

Never too late

Seniors develop poise, sense of pride, self-worth through ballet

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Beijing solidifies its appeal as global hub for investment

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Melting pot

Nepalese surgeon reflects on city's recent progress in serving people

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CHINA DAILY

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Folk artistes perform the dragon dance amid a traditional hammered molten iron fireworks display at a temple fair in Beijing, during Spring Festival on Feb 4. On Wednesday, UNESCO inscribed Spring Festival to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, marking global recognition of the vibrant celebrations and cherished cultural traditions. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

UNESCO recognizes traditional festival's promotion of harmony

By YANG FEIYUE yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese people have expressed their immense joy and pride over the recent honor bestowed upon Spring Festival, the country's oldest and most important traditional festival.

On Wednesday, UNESCO inscribed Spring Festival — the social practices of the Chinese people in celebration of their traditional new year — on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The decision was made during the 19th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Asuncion, Paraguay, in recognition of the festival's rich tapestry of social practices, rituals and cultural elements that engage the entire Chinese society.

The news quickly topped the chart of popular topics on social media platform Sina Weibo, garnering over 400 million views as of 7 pm on Thursday.

Reacting to the UNESCO honor, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said on Thursday that Spring Festival embodies the values of peace, harmony and unity cherished by the Chinese people and the Chinese civilization.

It is not just a Chinese festival but a global one, he said, noting that nearly 20 countries have designated the first day of the first month of the Chinese lunar calendar as a public holiday, with about one-fifth of the world's population participating in various forms of celebration.

Lin also extended a warm invitation to people worldwide to visit China and experience the vibrant festivities firsthand.

Spring Festival, which marks the beginning of Chinese New Year, witnesses practices including wishing for good fortune, organizing family reunions and promoting social harmony. Such celebrations are known as *guonian*, or crossing the year.

Rao Quan, vice-minister of culture and tourism, who led the Chinese delegation at the UNESCO session, emphasized that Spring Festival provides lasting spiritual strength to the Chinese people, promoting family and social harmony, economic development, environmental protection and global cultural exchanges.

The UNESCO recognition of the festival will help promote universal values of peace and harmony and highlight the role of intangible cultural heritage in sustainable development, Rao added.

Kang Zhen, an expert on traditional culture and vice-president of Beijing Normal University, highlighted the profound impact the UNESCO recognition is expected to have on the global Chinese community.

"The inscription will strengthen cultural identity and connections, enhancing the sense of belonging among the Chinese people worldwide," he said.

Kang added that this acknowledgment would help establish Spring Festival as a "shared treasure of humanity", promoting its cultural traditions and values, and encouraging the preservation of other traditional festivals.

UNESCO's documentation noted that the traditional knowledge and customs associated with Spring Festival are passed down both informally within families and communities and formally through the education system. The festival's craftsmanship and artistic skills are transferred through apprenticeships, fostering family values, social cohesion and peace, while reinforcing cultural identity, it said.

Kang said he believes that these enduring characteristics will only grow stronger with time and technological advancements, enhancing people-to-people relations and mutual understanding.

Chen Hongyu, an intangible cultural heritage scholar at Nanjing University of the Arts in Jiangsu province, said the UNESCO recognition underscores the importance of preserving cultural diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue. He highlighted diverse activities such as the custom of displaying New Year paintings.

Wu Xin, a cultural expert, said the Taibo Temple Fair, a Spring Festival celebration in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, during which locals worship their ancestors on the ninth day of the Chinese New Year, will gain greater visibility and influence following the UNESCO inscription.

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Xi: Build strong information support force

President stresses role of PLA's newest branch amid new round of technological revolutions

By MO JINGXI mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has called for efforts to build a strong and modernized information support force and to realize leapfrog development of the Chinese military's network information system.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks when making his first inspection of the newest branch in the Chinese military on Wednesday.

Known as the Information Support Force of the People's Liberation Army, the newly established unit, which reports directly to the Central Military Commission, was inaugurated in April by Xi, who described it as a vital power in modern warfare.

The establishment of the new force is a major decision made by the CPC Central Committee and the CMC that aims to build a strong PLA, and a strategic step to establish a new structure of services and improve the military system with Chinese characteristics.

Speaking to the force's officers and soldiers on Wednesday, Xi said the network information system in modern warfare now plays an unprecedentedly prominent role as a new round of rapid development in technological and military revolutions is taking place with forms of warfare evolving at an accelerated pace.

Noting that the Information Support Force is first and foremost a combat force, Xi stressed that the unit must speed up the construction of the network information system which is extremely important for building a strong military, and urged the unit to build up its capabilities to provide service support for enhancing combat preparedness.

Xi said the new force should focus on its capabilities to fight and win, improve its methods of providing information service, steadily advance the building of a public service platform for network information, and make good use of various data and information in an integrated way.

He also required the unit to pay high attention to network information security and take the lead in innovating the mode of command and transforming combat methods.

As the Information Support Force is newly established, Xi stressed the need for it to reinforce its foundation of development and remain committed to the Party's absolute leadership over the people's armed forces.

It is necessary to strictly enforce discipline and combat corruption to ensure that the military remains absolutely loyal, absolutely pure and absolutely reliable, he said.

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AI'S GLOBAL VILLAGE OPENS WIDER TO MORE VOICES

Developers look to break from yoke of English language, cater to all groups of people

By OASIS HU in Hong Kong oasis@chinadailyhk.com

Artificial intelligence engineer Jacky Chan Ho-kit has conflicting feelings about his industry.

While he looks forward to a future where AI reaches its pinnacle — possessing humanlike cognitive capabilities — he is deeply



concerned that it will only understand English.

"Given the language status quo, this is highly likely to be a reality rather than just alarmism," he said.

Chan is the chief technology officer at Votee, a Hong Kong-based AI firm. He is also a language enthusiast who in his free time follows language bloggers on social media, absorbing their linguistic insights. Through his research, he has learned that many languages are disappearing.

Even though there are around 7,000 languages still in use globally,

according to the World Atlas of Languages of UNESCO, only 10 boast more than 200 million speakers. UNESCO has said that a language vanishes every two weeks, with 25 disappearing annually.

In the online realm, the disparity in language usage rates is even more pronounced.

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Political turmoil



French Prime Minister Michel Barnier reacts after delivering a speech during a debate on a no-confidence motion against his government at the National Assembly on Wednesday in Paris, France. Barnier submitted his resignation after 331 out of 577 lawmakers voted against him. SARAH MEYSSONNIER / REUTERS See story, page 10

China's initiatives promote stability in Asia-Pacific

President Xi Jinping, in his speech in November at the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Lima, Peru, chalked out a new holistic and comprehensive road map for greater inclusiveness and openness to promote economic and international cooperation, through an open and integrated Asia-Pacific.

Xi called for staying committed to multilateralism and an open economy, firmly upholding the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core, and advancing regional economic integration.



By Zulkafli Hassan Khan

Hopefully, a fair, free, transparent and equitable trading system will further enhance and expand the scope, utility and importance of regional economic integration in the Asia-Pacific.

Xi's suggestions are timely in facilitating a positive, productive and participatory trading system producing win-win situations for

every country in the region.

In recent years, China has concluded in principle a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with the European Union, and applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, vividly reflecting its strong desire for further opening-up and cooperation.

From systemic reform to institutional openness, China is integrating its efforts to support high international economic and trade standards and actively participating in interna-

tional economic and trade rule negotiations through the Belt and Road Initiative and the China International Import Expo.

The China International Fair for Trade in Services and the China International Consumer Products Expo also clearly illustrate China's vision for trade liberalization and economic globalization.

China is moving toward further high-level opening-up and economic integration in the Asia-Pacific.

While pledges made by the United States in the Asia-Pacific often fail to materialize, resulting in emp-

ty promises and widespread disappointment, China-led BRI cooperation in the region presents a stark contrast. Chinese involvement in the region has directly improved education, healthcare, employment and more.

Xi has outlined a futuristic road map for the Asia-Pacific, comprising green transformation and development of qualitative industrialization, digitalization, innovation and, above all, open economic cooperation, which is the way forward to rescue economies, communities and nations' building capacities from global warming and economic protectionism.

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PAGE TWO



ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

Models: Preserving integrity of languages

From page 1

Over the last decade, English content has dominated the internet, accounting for 49.4 percent as of Nov 26 — more than eight times the use of Spanish, the second most prevalent online language at 6 percent, according to a report by W3Techs, a company that conducts global web surveys.

Conversely, the proportion of web pages that use Chinese, the second-most spoken language in the physical world with more than 1.1 billion speakers, has plummeted from 4.3 percent in 2013 to 1.2 percent in 2024.

In the realm of AI, prominent large language models, or LLMs, like OpenAI's ChatGPT4, Google's Gemini, and Anthropic's Claude all use English as their main language.

Mainstream AI language models, particularly those originating in the West, are made for English-speaking audiences, with translations for other languages serving as only a support function, said Cao Jiannong, chair professor in the Department of Computing at Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Artificial intelligence is a field devoted to developing technologies that can replicate or even surpass human intelligence. Before this vision becomes real, large-scale AI companies will continue to prioritize enhancing AI's intelligence ability, instead of expanding their services to encompass more languages, Cao added.

Chan, CTO at Votee, agreed that the endgame of AI is humanlike intelligence, but questions the consequences if such intelligence can only speak English.

"Wouldn't it be even more unfair to non-English speakers? Wouldn't global cultural diversity be greatly eroded? Wouldn't the gap between the world's rich and poor be wider?" Chan said.

Since last year, Votee, which previously concentrated on automated data collection and analysis, has shifted its focus to developing AI services for lesser-used languages.

This year, it unveiled a Cantonese LLM and is actively pursuing clients in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Chinese mainland. Future initiatives include the launch of LLMs and other AI services for Javanese in Indonesia, Okinawan in the southern region of Japan, and various Chinese dialects including Shanghaiese and Hakka.

"In an increasingly polarized world, we aim to utilize technology to bridge this gap," Chan said.

Data scarcity

The cornerstone of training AI lies in data. A significant hurdle in advancing AI's linguistic prowess is the scarcity of data available in

numerous languages, Chan said.

Of about 7,000 languages spoken worldwide, nearly 99 percent are considered low-resource languages, as the data available for computational processing and analysis is limited.

The fact that mainstream AI tools predominantly rely on English corpora, or collection of written text, leads to significant inconvenience when handling other languages, said Ting Pak-sun, CEO of Votee.

These AI tools often result in inaccuracies and biased content, cultural misunderstandings, business errors, and even legal violations, rendering them unsuitable for use in both casual and formal contexts, Ting said.

On the beneficial side, AI tools hold the potential to streamline operations, boost productivity, and have a direct impact on local economies.

At an investment summit in mid-November in Hong Kong, Daniel Pinto, president of JPMorgan Chase, said that AI contributed approximately \$1.3 billion to the group's finances last year, through cost reductions or revenue increases, with projections indicating a rise to \$2 billion this year.

Chan warned regions that are unable to leverage AI tools due to language limitations are likely to experience decreased productivity in the future.

