for the under-privileged, homeless and refugees at the Homeless Euro 2024 championship in Hamburg in June, where they faced peers from across Europe.

The team, run by Hungary's Oltalom Sport Association, also competed in the South Korean capital Seoul for the Homeless World Cup late last month.

"I came to train here first about 10 years ago, and I am fairly dedicated," Paladi said.

He proudly lists the countries where he has played with the team, including Wales, host of the 2019 Homeless World Cup.

Oltalom provides regular, free sports opportunities for those living in poverty, homeless people, youngsters raised in institutions and also young refugees.

The association is backed by sponsors, including the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme, the UEFA Foundation for Children and the Common Goal charity, and also relies on donations. It does not receive support from the Hungarian state, and it does not have a permanent training ground. Financing its activities is difficult, Oltalom says.

Building resilience

Besides the joy of playing soccer, youngsters learn life skills, such as cooperation, teamwork and building resilience, helping them over-

come trauma. Many of them also get new chances in life.

"This is a place where no one does anything wrong, at least while they are here," Paladi said, referring to the beneficial effects of playing on a team and getting engaged in sports.

Most children and young people training with Oltalom come from deeply poor backgrounds. Some 85 percent of teenagers currently playing come from state foster care institutions. Oltalom often holds training sessions in children's homes or juvenile detention facilities.

Last year, 361 youngsters took

part in training sessions, with around 60-100 participating at least once a week.

In Hamburg, away from the hype surrounding the main European Championship, the Homeless tournament brought people together from different backgrounds, who have learned to accept each other and express themselves through soccer.

Fitzgerald Fontah Kwe, or Gerard as his teammates call him, a 29-year-old Cameroonian member of the Hungarian team, came to Budapest to study in 2017 and joined the Oltalom team in 2022.

He says the team is really inclusive, giving people from different backgrounds a chance to play and learn to be tolerant.

"For people who do not have the means, it's a good opportunity ... it is inclusive and people have a sense of purpose," he said.

Youngsters attending the regular training sessions include refugees from Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Egypt and Libya, as well as Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa.

REUTERS

SPORTS

TENNIS



Above: China's Shang Juncheng hits a return to Coleman Wong of Hong Kong, China, during their match at the Rolex Shanghai Masters on Wednesday. **Below:** China's Wu Yibing hits a return to India's Sumit Nagal during their first-round match in Shanghai on Wednesday. AFP



Chinese men start to smash it!

Following in the footsteps of their female counterparts, the success of local talent on the ATP tour is surging

By **SUN XIAOCHEN** in Shanghai
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The surging collective strength of Chinese men's tennis is turning heads at the top of the game with an unprecedented local contingent racing to make some noise at the Rolex Shanghai Masters.

Following his straight-sets opening win against India's Sumit Nagal in Shanghai on Wednesday, China's former US Open boys' champion Wu Yibing celebrated his first ATP Tour win in over 13 months by writing down an implicit "F5" on the broadcasting camera, leaving even his most diehard fans wondering what he meant.

Wu was marking a historic moment for Chinese men's tennis.

Led by three top-100 contenders, five Chinese mainland players have entered this year's Rolex Shanghai Masters, including two wild-card entries, making it the biggest ever Chinese representation at any professional tournament on the ATP Tour.

And Wu hopes this strength in numbers will only continue to grow.

"F5 is the 'refresh' button on a computer keyboard. I just hope all the five of us, or even more in the future, can renew our previous bests by outdoing ourselves here," Wu said after beating Nagal 6-3, 6-3 on Wednesday, becoming the lowest-ranked singles main draw winner — he was ranked No 564 at the time — in the Shanghai tournament's history. The win has propelled Wu to an ATP live ranking of No 441.

As the first Chinese player to be crowned a Grand Slam junior champion (New York, 2017), and the first to claim an ATP Tour title at the 2023 Dallas Open, Wu was supposed to spearhead the rise of the Chinese men under a central spotlight. Yet, a series of injuries, mainly a left foot problem that had bothered him for over 10 years, took a toll on his consistency, forcing him to take a number of long breaks over the past two seasons.

His retirement from back-to-back home tournaments over the past two weeks, first in Hangzhou and then Beijing, had left fans in doubt over his ability to compete during the highly anticipated Chinese season. Wu, however, eased those concerns with a convincing win in his first completed match in over five weeks.

When a physically ready Wu hits with confidence, his game is entertaining to watch.

By firing seven aces and racking up 25 winners, Wu dominated 83rd-

ranked Nagal with his trademark barrage of powerful serves and lethal forehands, clinching his first win on the Tour since a first-round victory over Serbia's Dusan Lajovic at last year's US Open.

The 24-year-old is eager to start anew, having recovered from surgery to repair his troublesome left foot following his appearance at last year's Asian Games in his home city Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

"Indeed I've had more ups and downs than my peers in the beginning of my career, but I am still quite confident in my game when I am healthy," said Wu, who reached a career-high ranking of No 54 in May last year, three months following his ATP250 title run at the Dallas Open in Texas.

"Everyone around me, my family, my team and friends, they all trust that I can still play excellent tennis. I just need to take better care of my body and have more consistent training."

Joining Wu in the second round at the Shanghai tournament is teen sensation Shang Juncheng, who claimed a first Chinese ATP title on home soil at the Chengdu Open on Sept 24, and wild-card holder Zhou Yi.

Nineteen-year-old Shang, the current world No 51, rode his recent momentum to beat Coleman Wong of Hong Kong, China, on Wednesday to set up an eye-catching rematch against four-time major winner Carlos Alcaraz. Shang's only previous meeting with the Spaniard, who just won the ATP500 title in Beijing, was in the third round at this year's Australian Open, when Shang had to retire in the third set due to injury.