To avoid lagging behind European and United States tech giants, governments and major tech firms in some regions have initiated the development of LLMs customized to their linguistic needs, Cao from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University said.

The UAE, for instance, introduced Jais, the highest-quality Arabic AI LLM, in 2023. This year, South Korea's LG Group unveiled Exaone 3, the country's inaugural open-source Korean AI model.

Smaller, nimbler

Many smaller companies around the world are also venturing into the creation of small language models, Cao said.

Asiabots Ltd, a Hong Kong-based artificial intelligence company established in 2017, is one such company.

Chris Shum Chiu-fai, co-founder and CEO of Asiabots, said that the company initially prioritized AI capabilities in Cantonese due to its Hong Kong location. However, over time an increasing number of clients have approached them for AI solutions in various languages.

Their clients encompass government bodies and private enterprises worldwide including from Southeast Asia and Europe. Instead of opting for large language models, they prefer small language models tailored to specific scenarios, such as AI-driven customer service, AI speech recognition technology, and AI text-to-speech tools.

Asiabots' clients include the Hong



Protecting the cultural value of a language is much more urgent than its commercial worth, yet it often receives inadequate attention."

Jacky Chan Ho-kit, chief technology officer at Votee Ltd, a Hong Kong-based AI firm

Kong Special Administrative Region government, which asked them to develop AI tools for translation services between Cantonese and Middle Eastern languages. The request followed this year's Policy Address, which called for attracting more Muslim tourists, and encouraged the city's taxi services to offer information in Arabic for visitors from the Middle East.

In July, a tourism company in Kunigami, Okinawa, Japan, engaged Asiabots to develop an AI tool capable of translating multiple languages, including minor ones such as Vietnamese.

"Japan is preparing to host the World Expo next year. With the anticipated increase in global tourism, many Japanese companies are seeking AI tools, leading to a surge in requests from Japan recently," Shum said.

Specialized needs

Many mainstream AI tools excel at translating between widely spoken languages such as English and Chinese. However, when faced with less common languages, these tools may falter in recognizing speech and converting it into text, resulting in numerous errors.

The primary issue lies in inadequate data for the specific language, Shum said. In some instances, countries with limited technological infrastructure may find that their online information is predominantly available in English, rather than their native language, as seen in the Philippines and Mongolia.

Some languages have a variety of pronunciations without standardized characters, such as Minnan, a dialect spoken in southern parts of China.

Other languages are fragmented into numerous dialects. In Indonesia, for example, there are more than 300 dialects, which increase the complexity and diversity of the language.

These challenges can be overcome as long as clients have the financial resources to collect the necessary data, Shum said.

Asiabots accumulates data from extensive research and non-infringing open-source repositories, he said. Clients also provide data to the company or fund

it to conduct on-site data collection.

After collecting the data, Asiabots collaborates with local universities and recruits native language speakers to refine and localize AI solutions, aligning them with regional cultures and legal frameworks to overcome cultural barriers.

Since its inception, Asiabots has expanded its AI's linguistic repertoire over the past seven years to 22 languages, including Indonesian, Filipino, Portuguese and Hindi, as well as less common dialects.

After establishing language capabilities, the company tailors AI software and hardware to meet specific customer requirements.

For instance, for the Okinawa tourist spot, Asiabots developed an AI translator capable of translating among five languages: Japanese, Chinese, English, Korean and Vietnamese. These languages can also be interchanged with any of the company's 22 language libraries when required, Shum said.

Endangered languages

While commercial demand ensures the survival of languages with a large offline population, those with few speakers, limited commercial interest, and insufficient technological research are at risk of becoming endangered both online and offline, Chan warned.

UNESCO has a classification system for endangered languages. Ones spoken across all age groups and contexts are considered safe, while languages that children no longer learn as their mother tongue are considered endangered. Those spoken solely by grandparents are in extreme peril, and those lacking speakers face extinction.

Based on this definition, even language dialects that are spoken by substantial populations, like Minnan and Hakka, which is primarily used in southern China, face a fight for survival as fewer young people are learning them.

Shum said not preserving an endangered language could lead to a deep sense of regret.

"There are various research directions in AI and we opted to delve into language study from the start, because behind each language lies a unique mode of thought and a profound reservoir of human wisdom," Shum said.

For instance, the Minnan term describing tears as "falling water" reflects a beautiful perspective. Losing such ways of thinking and expression is a loss of culture, and possibly even civilization, Shum said.

Chan said that language is a crucial vessel of intangible cultural heritage, showcasing the history, customs, habits and social relationships of a region, while forming a part of people's individual and collective identity.

"Protecting the cultural value of a language is much more urgent than its commercial worth, yet it often receives inadequate attention," he said.

By preserving the voice and text of a language through a language model, even if the original speakers disappear, people can access its nuances and written form and learn it whenever they want, Chan said.

Money talks

With hundreds of indigenous languages in Africa at risk of extinction, Votee has worked with clients on the continent to assist in language preservation efforts. However, significant challenges stem from Africa's political instability, limited technological proficiency and insufficient technology infrastructure.

In recent years, many clients have asked Asiabots to develop language models for the preservation of endangered languages.

However, all these projects faltered due to a lack of funding for data collection, such as sending researchers into remote mountainous regions to record voices, and process and digitize these recordings, which might cost millions of dollars.

Francis Fong Po-kiu, honorary president of the Hong Kong Information Technology Federation, said that the governments of smaller language communities should recognize the cultural value inherent in these languages.

Chan proposed that global tech firms, language-focused NGOs, linguists and language enthusiasts collaborate to form communities for mutual support and to encourage the contribution of open-source language data.

When developing its Cantonese LLM, Votee collaborated with Cantonese linguists and enthusiasts to establish a Cantonese-centered community. Subsequently, it open-sourced all the data and models within the LLM.

"Cantonese belongs to everyone, not just a select few — it already lacks resources, so why create additional boundaries?" Chan said.

In July this year, SenseTime, an AI software company in Hong Kong, launched a Thai-language LLM.

Lu Lewei, director of the SenseTime Research Institute, said that they paid attention to minor languages because equipping AI with multilingual capabilities is also good for its own improvement.

More importantly, AI was designed to assist humanity, and its future should prioritize broader accessibility and use, and not neglect some groups, Lu said.

"I believe this is the original intent, also the ultimate goal of humanity's pursuit of technological advancement," Lu said.

TOP NEWS



Table-tennis champion Ma Long, who was part of a college student delegation from the Chinese mainland to Taiwan, tries his hand at baseball on Sunday at Taichung, Taiwan. LU MEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

College students' trip to Taiwan boosts cross-Strait exchanges

By ZHANG YI
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The visit to the Taiwan region by a college student delegation, with members including Olympic table tennis champion Ma Long, has facilitated cross-Strait sports and cultural exchanges, igniting a wave of positivity and goodwill amid strained cross-Strait relations.

The delegation, comprising 40 mainland students and teachers, was invited by the Taiwan-based Ma Ying-jeou Culture and Education Foundation to visit the island. The group departed on Thursday after concluding a nine-day trip.

The group visited universities on the island for exchanges with their peers, and also traveled to historical and cultural sites including the Taipei Confucius Temple, where they learned about Confucian rituals and ceremonial instruments.

Ma, a six-time Olympic table tennis champion, was warmly welcomed by fans who asked him to sign autographs on table tennis paddles and pose for photos. Cheers erupted as Ma made his appearance, with the crowd chanting, "Captain Long, welcome to Taiwan!"

Ma, who has been the captain of the Chinese men's table tennis team since 2014, is also a postgraduate student at Beijing Sport University.

On Friday, he played in an exhibition table tennis match with Ma

Ying-jeou, former leader of Taiwan and former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang, at the Chinese Culture University in Taipei.

On Sunday, the delegation experienced baseball, one of the most popular sports in Taiwan, at the Taichung Intercontinental Baseball Stadium. They learned to swing bats to hit the ball under the instruction of Taiwan players. After two failed attempts, Ma Long succeeded on his third try, and jokingly said, "The first two were just bad examples!" His comment evoked laughter from the students who stood around.

Song Siyao, a member of the delegation and a student at Fudan University, congratulated the baseball team from Taiwan on its victory in the World Baseball Softball Confederation's Premier12 tournament. "Compatriots from both sides can work together to improve our country's performance in the field of baseball," she said.

Hsiao Hsu-tsen, executive director of the Ma Ying-jeou Culture and Education Foundation, said, "We should play ping-pong, not war."

Both sides of the Taiwan Strait share similarities as well as differences in perspectives, Hsiao said, adding that it's precisely because of this that communication is necessary — to understand each other's differences, reduce misunderstandings and minimize conflicts.

The visit by the mainland student

group to Taiwan holds special significance at this moment of strained cross-Strait relations, and the foundation will continue such activities, he said.

Qiu Yong, secretary of the Communist Party of China Tsinghua University Committee, who led the group, said that he expected more opportunities for young people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait to meet, understand each other and build friendships.

He emphasized that the connection between the two sides of the Strait will never be severed and the bonds of affection will never be obstructed.

Olympic shooting gold medalist Yang Qian from Tsinghua University was also a member of the delegation, which also included students from other mainland universities, including Peking University and Sun Yat-sen University.

It was the second such visit organized by the foundation. Last year, faculty members and students from five mainland universities were warmly received across Taiwan. In 2023 and 2024, Ma Ying-jeou also led youth groups from Taiwan on visits to the mainland.



Online
Watch the video
by scanning
the code.

Benefits of high-quality development in spotlight

China's pursuit injects positive factors into the world, experts say

By LIU ZHIHUA, WANG KEJU
and ZHOU LANXU

China's steadfast pursuit of high-quality development, which focuses on high-level opening-up and deepened reforms to further stimulate growth while bolstering economic resilience, not only serves the nation's interests, but also injects positive factors into global development, according to experts, business leaders and government officials from home and abroad.

They also said on Thursday that more efforts are needed to enhance the international community's understanding of China's economic outlook and the global benefits of its high-quality development, which they described as critical for shaping a better future for the world.

The remarks were made at a Vision China event that brought together representatives from international organizations, enterprises, universities and think tanks, who shared insights on China's high-quality development.

The event was jointly held by China Daily and the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

"Global attention is keenly focused on China's economic trajectory as a source of stability," said Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily.

"It is crucial for various stakeholders, including media, businesses, universities and think tanks, to proactively articulate the intrinsic logic of China's economic development story, and elucidate the interplay between China's high-level opening-up and the shared development of nations," Qu said.

Such efforts will foster a better understanding within the international community of China's economic development prospects and the dividends that its high-quality development offers to the world, he added.

Qiu Xiaoping, vice-chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, said that in-depth exchanges among renowned economists, chambers of commerce and business leaders from home and abroad are of great significance for promoting the high-quality development of China's economy and global common development.

Specifically, he said the high-quality growth of China's private

sector is set to advance with more robust strides, thanks to the momentum of reforms, the backing of supportive policies, the diligence of enterprises and the collective effort of Chinese society.

"Such progress will perpetually infuse fresh energy into the high-quality development of China's economy and harness the power of Chinese private enterprises to contribute to the prosperity and advancement of the global economy," he said.

Oton Solis, former special adviser to the president of Costa Rica, suggested that relevant high-quality development goals focusing on production, humanism, sustainability and globalization should be central to both scientific and social research as well as policymaking.

China, with its vast size, population, GDP and historical depth, is poised to play a pivotal role in "inspiring the world to move toward high-quality development," he said in a video speech.

During the event, all participants expressed robust confidence in the promising future of China's economy.

As the country intensifies endeavors to foster high-quality development and generate new growth momentum and vitality, its growth will benefit others as well, they emphasized.

"The bright future of China's economy toward high-quality development remains steadfast, undaunted by storms," said Qu, the China Daily publisher and editor-in-chief.

In addition, the Chinese economy, featuring high-level openness, offers a vast market and win-win opportunities to the world, and China's path to modernization presents the world with a Chinese solution and strength for shared prosperity, he said.

Jack Perry, chairman of the 48 Group and CEO of London Export Corp, highlighted that China's growth has been beneficial to people both within and beyond its borders. In his video speech, he also praised China's dedication to maintaining a high level of openness.

Steven Barnett, the International Monetary Fund's senior resident representative in China, said that 0.9 of a percentage point of the projected global growth of 3.2 percent for this year and next is expected to come from China.

That means the Chinese economy continues to be the primary engine

of global growth, contributing more than one-fourth of the world's economic expansion, he said.

Safdar Parvez, the Asian Development Bank's country director for China, said the institution expects China's growth in 2024 to be within the target range of about 5 percent set early this year, with recently announced proactive policy measures.

Huang Baoyin, Party secretary of the University of International Business and Economics, pointed out that developing new quality productive forces tailored to local conditions, refining incentive and constraint mechanisms that promote high-quality growth, cultivating new growth drivers, and leveraging greater opening-up are all critical elements of China's development strategy.

Marc Horn, president of Merck China, said the country stands out as a leader in innovation, driven by key strengths like outstanding adaptability and scalability.

"Thanks to an innovative ecosystem, China often quickly leads the world in the adoption of new and disruptive technologies," he added.

George Xu, executive vice-president of Airbus and CEO of Airbus China, said the company is inspired by China's commitment to high-quality development and high-level opening-up.

"The immense market size presents a unique opportunity not only for business growth, but also for the high-quality development of the entire industrial chain," Xu said.

Song Yang, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of Economics and research fellow at the university's National Academy of Development and Strategy, underscored that China is on the right track to common prosperity.

Also at the event, Qu, from China Daily, announced that it has been decided to integrate corporate communication resources, guided by the ethos of openness, to establish the China Daily Institute for Corporate Communication. The aim is to tell great stories of how Chinese and foreign enterprises grow with China.

"We will continually expand the global network of enterprise friendships, and drive the exchange and mutual learning of civilizations," he said.

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Tradition: Efforts needed to protect culture

From page 1

"The inclusion of Spring Festival on the UNESCO list is significant for tracing, revitalizing and promoting Chinese traditional culture," Wu said.

Pan Lusheng, vice-president of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, called the UNESCO honor an effective response to cultural dissemination.

Calling for continued efforts to protect and carry forward the rich culture of Spring Festival, Pan

The inclusion of Spring Festival on the UNESCO list is significant for tracing, revitalizing and promoting Chinese traditional culture."

Wu Xin,
Chinese cultural expert

emphasized the urgent need for studying and preserving traditional festivals.

Last year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution designating Spring Festival as an official UN holiday, signaling its gradual recognition as a global celebration.

With the recent addition, China now has 44 cultural elements or practices recognized by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Region: Road map outlined for green, digital future

From page 1

It is a good omen that China, with a view to contributing to high-quality development of the Asia-Pacific, has once again put forward initiatives for the digitalization of commerce and trading systems, such as the application of digital bill of lading, capacity-building on green supply chains, exchanges and dialogue on approaches to artificial intelligence and the digitalization of food supply chains.

Critical analysis reveals that in recent years, China has placed significant emphasis on sustainable economic and social development, actively implementing the concept of green development.

Over the past decade, China has made remarkable contributions to

global green transformation through its continuous technological advancements, complete industrial supply chains and favorable market environment.

It is pertinent to mention that China's green energy development has become a driving force for global energy transition, countering global inflation pressures while also addressing climate change.

China has established a relatively complete supply chain for wind and solar power industries at home, while actively integrating into the global clean energy supply chain, continuously sharing high-quality clean energy products with the world.

China's expertise in innovation and photovoltaic technologies have set new world records in conversion efficiency, with mass-produced

Xi's vision for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation is for greater trade, digitalization of economies, green transformation, integrated customs mechanisms, easy and smooth e-commerce and, above all, greater banking and financial integration as the way forward.

advanced crystalline silicon photovoltaic cells now achieving conversion efficiencies exceeding 25 percent, reducing carbon footprints in the Asia-Pacific.

It is indeed a great workable suggestion consolidating further cooperation in economics, technology, artificial intelligence, digitalization and green transformation among the countries of the Asia-Pacific. Inclusiveness, integration, openness, modernization and qualitative industrialization would further boost regional economies and manufacturing sectors.

Initiatives proposed by Xi, including the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, and shared prosperity, can be guarantors of peace, stability,

harmony and multiculturalism in the Asia-Pacific.

Xi's suggestions and proposals are holistic, comprehensive, positive, productive and participatory, promoting regional socioeconomic integration and prosperity, facilitating the eradication of poverty, the generation of new jobs, women's empowerment, successful handling of nonstate actors, and enhancing qualitative industrialization, gearing the region's economies toward quick recovery.

In summary, Xi's appeals and proposals are workable, promoting peace, stability, harmony and the spirit of peaceful conflict resolution in the Asia-Pacific.

In fact, these appeals are based on the golden principles of development, dialogue, diplomacy and political determination to cater to the present needs and future demands of the Asia-Pacific.

China's transparency and easy

accessibility invite all stakeholders, policymakers, potential traders and investors to invest in China without fear. China's Global Cross-Border Data Flow Cooperation Initiative vividly reflects its strong commitment toward a fair, free and equitable economic world order, and a greater role in global governance and the development of the Global South and underdeveloped countries.

Simply put, Xi's vision for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation is for greater trade, digitalization of economies, green transformation, integrated customs mechanisms, easy and smooth e-commerce and, above all, greater banking and financial integration as the way forward.

The author is director of The Center for South Asia & International Studies, a nongovernmental organization based in Islamabad, Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Students pose for a group photo before the start of the Vision China event, that was co-hosted by China Daily, in Beijing on Thursday. The event was themed "High-Quality Development: Shaping the Future". WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Rope factory secures new business with tech

By ZHAO RUIXUE
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During a livestream, Zhang Shuyuan takes viewers on a tour of a factory that produces nets in Lizhuang town of Binzhou, Shandong province.

Engaging with the online audience, Zhang answers questions and provides insights into the manufacturing process, including the technologies allowing the nets to block sunlight efficiently.

After graduating from a university in Shanghai, Zhang, 23, returned to his hometown last year to develop his family business.

"My grandfather has been involved in the rope industry since the 1990s, and my father, along with fellow villagers, has been instrumental in advancing the rope and net industry in our town," Zhang said.

"I hope to contribute to the development of the rope industry in my hometown with new ideas such as promoting our products on e-commerce platforms."

With a history spanning 300 years in making ropes and net products, Lizhuang has developed over 300 products, including those used in construction and sports.

These products hold a market share of over 80 percent nationwide and are exported to more than 100 countries and regions worldwide, including the Middle East, Europe and East Asia.

"There was a period when our products struggled to meet market demand due to the similarity among products produced by rope and net manufacturers in our town. We needed to innovate and diversify to tap into new markets," said Zhang Weisheng, Zhang Shuyuan's father.

"Fortunately, the town government provided timely support. Measures like equipment upgrades and expert training have been helpful in navigating challenges and staying competitive," added the father.

Under the guidance of local

authorities, rope and net producers have participated in trade fairs and international exhibitions, facilitating market expansion and diversification into sectors such as agriculture, sports, leisure and deep-sea aquaculture.

At Zhanpeng Net Co's workshop in Lizhuang, a new batch of products tailored for export to the Middle East is in production. These nets incorporate additives that produce an unpleasant flavor in animals' mouths, effectively deterring them from chewing the ropes.

While traditionally focused on safety and dust protection nets for construction, Zhanpeng Net witnessed a decline in demand and profitability in recent years.

Collaboration with academic institutions led to product enhancements, including improved durability and anti-aging properties, enabling access to new markets and applications.

Energized by technological advancements, local companies are transitioning toward specialized functional rope nets, including weed control nets, deep-sea cage nets and high-performance polymer drag nets.

In recent years, a growing number of young entrepreneurs have returned to their hometowns, injecting fresh energy into the rope industry. Through online operations and e-commerce, they have expanded market reach and sales channels for rope products.

"Since 2023, we have been utilizing internet platforms for sales and promotion, attracting clients from diverse regions. In July, we ventured into international markets, with overseas sales reaching three million," Zhang Shuyuan said.

To propel the rope and net industry toward cutting-edge advancements, the town will develop more cooperative relationships between businesses and research institutions, said Li Peng, Party secretary of the town.

These partnerships aim to drive innovation in areas such as biodegradable high-performance ropes tailored for the aerospace and aviation industries, he said.



A worker checks a net produced in a factory in Lizhuang town of Binzhou, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Members of Ballet Grandmas take a group photo in Changchun, Jilin province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Seniors discover poise and confidence through ballet

Classes focus on gentle movements that improve posture and strengthen muscles

By LIU MINGTAI in Changchun
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In a brightly lit dance studio in Changchun, Jilin province, a group of women wearing leotards and ballet dresses hold their positions and move gracefully across the floor. This is no ordinary ballet class — it's the rehearsal space of Ballet Grandmas, a senior ballet troupe at Jilin Province Community Senior Citizen University. Elegance and determination displayed by members of the troupe prove that it's never too late to pursue a dream.

For many members aged 40 to over 70, ballet is more than a hobby — it's a youth dream revived.

"When I was young, I was fascinated by Chinese ballet performances like *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White Haired Girl*," said 70-year-old Kong Xiaoli, one of the troupe's first members. "But life got in the way. Retirement gave me the time to do what I've always loved."

Many joined the troupe with no dance experience, yet it didn't stop them. "I hadn't learned ballet dance before," said Zhang Meizhu who is in her 70s and has osteoporosis. Her family initially opposed her joining the troupe, fearing she might injure herself. But she refused to give up.

"Now, they can see how much healthier and happier I am. I've never felt so alive," she said.

Another member, Zhang Weihua, 56, overcame her family's skepticism through sheer persistence. When they saw how confi-



Members of the troupe practice at Jilin Province Community Senior Citizen University.

dent and radiant she became, they started to support her chasing her dancing dream in retirement.

The troupe's journey never lacked challenges. Ballet requires discipline, flexibility and balance — skills that don't come easily later in life.