"I know that he has really good potential, really good tennis ... I'm going to prepare as best as I can (against him)," Alcaraz said of Shang's game at a pre-tournament news conference in Shanghai on Thursday.

Zhou advanced into the second round in Shanghai after his Japanese opponent Yoshihito Nishioka retired injured while leading 4-2 in the first set.

The never-before-seen Chinese contingent at the season's penultimate ATP Masters tournament has captured the attention of the world's best.

Serbian great Novak Djokovic, who is making his return to China after a five-year hiatus, said the fact that Chinese men have caught up with their more successful women's counterparts only helps grow the game internationally.

“

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Novak Djokovic, applauding

China's tennis development



"Historically, women's tennis in China has always had great success, particularly with Li Na, who won multiple Grand Slam titles and was a great champion. That has positively affected, in a great way, the growth of tennis in China," Djokovic said after completing an open training session with China's top men's ace Zhang Zhizhen on Wednesday.

"It seems like the future is bright for Chinese tennis in both the men's and women's game. I like to see that," said the men's record 24-time major winner.

"I was actually hoping that there would be a Chinese man to break to top 100, top 50 in the world, and now you have not just one, but several of those guys that are really playing some good quality tennis."

"I don't think that the dedication, or putting in the effort, was ever a problem (in China). I think the Chinese mentality is such that, when they are dedicated to something, you can see that working hard is not an issue here."

"It will be very interesting to see on the men's side, how the players will evolve. I think it can only go up, because of the good mentality and, I guess, the overall great investment in tennis. I'm really excited to see how Chinese tennis will grow in the future."

Refreshed Alcaraz raring to go at Shanghai Masters

World No 2 Carlos Alcaraz said playing as part of a team at the Davis Cup and Laver Cup had left him feeling refreshed and ready to go in the Asian swing, where he is looking to add the Shanghai Masters title to his victory at the China Open.

Alcaraz, who won this year's French Open and Wimbledon — and took home a silver medal at the Paris Olympics — was not firing on all cylinders during the North American swing, losing in the second round at Cincinnati and the US Open.

Since his loss in Flushing Meadows, Alcaraz has helped Spain seal its spot in the Davis Cup's quarterfinals and inspired Team Europe to victory in the Laver Cup, before beating Italian rival Jannik Sinner to win the China Open.

"I had a really good month of practice after the American swing. The Davis Cup and the Laver Cup helped me a lot to get the energy back, to get motivated again," Alcaraz told reporters on Thursday.

"I love playing in team competitions, the Davis Cup with the players, with their team, with the Spanish federation as well, all the people who are around just to help me to be better, and feeling great off the court as

well, that is really important.

"The Laver Cup, same thing. Those competitions helped me a lot to get the joy back on the court, and being focused on what's next. I came here to Asia with a lot of energy, enjoying every single second that I step on the court, and that for me is really important."

Alcaraz took three hours, 21 minutes to beat Sinner 6-7 (6), 6-4, 7-6 (3) in the final in Beijing on Wednesday, and faced a tight turnaround to compete in his first match in Shanghai on Friday, where he takes on home favorite Shang Juncheng.

"The tennis schedule is so tight, but we have to get used to it. Yesterday we finished 8:30 pm, 9:00 pm, a three-hour match, and then I had no time to do anything else," Alcaraz said.

"I went to the club before the final with all the bags, because I knew that we had to run after the final to take the flight to come here."

"We arrived at 4:00 am, just to be ready, or just to get some sleep here in Shanghai, and woke up to get used to the conditions here and try to be ready for my first match."

Nole hopes Sinner case wraps up 'ASAP'

SHANGHAI — Novak Djokovic said Wednesday that he hoped current world No 1 Jannik Sinner's steroid case would be "resolved as soon as possible", as he again bemoaned the tennis anti-doping system's "inconsistencies".

Sinner failed two doping tests in March, but was cleared of wrongdoing and allowed to keep playing by tennis authorities.

But, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said Saturday that it had mounted an appeal, and was seeking a ban of up to two years.

Djokovic — known to his fans as Nole — had previously said he could "understand the sentiments of a lot of players" who were questioning whether Sinner's rank had protected him.

On Wednesday, speaking at a news conference at the Shanghai Masters, the former world No 1 acknowledged that it must be "very tough" for the Italian.

"I think it's quite obvious that we have a system that is not working well... There are way too many inconsistencies, way too many governing bodies involved and, you know, just this whole case is not helping our sport at all," the 37-year-old said.

"Whatever is going to happen at



Fans swarm to Serbian Novak Djokovic's training session at the Shanghai Masters on Wednesday. AFP

the end of the day, I just wish for it to be resolved as soon as possible."

Tennis authorities accepted Sinner's explanation that trace amounts of a steroid unintentionally entered his system from a physiotherapist who used a spray containing it to treat a cut, then provided massage and sports therapy to the player.

The WADA appeal has reignited the case, with Sinner saying he has had sleepless nights over the issue.

The 23-year-old has pushed through the controversy to win the

US Open, as well as progressed to the final of the China Open, facing world No 3 Carlos Alcaraz.

"It's impressive what (Sinner's) been doing during the whole process of what's been happening, that he's been playing at such a high level," Djokovic said.

Both Sinner and Alcaraz are also in Shanghai for the Masters, where they, and Djokovic, are among the favorites.

The Serbian is aiming for a 100th singles title — which he said was "extra motivation" — but admitted

he had "some catching up to do", as he hadn't played many tournaments recently.

"Hopefully, I can use that freshness in a way, and also the past experiences and success I had," he said.

Djokovic is a four-time champion in Shanghai, but has not played there for five years.

Asked what the secret to his previous success was, he laughed: "I love dumplings and the Chinese language, I think that helps!"

AFP