"Standing en pointe is hard for anyone," said Kong. "But we've learned to embrace the process to perform with flexibility and strength."

Their perseverance and practice paid off.

In October last year, the troupe traveled to the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region for a cultural exchange performance, bringing home six awards.

Behind the success of the troupe

is their teacher, Li Yanfei, a certified ballet instructor.

"Other cities, like Shenyang (in Liaoning province), Harbin (in Heilongjiang province), Wuhan (in Hubei province) and Beijing have senior ballet troupes, so why shouldn't Jilin have one too?" she said. With a vision to bring ballet to seniors in her hometown, she started senior ballet courses to teach basic skills, which subsequently developed into today's ballet troupe for the elderly.

Her initiative quickly attracted followers.

"During my first public class, more than 60 people showed up. The room was so packed that we couldn't even fit everyone," Li said. To accommodate demand, she split

the group into smaller classes, each with about 20 students. Over time, some of these beginners became founding members of Ballet Grandmas.

Li designed classes tailored to seniors, focusing on gentle movements that improve posture, strengthen muscles and relieve joint pain.

"It was incredible to see them evolve," she said. "From learning to hold the barre for balance to finally performing en pointe gracefully, their dedication has been inspiring."

Beyond teaching techniques, Li used ballet to instill a sense of pride and self-worth in her students. Ballet isn't just about movement — it's about feeling beautiful and strong. It's a safe and scientific art that people at any period of their lives can learn, she said.

"Every time I dance, I feel like I've turned back the clock," said Kong. "Ballet has taught me that beauty and strength never age."

Ballet has brought more than personal transformation. It has fostered a sense of community and belonging among the women. During rehearsals, they support each other, sharing laughter and encouragement, striving for the upcoming performances.

Members of the troupe have not only learned to dance — they're proving that life, like ballet, can be full of elegance and possibilities, no matter when you start, Li said.

There is always a chance to step into the spotlight and shine, she said.

Guo Yanqi contributed to this story.

Shandong extends marital leave to boost childbearing

JINAN — Shandong, China's second-most populated province, plans to extend marital leave in order to provide additional support for newlyweds in an effort to boost local childbearing.

Shandong is expected to prolong the current three-day marital leave to 15 days for people who go through legal marriage registration. Those who participate in premarital medical examinations will have an additional three days of marital leave.

On Nov 25, the provincial health commission began soliciting opinions from the public on the possible extension of marital leave for local couples.

Since China implemented its three-child policy and supporting measures in 2021, most provincial-level regions across the country have extended marriage leave. Among them, Shanxi in North China and Gansu in Northwest China offer the longest marriage leave, with up to 30 days, while Henan in

Central China provides 21 days, which can be extended to 28 days for those who participate in premarital medical examinations.

Tian Yang, a researcher at the institute of population and social development of the Shandong Academy of Social Sciences, explained that in recent years, young people of marriageable age in China have shown a declining desire to tie the knot and bear children, a fact that is receiving greater attention from governments at all levels.

Extending marital leave is projected to help increase the marriage rate, which signals a progressive trend conducive to building a fertility-friendly society. "This is a humanistic measure by government departments to provide support and encouragement on marriage and childbearing issues," Tian added.

Chen Xiaoqian, an associate researcher at the Shandong Academy of Social Sciences, said it is necessary for local governments to

“This is a humanistic measure by government departments to provide support and encouragement on marriage and childbearing issues.”

Tian Yang, researcher from the Shandong Academy of Social Science

provide holiday support in policies related to marriage and premarital examinations.

"Marriage and childbirth are very complicated processes, especially for young people who are getting married or having children for the first time," said Chen, who favors the plan.

Marriage is both a joyous occasion and a labor-intensive event, requiring the handling of a series of matters, such as preparing for the wedding, visiting relatives and

friends, and performing ancestral worship, according to Chen.

"Newlyweds also need to make some physical and psychological preparations before and after the premarital examination. They may even be too busy to conduct an accurate premarital check-up without enough marital leave," Chen said.

Liu Zijiang from Qingdao, Shandong, plans to walk down the aisle next spring. "Extending marital leave also provides a buffer period to adjust our mindset and start a new chapter in life with a more positive and joyful mood," she said.

Marriage is one of the most important events in one's life, and the proposal to extend marital leave has made her feel the care and support of society toward young couples, she added.

Shandong has more than 101 million permanent residents. The provincial capital Jinan introduced a policy last year to grant a monthly childcare subsidy of 600 yuan (\$83) for the second and third child born after Jan 1, 2023 in the same family. This subsidy is provided until the child reaches the age of 3.

XINHUA

Carpenter rescues wife in black bear attack

CHENGDU — Mu Guangcai's heart still races with fear as he recounts his harrowing battle with a black bear.

The 58-year-old, who at 1.57 meters tall and weighing just over 50 kilograms, was smaller and lighter than the bear, somehow managed to overpower it and rescue his wife from the jaws of death. The terrifying incident unfolded on Nov 20, when a black bear burst into their yard in Zixin village, Sichuan province, knocking his wife to the ground. "I grabbed a hammer, aiming for the bear's head, but I was afraid of accidentally hitting my wife. So instead, I struck its back," he said.

The bear released his wife but then knocked him to the ground. Their dog started barking incessantly, which distracted the bear and helped shift its focus. "I seized the opportunity to grab an axe and strike at the bear," Mu said, adding that, as a carpenter, tools are

always within reach in his home.

Furious, the bear lunged at him once more, pinning Mu into a corner. Unable to move, his mind focused solely on fighting with everything he had. "In that moment, I grabbed a carpenter's adze and struck the bear again. Finally, it collapsed," he said.

The black bear was killed and its lifeless body was sent to a local university. With approval from the relevant authorities, it will be used for scientific research and educational purposes.

Mu said he had sustained bruises on his back and a dislocated arm, while his wife suffered multiple injuries to her head, face, chest and back. Neither of them is in a life-threatening condition and they are both receiving treatment at the hospital, with the costs covered by the government's wildlife liability insurance.

XINHUA

BUSINESS

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Yangtze River Delta set to up innovation

Region's R&D intensity increased from 2.81% in 2018 to 3.34% in 2023

By CHINA DAILY

The Yangtze River Delta region, a cornerstone of China's economic landscape, is poised for a future defined by heightened cooperation and a steadfast commitment to cross-regional cooperation in innovation and industry, the YRD region has solidified its status as an economic powerhouse. Noteworthy statistics showcase the region's economic ascent, with its share of the country's total GDP climbing from 23.9 percent in 2018 to 24.4 percent in 2023. Impressively, nine cities within the region now feature economies surpassing 1 trillion yuan (\$140 bil-

lion) annually, representing one third of such urban areas nationwide.

Central to this remarkable growth trajectory has been a deliberate shift toward high-quality economic development, exemplified by a surge in R&D expenditures. The region's R&D intensity has surged from 2.81 percent in 2018 to 3.34 percent in 2023. This dedication to groundbreaking research has garnered international acclaim, with Shanghai-Suzhou and Nanjing, Jiangsu province securing the fifth and ninth positions, respectively, in the 2024 Global Innovation Index's ranking of the top 100 science and technology urban clusters.

Gu Jun, director of the YRD Regional Cooperation Office, hailed these achievements as emblematic of the regions economic resilience



Tourists congregate at the Bund area of Shanghai. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

and dynamism. Gu emphasized the successful implementation of the third round of the Three-Year Action Plan for Integrated Development of the YRD Region, a pivotal roadmap guiding the region's progress from 2024 to 2026.

A linchpin in the region's success story has been collaborative endeavors, such as the joint research program spearheaded by comprehensive national science centers in Shanghai's Zhangjiang high-tech industrial development zone and Anhui's provincial capital

Hefei. These partnerships have birthed 12 innovation alliances and a roster of 41 demand-driven research tasks for the region's third phase, fostering a fertile ground for cutting-edge discoveries and advances.

As the YRD region looks to the future, officials underscored the paramount importance of sustained collaboration in navigating the complexities of a rapidly evolving global landscape. Zhang Zhongwei, executive deputy director of the YRD Regional Cooperation Office, emphasized the necessity of a dual-pronged

strategy to fortify regional integration, blending governmental initiatives with the vibrancy of market forces.

"To propel integrated development in the Yangtze River Delta, we must establish robust institutional frameworks within our operational mechanisms," Zhang said. "This institutional setup encompasses both governmental and market dimensions, embodying two-wheel drive and mutual empowerment of governmental and market forces."

Luo Bin contributed to this story.

Beijing boosts its appeal to global investors

China's capital city of Beijing has solidified its appeal as a hub for foreign investment through continuous efforts to improve its business environment.

Beijing is home to 252 regional headquarters of multinational companies and 149 foreign-funded research and development (R&D) centers. In the first eight months of 2024, 121 major foreign-funded R&D centers in the municipality invested 13.77 billion yuan (\$1.89 billion) in R&D, up 29.9 percent year-on-year.

"Beijing has consistently prioritized improving its business environment as a crucial strategy to transform government functions, boost the vitality of enterprises and strengthen the internal drivers of economic growth," Beijing's Deputy Mayor Sima Hong said.

For seven consecutive years, the Beijing municipal government has updated its business environment reform plan, introducing more than 1,500 reform measures in the process.

Tetsuro Homma, executive vice-president of Panasonic Holdings Corp and group chief executive for China & Northeast Asia, told Xinhua that since Panasonic established its joint venture in Beijing in 1987, the company has witnessed and benefited significantly from improvements in the city's business environment.

"China boasts a vast market, a comprehensive industrial and supply chain, strong adaptability to new technologies, and immense economic development potential, offering enterprises extensive opportunities for growth," said Homma.

"Major foreign firms are bullish on China's long-term growth prospects," said Li Yang, secretary-general of the Beijing Association of Enterprises with Foreign Investment, while adding that foreign firms continue to regard the country as a preferred investment destination.

To improve its business environment further, Beijing is also striving to transform and elevate its reform achievements into regulations.

On July 1, Beijing's first special regulation on foreign investment took effect. Moreover, Beijing on Friday passed newly revised regulations on optimizing its business environment, representing the capital's latest effort to promote further opening-up and boost its appeal among global investors. This regulation took effect in 2020 and was first revised in 2022.

Zhang Jiachun, managing partner of Chinese law firm East & Concord Partners, noted that this effort will further foster a stable, fair, transparent and predictable business environment.

"The revision of the regulation demonstrates the municipal government's strong commitment to enhancing the business environment and supporting enterprise development in the city, which reinforces our confidence in growing in Beijing," said Yu Feng, president of Honeywell China, adding that the company will expand its investment in the capital.

Honeywell, a Fortune 500 company headquartered in the United States, has been present in the Chinese market for nearly 90 years. It has formed a full value chain in China, ranging from manufacturing and technology R&D to procurement and supply chain, and has actively joined hands with upstream and downstream enterprises in the supply chain to effectively integrate into local economic development.

Services sector continues to expand

By CHINA DAILY

China's services sector has remained in expansionary territory for 23 consecutive months, highlighting the resilience and growth potential of the economy during the country's economic structural transformation.

The Caixin China General Services Purchasing Managers' Index, a private gauge of the country's services activity, came in at 51.5 in November, down from 52 in October but firmly above the 50-mark since January 2023, pointing to a gradual increase in services activity.

"China's services sector experienced some monthly fluctuations in November. Despite a slight decline in the index, it remained above the 50-point threshold, signaling continued expansion in the sector," said Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank.

These gains are largely driven by the gradual effects of domestic macroeconomic policies, particularly the unprecedented incremental measures rolled out since September, which have significantly boosted market expectations, Zhou added.

Chang Haizhong, executive director of corporates at Fitch Bohua, said that business activity has remained in expansionary territory for 23 consecutive months, highlighting the resilience and growth potential of China's services sector during the country's economic structural transformation.

In fact, over the past decade, the contribution of the services sector to GDP has consistently exceeded 50



Employees sort packages at a logistics center in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province. GENG YUHE / FOR CHINA DAILY

percent (except in 2020), even surpassing 60 percent, Chang said. "In the long term, as China's economic transformation continues and demographic changes unfold, the services sector's contribution to GDP is expected to keep increasing," he added.

Recent data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, which cover a larger number of enterprises compared to the Caixin index, show that the services PMI remained steady at 50.1 in November.

As the impact of the National Day holiday subsided, business activity indices for sectors linked to travel — such as retail, accommodation and dining — saw declines to varying degrees, said Ming Ming, chief economist at CITIC Securities.

"Looking ahead, the continued implementation of supportive macroeconomic policies is expected to spur a recovery in effective demand, driving a rebound in the vitality of the services sector," he added.

However, the overall momentum of expansion in the services sector remains subdued. Some enterprises are grappling with weak demand recovery, mounting input cost pressures, and intense industry competition, said Zhou.

Looking ahead, Zhou said the services sector is still expected to main-

tain its growth momentum. "Strengthened domestic policy implementation is set to accelerate the effects of both existing and new measures, effectively navigating the challenges of a complex domestic and global economic environment," he added.

"Policies already in place, such as domestic measures to stabilize the real estate market, equipment upgrades and exchange policies for consumer goods, along with new support for the manufacturing sector, not only help to boost the recovery of consumption and investment but are also expected to drive growth in the services sector," he said.

The confidence in services sector businesses continues to improve, with the business expectation index in November reaching a seven-month high within the expansion range, according to Caixin.

Zhou said that the confidence of services sector businesses is primarily driven by the steady recovery of the domestic economy, increased market demand for orders and the potential effects of both existing and new domestic policies yet to be unleashed.

Yin Mingyue contributed to this story.

China slams US tariffs on photovoltaic goods

By WANG KEJU and LIU YUKUN

China has expressed concerns over the United States' new tranche of tariffs on solar product imports from four Southeast Asian nations, and called on Washington to jointly maintain the free trade of new energy products, the Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday.

Moreover, such tariffs will push up solar power costs in the US, with the losses ultimately borne by its own enterprises and consumers, officials and analysts said, adding that it will drive up the country's costs of meeting its energy transition goals.

"The US has shown a clear result-oriented approach in its investigation of photovoltaic products from Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia," said He Yadong, a spokesman for the ministry, stressing that China is worried about the US tendency to turn trade remedy investigations into political tools and suggested that the investigation's results were predetermined.

According to a preliminary decision released by the US Department of Commerce on Friday, it announced duties of up to 271.28 percent on solar products from the four nations, depending on the country and company in question.

In recent years, a number of Chinese photovoltaic companies have invested and operated in various Southeast Asian countries, making positive contributions to local economic and social development, He said.

The US move to levy these tariffs will inevitably affect the operations and competitiveness of these Chinese enterprises in the region. Chinese firm Jinko Solar, for instance, has received duties of 21.31 percent for its products made in Malaysia and 56.51 percent for those produced in Vietnam.

Trina Solar, another Chinese firm, has been slapped with a dumping margin of 77.85 percent for products it makes in Thailand and 54.46 percent for those it manufactures in Vietnam. A hefty 53.30 percent duty on solar products manufactured by China's JA Solar in Vietnam has also been levied.

The US should abandon its protectionist practices and work with the international community to jointly maintain the free trade of new energy products like solar panels in order to contribute to the global fight against climate

change, He said.

By restricting access to affordable solar products, the US is essentially shifting the burden onto its own enterprises and consumers, thus undermining the competitiveness and development of its domestic solar industry, analysts said.

In line with the goal of the US Department of Energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, solar deployment in the US needs to grow by an average of 30 gigawatts alternating current each year between now and 2025 and ramp up to 60 GW per year between 2025 and 2030.

While the US is on track to fulfill its domestic installation demand for solar panels backed by policy stimulus, its dependence on imports still persists in the silicon wafer and cell sectors, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Unlike solar panel manufacturing, which can be readily expanded through investments, the solar cell and silicon wafer industry chains involve intricate technology inputs, posing challenges for rapid expansion, Lin said.

To meet US renewable energy objectives and increase solar installations, the US will continue to require imported equipment. However, imposing higher tariffs would mean that this expense would be distributed among consumers and local enterprises, Lin said.

According to a recent report by the Clean Energy Associates in the US, these new tariffs could lead to an increase in the cost of solar cells and modules "to a level that would severely limit the supply and installation of solar energy in the US."

The report found that potential new antidumping/countervailing duties could raise the price of US-made solar modules by \$0.10 per watt and imported modules by \$0.15 per watt, which would "significantly affect" the economic viability of solar projects.

The US Commerce Department's final determinations are set for April 18, 2025, with the final duties subject to change. The department's International Trade Administration is then set to finalize its determinations on June 2, followed by an issuance of orders on June 9.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

XINHUA

Briefly

Central bank conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 37.3 billion yuan (\$5.19 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.5 percent on Thursday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system adequate at a reasonable level in the banking system, the central bank said. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank pur-

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

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 55 pips to 7.1879 against the US dollar on Thursday, according to the China

Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Hydrogen energy forecast to see rapid development in nation

By ZHENG XIN
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China is poised to experience a boom in hydrogen energy development, driven by strong government policies and a rapid decline in renewable energy costs, according to industry experts.

With government-backed incentives, a growing infrastructure for hydrogen production and storage, and a complementary synergy with solar and wind energy, the number of hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles in operation nationwide is projected to reach around 45,000 by the end of 2025, according to the Hydrogen Energy Industry Promotion Association (HEIPA).

The market size for vehicle-mounted hydrogen storage cylinders in China is expected to reach approximately 38 billion yuan (\$5.23 billion) to 46 billion yuan between 2025 and 2030, said HEIPA, which is under the China Association for the Promotion of Industrial Development, a Beijing-based trade body.

According to HEIPA, China is positioning itself to become a global leader in hydrogen energy development in the coming years. As of October, China has sold a total of approximately 22,790 hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. The government plans to have around 50,000 fuel cell vehicles in operation by 2025.

Hydrogen energy, as a rich, green and efficient secondary energy source, has become a key pathway for the global energy system's clean and low-carbon transformation. As of November, 53 countries and regions worldwide have developed hydrogen industry development strategies or roadmaps, it said.

China has released over 20 national-level policies to support the hydrogen energy industry this year, covering various areas such as standards development, technological innovation, infrastructure, dem-

onstration and promotion, and equipment upgrades, said Wei Suo, head of HEIPA.

The policy framework is continuously being refined and improved, he said.

Wei said the development of the hydrogen energy sector has shifted from focusing on technological breakthroughs in key areas and pilot demonstrations in the transportation sector to achieving technological advancements across the entire industry chain and scaling up applications in multiple fields.

"Research across the industry chain is also gradually moving from complete vehicle manufacturing to core material development, applied technology research and fundamental research," he said.

Transportation is a leading sector in the development of the hydrogen energy industry, with its commercialization playing a critical role in driving broader industry growth. China has prioritized expanding the use of hydrogen in transportation as a key strategy for accelerating the development of the hydrogen sector, rolling out a series of supportive policies, said the association.

Industry experts believe hydrogen energy, as a clean and versatile energy source, holds the potential to significantly reduce carbon emissions and drive the transformation of the energy sector.

Su Wei, China's chief climate negotiator, said the country has established a hydrogen energy industry system that covers the entire value chain, including hydrogen production, storage, transportation, refueling and equipment manufacturing.

Hydrogen energy is finding broad applications across various sectors, such as industry, power, transportation, and construction, said Su.

Driven by the massive market potential, many Chinese enterprises are already laying out plans for hydrogen development. Since 2024,

six provinces, including Shandong and Sichuan, have introduced policies to reduce toll fees for hydrogen vehicles on highways, while many provinces have also proposed the creation of cross-regional hydrogen corridors.

CIMC Enric, which specializes in manufacturing hydrogen-related products including storage tanks, has seen growing popularity of its products in China and overseas markets.

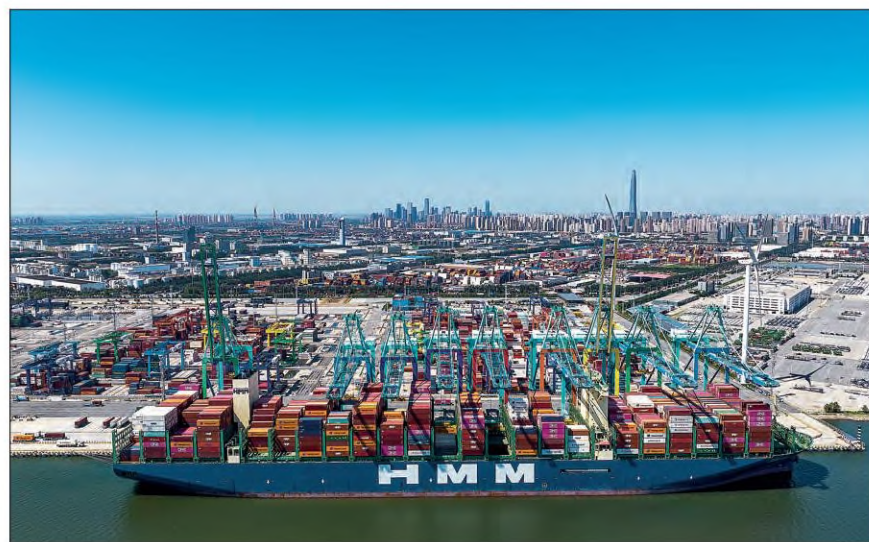
The company established a joint venture company in 2021 with Swedish technology group Hexagon AB to provide safe, economical and efficient storage and transportation solutions for the fast-growing high-pressure hydrogen storage and transportation market in China and Southeast Asia. The JV plans to set up a production line with an annual production capacity of approximately 100,000 units of hydrogen storage cylinders, and the actual output will be gradually increased to achieve the highest production capacity, it said.

In addition to domestic companies, foreign players are also eyeing the massive potential of China's substantial hydrogen market, with companies such as Hexagon and Toyota also making significant strides in the hydrogen sector.

Many provinces are also laying out plans to develop the hydrogen energy sector.

Aiming to position itself as a leader in this emerging field, Guangdong province released on Thursday measures to accelerate the high-quality development of the hydrogen energy industry.

For manufacturing projects in the hydrogen energy industry with an investment of 100 million yuan to 1 billion yuan, a funding reward of 1 percent of the total annual fixed-asset investment after the project is launched will be provided. The maximum reward for a single project will not exceed 10 million yuan, it said.



A containership docks at a port in Tianjin on Aug 27. ZHAO ZISHUO / XINHUA

TEDA to chart more policies to woo MNCs

Development zone in Tianjin eyes more projects related to Belt and Road

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin
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Tianjin Economic-Technological Development Area, or TEDA, is charting more preferential policies for foreign companies, said a senior official of the development zone.

"TEDA will continue to fulfill its commitment to higher-standard opening-up and accelerate reforms and quality development," said Hong Shicong, director of the administrative committee of TEDA, during the zone's 40th anniversary celebration on Thursday.

Among the first batch of national-level economic and technological development zones in China, Hong said TEDA will continue intensifying implementation of the pilot free trade zone enhancement initiative, and strive for more proactive policy trials.

With more opening-up efforts in the pipeline, the development zone aims to take the lead nationwide in making breakthroughs in more areas, such as cross-border data flow, telecommunications and

high-end foreign-funded hospitals, Hong said.

TEDA said that as of the end of 2023, it had become home to 53,400 companies. Since its establishment until the end of last year, the zone had utilized foreign investment totaling \$69.56 billion from 97 countries and regions, covering 573 projects from 124 Fortune Global 500 companies.

Additionally, foreign-invested enterprises in TEDA contribute about 45 percent of the area's tax revenue, nearly half of its GDP and over 70 percent of its industrial output value.

Many major companies, such as FAW Toyota, FAW-Volkswagen, Sinopec, CNOOC and Novo Nordisk, set up facilities or offices in TEDA, making it a powerhouse for industrial innovation and collaboration, Hong said.

Ryu Kyeong-woo, general manager of Tianjin Samsung Electro-Mechanics Co Ltd, said, "We benefit from TEDA as a company involved in electrical products, of which the industrial value reaches 1 trillion

yuan (\$137.6 billion) in the zone."

Attracted by the favorable policies and the business environment, some multinational corporations relocated their research hubs and engineering facilities to TEDA.

Yan Caiping, general manager of PPG Asia-Pacific, said: "Of PPG's only two research centers worldwide, one is in the United States and the other is in TEDA, as we are attracted by the talent there."

Many executives deem the zone to be a key investment hub.

Michael Griffin, a former executive with Otis China, said TEDA has superior infrastructure and supportive policies leading its settled enterprises to success.

Jochem Heizmann, former president of Volkswagen AG's China operations, said the administration and operation of TEDA align with development strategies of Volkswagen, particularly in the realm of advancing new energy vehicles.

Looking ahead, TEDA will seek a bigger role in projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative for development, said Hong, adding that since 2016, enterprises in TEDA have also executed 184 outbound investment projects worldwide, with a total value of \$4.45 billion.

Suzhou city in East China making name for itself among tourists

By WANG JINHUI
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As China's tourism market continues its resurgence, Suzhou of Jiangsu province in East China, a model city for the country's 144-hour visa-free transit policy, is parlaying its unique integration of natural scenery, classical gardens, ancient architecture and diverse cuisine into a primary destination for a growing number of domestic and international visitors.

According to official data, in the first seven months of this year, Suzhou welcomed 495,000 overnight inbound tourists — a year-on-year increase of 97.9 percent. The visitors hail mainly from Australia, Japan, South Korea, the United States, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam, as well as China's Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

Key hotels in the Suzhou Industrial Park mainly host business travelers, performing artists, sports teams and international school exchange groups, while attractions such as classic gardens, Tongli Ancient Town, Luzhi Ancient Town, Shajiang Yushan Mountain and Shanghu Lake tourist area mainly attract inbound tourist groups.

In a 24-hour vlog of Suzhou, Zina, a blogger from the Czech Republic with nearly 6 million followers, wore a silk cheongsam while enjoying a stroll on ancient Pingjiang Road, and during a river excursion she was serenaded by a boatman with Jiangnan tunes in the soft Wu dialect. Zina also visited silk shops, sampled Suzhou-style soup noodles from an old brand, and enjoyed afternoon tea with Suzhou-style meat mooncakes.

Jason, a British blogger with 1 million followers, had a different 24-hour experience in Suzhou. He spent most of his time watching operas, but also visited the China Kunqu Opera Museum and Suzhou Pingtan Museum, appreciating Kunqu classics such as *The*



Suzhou is promoted on a screen at the Queen Street in Auckland, New Zealand. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

495,000

the number of overnight inbound tourists that Suzhou welcomed in the first seven months of this year, a year-on-year increase of 97.9 percent

Peony Pavilion. He discovered that folk stories can be sung and narrated with the accompaniment of China's traditional musical instruments *pipa* and *sanxian*.

Jared from Canada, another blogger with 1 million followers, took an instant liking to Suzhou's classical gardens and water town scenery. He went for a morning run on the Wuyao Bridge and enjoyed a sumptuous breakfast at a 30-year-old shop. Dishes such as meat wontons and juicy meat moon cakes, along with a bowl of gorgon fruit soup, made him even more determined to extend his visit.

Many other foreigners have documented their wonderful experiences in Suzhou in ways that have inspired overseas fans. To live up to those expectations, in May, the

local government issued several measures to promote inbound tourism, including 10 incentive policies to encourage inbound tourists to visit and stay in Suzhou, expand the overseas tourist market and optimize the environment.

At the same time, the Suzhou culture and tourism bureau continues to upgrade inbound tourism products, such as its Jiangnan intangible cultural heritage tour. It has also made payments more convenient by increasing the number of foreign currency POS machines, ATMs and exchange points, and an international service point has been set up at Terminal 1 of the Shanghai Pudong International Airport, ensuring seamless and worry-free travel for visitors.

As well, the bureau has launched the Suzhou travel code project, providing graphic guides for inbound tourists on how to get a mobile phone card, register for mobile payments, navigate transportation, and book attractions and hotels.

In the coming months, the city will launch the Suzhou Pass, offering integrated tourism discount packages for international tourists.

Haleon increasing investment in its China JV for supply chain edge

By ZHONG NAN
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Haleon Plc, a British multinational consumer healthcare group, plans to complete the acquisition of all equity interest in Tianjin TSKF Pharmaceutical Co Ltd, its joint venture in China, from its local partners next year, said its top executive.

The move aims to further reinforce its supply chain operations and innovation capabilities in China, enhancing the company's ability to meet the growing demand for consumer healthcare products in the country, said Brian McNamara, CEO of Haleon.

The Weybridge, United Kingdom-headquartered group announced in late September that it plans to raise its stake in Tianjin TSKF from 55 percent to 88 percent through an investment of 4.47 billion yuan (\$615 million).

This marks Haleon's largest single investment in China to date, aimed at transforming the pure manufacturing facility into a comprehensive operational hub in northern China, as well as upgrading and modernizing its supply chain system within the country.

Emphasizing that China is a must-have and not a nice-to-have market, McNamara highlighted that the majority of the company's efforts in China are dedicated to serving the local market. However, from a research and development standpoint, the work carried out in China has a far-reaching global influence.

Innovations and capabilities developed in China can often extend to other countries, positioning China not only as a critical market for local success but also as a



Brian McNamara

strategic hub for driving growth and competitiveness in international markets, he added.

Haleon's product portfolio spans five major categories — oral health, pain relief, respiratory health, digestive health, and vitamins, minerals and supplements. It owns brands such as Centrum, a multivitamin brand, and Sensodyne, a toothpaste brand for sensitive teeth.

Eager to seize more market share, the company put a new China innovation center in Shanghai into operation in 2023.

In addition to launching a gum health brand named Paradontax in China earlier this year, McNamara said the company — supported by 3,500 employees across the country — will focus on innovations like daily essentials to offer consumers the right number of vitamins for any given day, for the essential nutrients they need.

"We will continue to prioritize categories of over-the-counter, vitamins, minerals, supplements and oral health in China," he said, adding that about 85 percent of the products Haleon sells in the country are manufactured in its plants in Tianjin and Suzhou, Jiangsu province.

Noting China's recent policy measures to remove all market access restrictions for foreign investors in the manufacturing sector, McNamara said this initiative is expected to encourage foreign companies to boost their investments in China, particularly

in high-end manufacturing and innovation.

The latest edition of China's national "negative list" for foreign investment, which took effect on Nov 1, removed the last two manufacturing-related restrictions, according to the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator.

The items on the latest "negative list", which specifies fields that are off-limits to foreign investors, have been further reduced to 29.

"We remain highly optimistic about the growth potential of China — our second-largest market globally after the United States," said McNamara. "Our performance in the country has been strong, with consistent growth over the past 50 months, during which we have steadily increased our market share."

He said that under the Healthy China 2030 initiative, the focus on public health is transitioning from being "disease-centered" to "health-centered" and this will create new opportunities for the growth of the consumer health industry.

The Healthy China 2030 blueprint was unveiled in 2016 to achieve health targets aligned with the United Nations' sustainable development goals.

Driven by an improved policy environment, rising socio-economic levels, growing public awareness of health, an expanding aging population, and the evolving consumption habits of younger generations, the consumer health market's potential will be further unleashed in China, said Guan Lixin, a researcher specializing in marketing at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

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A train departs from Vientiane, capital of Laos, for Kunming, Yunnan province, in August. YANG YONGQUAN / XINHUA

Foreign financial firms beef up China investment

BEIJING — Since the start of this year, an increasing number of foreign financial institutions have cast a vote of confidence in China by establishing new securities entities and expanding the scope of their existing businesses in a market that continues to grow and open up.

Singapore-based DBS Group has obtained regulatory approval to increase its stake in DBS Securities (China) Ltd to 91 percent from 51 percent, with the transaction valued at about 823 million yuan (\$113.3 million), according to the group on Nov 26.

The move demonstrates the group's firm commitment to the Chinese market as it has continued to ramp up investment in the country in recent years. The acquisition would better enable DBS Securities (China) Ltd to tap into the group's resources to improve the capital market services it provides, according to the group.

This year, other foreign financial institutions, especially securities firms, have also increased their presence in the country as China steadily promotes the all-round institutional opening-up of the market, deepens the interconnectivity of domestic and foreign markets, and supports more foreign institutions to invest here.

Standard Chartered Securities (China) Ltd officially commenced its business earlier this year. So far, the company has obtained regulatory approval to provide custody-related services of securities investment funds, participate in the Bond Connect Scheme between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, and join the Wealth Management Connect Pilot Scheme in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

China's financial industry has continued to open both in width and depth, which provides sustainable development opportunities for the company to expand businesses in the Chinese market, said Jean Lu, CEO of Standard Chartered China.

BNP Paribas officially set up its securities branch in China this July and became the fourth approved wholly foreign-owned securities firm in the country. Another banking conglomerate Morgan Stanley also saw its securities branch in China obtain approvals to add securities investment consulting services into its business scope in the market this March.

The establishment of wholly foreign-owned securities firms and the expansion of foreign financial institutions' business scope reflect the strong appeal of the Chinese market, which is continuously optimizing policies to enhance the convenience for medium and long-term foreign capital investments, said Chen Li, chief economist at Chuancai Securities.

The country has started to implement revised rules for qualified foreign institutional investors, or QFII and renminbi QFII, since late August, with key revisions such as simplifying business registration procedures, and optimizing the management of accounts and cross-border fund flows.

Earlier last month, China released revised rules on foreign investors' strategic investments in listed companies, allowing foreign natural persons to make strategic investment in listed companies. The country also called for the steady promotion of the opening-up of the futures market in a set of guidelines released in October.

According to official data from the China Securities Regulatory Commission, the number of qualified foreign institutional investors had expanded to almost 858 by Nov 9, with more than 40 foreign investors being granted QFII status this year.

The advancing opening-up in China's financial market will provide diversified investment channels for foreign capital, while the strengthening global influence of the RMB makes it an important choice for investors to allocate the assets in their investment portfolios, said Tian Lihui, head of the Institute of Finance and Development at Nan-kai University.

BRI adds vitality to global exchanges

Cross-border trade route brings prosperity to involved members

BEIJING — From vision to reality! In just over a decade, the Belt and Road Initiative has become one of the world's largest and most comprehensive international cooperation platforms. It has revitalized ancient trade routes with new energy, injecting fresh opportunities and vitality into global trade and economic collaboration.

Since its launch three years ago, the China-Laos Railway, a flagship project under the BRI, has significantly reduced freight times and logistics costs between the two countries, deepening bilateral trade.

In 2023, the trade volume between China and Laos saw a year-on-year increase of 26.6 percent, reaching an impressive \$7.1 billion. Over 10.6 million metric tons of goods worth over 44 billion yuan (\$6.06 billion) has been transported via the railway so far this year as of November, Customs data showed.

At the railway's terminus in Vientiane, capital of Laos, the freight transit yard of China-Laos Railway's Vientiane South Station is buzzing with activity, while the

nearby Saysettha Comprehensive Development Zone, another BRI project, has attracted enterprises from Thailand, Singapore, Japan and elsewhere.

Signature projects such as the China-Laos Railway, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, and Piraeus Port in Greece have formed a vivid exemplification of the connectivity framework under the BRI.

"BRI projects have improved infrastructure development and connectivity, created tens of thousands of jobs," said Thong Mengda, a lecturer at the Institute for International Studies and Public Policy at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

"Through its focus on strategic alignment and complementary strengths, the BRI promotes a shared vision of peaceful development, win-win cooperation and mutual prosperity," the Cambodian scholar noted.

As the 100,000th China-Europe freight train, coded X8083, departed from Chongqing in Southwest China for Duisburg, Germany, on Nov 15, it highlights that modern "steel camels" have facilitated

“BRI projects have improved infrastructure development and connectivity, created tens of thousands of jobs.”

Thong Mengda, lecturer at the Institute for International Studies and Public Policy at the Royal University of Phnom Penh

cross-Eurasian trade, transporting more than 11 million containers of goods worth over \$420 billion.

Chongqing Tianjiecun Central Station, once a small railway hub, has become an international logistics center, while Duisburg has attracted numerous logistics and warehousing enterprises, revitalizing itself into a major hub.

The China-Europe freight train network now reaches 25 European countries and 227 cities, along with over 100 cities spanning 11 Asian countries, demonstrating the BRI's high-quality progress.

From railways to ports, new achievements have illuminated the path to shared development. In the first 10 months of the year, China's trade with BRI participating economies climbed 6.2 percent compared with a year earlier.

So far, China has signed BRI cooperation documents with over 150 countries and over 30 international organizations, while bolstering global leadership in mutual recognition agreements for authorized economic operators.

"Only by aligning policies of different countries and integrating economic elements and development resources on a larger scale can we form synergy and promote world peace, tranquility and common development," said Li Yongquan, a professor at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, citing the unstable foundation of global economic growth, sluggish trade and investment, setbacks encountered by economic globalization and intensified development imbalances.

The Ministry of Commerce said that by the end of 2023, Chinese companies had established 17,000 overseas enterprises in economies participating in the BRI, with direct investment stock exceeding \$330 billion. Meanwhile, overseas eco-

nomics and trade cooperation zones built under the initiative had created 530,000 local jobs.

Beyond economic benefits, the BRI also promotes people-to-people exchanges. The Luban Workshop, a project named after an ancient Chinese master craftsman, which provides vocational skills training for local people, has been established in 30 countries, training thousands of skilled professionals.

Since the first Luban Workshop was launched in Thailand in 2016, more than 30 have been set up across Asia, Europe and Africa, offering education to nearly 10,000 students and vocational training to over 31,000 participants.

The BRI has not only brought new ideas to opening-up and international cooperation in the new era, but also achieved new practical results, according to Li.

"It has opened up new space for world economic growth, built a new platform for international trade and investment, expanded new practices for improving global economic governance, and made new contributions to improving people's well-being in all countries," the scholar noted.

XINHUA

Nation steps up efforts to bolster import and export growth

BEIJING — In the face of sluggish global trade, China has introduced a series of measures to ensure steady import and export growth and help drive economic recovery this year.

In the first 10 months, China's total foreign trade value amounted to 36 trillion yuan (\$4.96 trillion), representing a 5.2 percent year-on-year increase, and its export share in the global market also remained largely stable.

At a news conference last Friday, Vice-Minister of Commerce Wang Shouwen said China's foreign trade had continued to show a positive trend, characterized by improved quality and stable volume growth.

However, as a backlash against globalization and rising protectionism dampen prospects of global trade, China's foreign trade growth has also softened since August.

An official investigation has also found multiple difficulties confronting trade enterprises, from export credit insurance to financing for small and medium-sized enterprises and shipping logistics.

To address these challenges, the Chinese government has intensified moves to bolster foreign trade.

Last Thursday, the Ministry of Commerce published a notice focused on measures to strengthen financial support for businesses engaged in international trade, foster new trade drivers such as e-commerce and green trade, and enhance services including favorable visa



A view of a container terminal in Haikou, Hainan province, in October. PU XIAOXU / XINHUA

policies for businesspersons.

Insurance companies are encouraged to increase underwriting support for "little giant" and "hidden champion" firms in their efforts to explore diversified markets, the notice said.

"Little giants" refer to the novel elites among SMEs engaged in manufacturing, specializing in a niche market and boasting cutting-edge technologies. "Hidden champions" are highly successful yet lesser-known firms.

Financial institutions should

optimize financial services for foreign trade enterprises in areas such as credit approval, loan disbursement and repayment, said the notice.

The central bank has continuously guided financing into equipment upgrades and green transformation of foreign trade companies and related logistics sectors, Liu Ye, an official of the People's Bank of China, said at the news conference. The country's outstanding green loans increased 25 percent year-on-year at the end of September.

The latest policy support emphasized e-commerce and green trade as burgeoning new growth drivers of China's foreign trade.

The e-commerce sector, which features customized services, fast delivery and low costs, is highly competitive, Wang said at the news conference. In the first three quarters, China's e-commerce imports and exports reported a vibrant 11.5 percent year-on-year increase, accounting for nearly 6 percent of total foreign trade.

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VISION CHINA

Editor's note: China Daily launched Vision China in 2018 as a bridge for communication between China and the rest of the world. Focusing on developments in both China and abroad, Vision China invites influential opinion leaders to share their ideas on a wide range of topics. The latest edition of Vision China was held on Thursday in Beijing. Themed "High-quality Development: Shaping the Future", the event welcomed officials, entrepreneurs and experts to share their thoughts on China's pivotal role in stabilizing and propelling worldwide development.

STEPPING UP TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

Experts share opinions on how China can put best foot forward and lead by example in today's rapidly changing world

Private sector to play key role in major projects



Qiu Xiaoping

By CHENG YU
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Private enterprises are expected to lead and contribute to China's major national technological projects, as the country's private sector bids to become a critical driver of technological innovation, economic growth and international cooperation, said a senior official from a national body serving the sector on Thursday.

Qiu Xiaoping, vice-chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, said: "In China, the private sector has never been more crucial. Major national scientific and research infrastructure is being further opened up to these private enterprises, allowing them to lead or collaborate on more ground-breaking projects."

Qiu, who is also a member of the Leading Party Members' Group of the federation, said that rising Chinese private enterprises are doubling down on their investments in strategic emerging industries from high-end manufacturing to advanced materials.

One of their particular focuses is on future industries such as quantum computing and life sciences, which are poised to define the next generation of economic competition globally, he said.

Data from the federation shows that private enterprises have become a key pillar of China's innovation ecosystem, contributing over 70 percent of the nation's technological breakthroughs, making up for more than 90 percent of national high-tech businesses and over 80 percent of national "little giant" companies — small and medium-sized enterprises recognized for their specialized expertise and innovation.

"Their innovative growth aligns with China's efforts to build a modernized industrial system and foster collaboration between large corporations and nimble SMEs. This ecosystem is expected to create fertile ground for innovation, driving the private sector to not only compete but thrive on a global scale," he said.

As private enterprises expand their reach, Qiu noted their economic influence has become undeniable. Collectively, they contribute over 50 percent of the nation's tax revenue, more than 60 percent of GDP and over 80 percent of urban employment.

On the global front, he emphasized that these firms account for over half of China's total import and export volume, making them a vital force in driving international trade.

"China is expanding high-level opening-up and fostering an open world economy," he said. "It also provides a vast stage for private enterprises to explore international markets. More private enterprises will build on their domestic success while expanding globally."

China's high-level openness to foster win-win opportunities



Qu Yingpu

By WANG KEJU
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China's high-level openness will offer a vast market and win-win opportunities to the world in the face of an international landscape marked by the rise of unilateralism and protectionism, said Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, on Thursday.

"The world is now in a period of turbulence and transformation," Qu said. "Economic fragmentation is being exacerbated, while globalization is encountering headwinds. China is facing a stern test of either forging ahead against the current or losing ground."

The fragmentation of the global economy, as estimated by the International Monetary Fund in January, has the potential to result in a 7 percent reduction in global GDP, roughly equivalent to the combined GDP of France and Germany in a single year.

"To pass this test, China is steadfastly becoming more open, fostering cooperation and seeking mutual gain, showcasing its grand vision and sense of responsibility as a major country, Qu said.

"We keenly perceive the global anticipation that the Chinese market offers mutually beneficial prospects and has the eagerness to seize the broader cooperation opportunities from the flourishing development of China's emerging industries," he said.

Undeniably, the Chinese economy itself has indeed encountered some internal and external challenges recently. Nevertheless, it has demonstrated immense resilience, significant potential and considerable flexibility, he said.

Over the past few months, Chinese policymakers have put forward a holistic set of forceful policies, including fiscal, monetary and property market measures, aimed at giving a much-needed boost to the economy to anchor market sentiment and strengthen recovery.

As the effects of the policy package continue to unfold, evidence of the economy's vitality and momentum is growing, reinforcing market confidence and catalyzing a notable upsurge in both market sales and the service industry, Qu said.

Meanwhile, foreign investment in renminbi assets is showing a positive trend, with many international institutions raising their expectations for China's economic growth, Qu added.

Due to China's policy shift, financial services group Nomura increased its China full-year GDP growth prediction in mid-November to 4.8 percent, compared to its prior 4.7 percent forecast.

Before Nomura's upgrade, both UBS Investment Bank and JPMorgan Chase had already raised their forecasts for China's full-year economic expansion this year to 4.8 percent, up from previous estimates.

Facts will once again prove that pessimistic narratives surrounding so-called overcapacity, a debt crisis, hard landing or economic collapse are merely the wishful thinking of some foreign media and politicians, Qu said.



Qu Yingpu (second from right), publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, Qiu Xiaoping (first left), vice-chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, and Huang Baoyin (first right), Party secretary of the University of International Business and Economics, present commemorative gifts to speakers during a Vision China event in Beijing on Thursday. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

Growth sought to steady unstable global landscape



Huang Baoyin

By ZHONG NAN
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With the global economy entering a period of turbulence and change, embracing openness and fostering new quality productive forces will enable China to generate fresh economic momentum and strengthen its competitive advantages, paving the way for sustainable and high-quality growth, a scholar from the University of International Business and Economics said on Thursday.

Huang Baoyin, Party secretary of the Beijing-based UIBE, said that as the global economy grapples with the spread of unilateralism and protectionism, developing new quality productive forces is essential for seizing opportunities and addressing challenges through expanded opening-up. Enhancing capabilities and standards of openness through international cooperation will also benefit the country.

New quality productive forces are advanced productivity measures freed from traditional economic growth modes and productivity development paths. Such forces are high-tech, high-efficiency and high-quality, and are in line with China's new development philosophy.

In recent years, the United States and certain Western countries have persistently pursued strategies of decoupling and supply chain disruption, as well as promoting "anti-globalization" and "de-globalization" activities.

Huang said these actions have severely disrupted the efficient global flow of production factors, hindered the optimal allocation of resources and significantly impacted the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains.

As China navigates a critical phase of transforming its development model, optimizing its economic structure and transitioning its growth drivers, the cultivation of new quality productive forces has become both a key requirement and a priority for advancing high-quality development, he added.

While new challenges and complexities have emerged in the macroeconomic environment, the core strengths of China's economy remain steadfast, Huang said.

"These advantages include a vast domestic market, robust economic resilience and considerable growth potential, demonstrating that opportunities continue to outweigh challenges," he said, emphasizing that economic globalization remains a dominant trend, with technological progress and industrial transformation serving as powerful drivers of growth.

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, China contributed an average of 24.8 percent annually to global economic growth from 1979 to 2023, ranking first globally, with its economic dividends benefiting all countries.

IMF official highlights reform-driven progress



Steven Barnett

By ZHOU LANXU and LI JIAYING

The reforming efforts China has made over the past 40-odd years have brought fruitful results in terms of economic development, and the country is expected to continue being the major growth driver for the global economy, said a senior official at the International Monetary Fund.

"China's growth was the result of reforms that China undertook to generate that growth, not a miracle. That's a lesson actually for the world and the country itself going forward — growth depends on reform," said Steven Barnett, the IMF's senior resident representative in China, in Beijing on Thursday.

In terms of how to keep pushing ahead with reforms, Barnett said China needs to boost market-oriented development.

"The recipe for doing so is to give the market a more decisive role in allocating resources and ensure a level playing field," he said.

China is set to contribute over a quarter of global economic growth this year and next, maintaining its position as the biggest driver of the world economy

despite challenges, Barnett added. The IMF official said that China is projected to contribute 0.9 percentage points — or around 28 percent — to global growth in 2024, based on the IMF's forecast of 3.2 percent global growth and 4.8 percent growth in China.

This will make China continue to be the single largest contributor to global growth, he said, adding that the same figures for 2023 and 2024 are expected in 2025, underscoring the nation's continued importance to the global economy.

The contribution does not yet take into account the positive spillover of China's growth on other economies, Barnett said.

Strong growth in China would be good for China, and it would also help lift demand for the global economy, he said.

While there are concerns that China's consumer demand has been subdued, Barnett said that no major economic shock is expected in 2025, as household consumption grows as quickly as China over the two decades before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Barnett said the real challenge is that, though consumption expanded fast, GDP growth has been even higher, leading to a relatively low share of consumption in GDP. In 2019, household consumption accounted for 39.2 percent of China's GDP, versus 67 percent in the United States.

This structural imbalance presents an opportunity for China: By transitioning to a consumption-driven growth model — whereby consumption grows faster than GDP — the share of consumption in GDP could steadily increase, unlocking new economic potential for the long term, he said.

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Country expected to achieve 2024 forecast

By LIU ZHIHUA
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With China's proactive policy taking effect, the Asian Development Bank expects the growth of the Chinese economy this year will be within the target range of about 5 percent, which was announced by the government early this year.

Sufdar Parvez, country director for China at the bank, said on Thursday that there was a positive outlook for the world's second-largest economy in both the short term and long term.

"The (Chinese) economy remains steady, growing at 4.8 percent in the first nine months of this year. This has been supported by strong export performance and policy measures to boost demand and improve the property sector situation," he said.

"Recent announcements on fiscal and monetary policy actions show that the authorities acknowledge the importance of addressing current challenges by deploying a range of stimulus measures."

He appreciated the country's growth of the Chinese economy in the short term, including a prolonged correction in the property market, subdued consumption and rising trade tensions.

However, Parvez noted some key downside risks for the Chinese economy in the short term, including a prolonged correction in the property market, subdued consumption and rising trade tensions.

"To enhance China's potential growth in the long run, he said there is a recognized need to optimize the allocation of capital, particularly directing credit toward more productive sectors such as the private sector, with a special focus on fostering innovative small and micro businesses, as well as large enterprises.

Merck seeks closer science, technology collaboration with Chinese companies

By LIUYUKUN
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German sci-tech giant Merck has pledged closer collaboration with Chinese companies as the nation advances its innovative capabilities, a senior executive from the company said on Thursday.

Marc Horn, president of Merck China, said that China stands out as a global leader in innovation, driven by key strengths in several areas such as adaptability and scalability.

"Its remarkable adaptability allows for quick responses to market changes, while a culture of collaboration fosters creativity and progress. The focus on user-centricity ensures that inventions meet consumer needs, supported by a bold spirit of risk-taking and experimentation that encourages exploration of new ideas," Horn said.

"Additionally, scalability enables successful innovations to be rapidly expanded. Together, these attributes create a dynamic ecosystem that positions China at the forefront of global innovation ... At Merck, we find ourselves in the sweet spot to both contribute to China's growing innovation ecosystem and to benefit from it, growing together with China," he said.

Data from the World Intellectual Property Organization shows that China has 25 of the world's 100 best science and technology clusters, ranking No.1 globally, followed by the United States and Germany.

"We do want to be part of this vibrant Chinese innovation system. We operate research and development centers and manufacturing sites all over China across our major business sectors of healthcare, life science and electronics. And this year, we expanded our M Lab in the Shanghai Technical Application and Testing Center to further support Chinese and international biopharmaceutical and biologics companies in developing novel drug therapies," Horn said.

At the China International Import Expo in November, the company's life science division signed a memorandum of understanding with Chengdu Eastern New Area in Sichuan province to enhance the capabilities of its Future Medical City.

Merck's increasing investment in China exemplifies an ongoing trend of foreign capital maintaining confidence in the country. Foreign direct investment on the Chinese mainland in actual use amounted to 693.21 billion yuan (\$95.3 billion) from January to October, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

During the same period, 46,893 new foreign-invested enterprises were established nationwide, representing a year-on-year growth of 11.8 percent, the ministry said.

Airbus targets Asia as fast-growing market

By ZHU WENQIAN
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George Xu

European aircraft manufacturer Airbus sees Asia, especially China, as the growth engine for the global aviation industry as the country's civil aviation sector has proved to be one of the most resilient markets in the world, said George Xu, Airbus executive vice-president and Airbus China CEO.

"As the world's second-largest economy, China had a steady growth this year, and has entered the path of high-quality growth. Airbus is committed to the China market, and will continue to be a long-term partner with China," Xu said during a Vision China event in Beijing on Thursday.

While the government has made particular efforts to expand domestic demand, increase residents' incomes and improve infrastructure construction, high-quality development will offer more opportunities for the aviation industry, and growing urbanization will also trigger demand for air travel, he said.

This year, domestic air passenger traffic in China is expected to hit a record high, according to projections from the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

According to a forecast from Airbus, China's fleet size is expected to triple over the next 20 years and will surpass the United States in the early 2030s.

Speaking of new deliveries all over the world in the next two decades, half of all new aircraft will be delivered to the Asia-Pacific region, and in the Asia-Pacific, nearly half the market is in China.

Xu noted that this immense market size presents a unique opportunity for Airbus' business growth, and for the high-quality development of the entire industrial chain.

Back in 2005, Airbus decided to build its first single-aisle aircraft final assembly line outside of Europe in Tianjin.

In the past 19 years, Airbus Tianjin has delivered around one-third of the Airbus fleet in China.

"Behind the incredible achievements, it's a story of how Airbus contributed to China's high-quality development. We have over 200 suppliers in China. Through the local for local strategy, Airbus partnered with Chinese suppliers for aircraft parts and sections manufacturing," Xu said.

"We are inspired by China's commitment to high-quality development and higher level of opening-up. Airbus is here with our partners, in China, for China."

Cooperation vital to solving problems

By CHINA DAILY



Jack Perry

China's opening-up efforts and high-quality development benefit both its domestic market and foreign countries, and cooperation rather than isolation is low countries should seek to jointly identify problems, possibilities and solutions, Jack Perry, chairman of the 48 Group, and CEO of London Export Corporation, said on Thursday.

Containing a 75-year tradition of getting to know China better and seeking cooperation with the nation, Perry said the speed of China's growth is significant, and the focus of the country's leadership is high-quality development, high-level opening-up and new quality productive forces, which are not just

Social equality required to attain common prosperity

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Song Yang

China should create more opportunities for the poor, reduce labor market discrimination and equalize basic public services to achieve common prosperity, said Song Yang, a professor at the School of Economics at Renmin University of China, during the latest Vision China event held in Beijing on Thursday.

The country aims to make substantial progress in achieving common prosperity by 2035 and basically fulfill this goal by 2050, according to the nation's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

China is on the right track to achieving common prosperity, which refers to all people being able to make a good living. The effort includes two components — growth and distribution, Song said during the event.

"For the growth component, it means people will have a better quality of life, earn higher incomes and see progress in human development in

and wanting to help the Chinese people as well as benefit other countries and businesses," Perry said.

"If you focus on high-quality development, that means that you're trying to be a player in tomorrow's industries," he said.

As China focuses on high-quality development, the 48 Group has invested in artificial intelligence technologies and has expressed faith in China's future, he added.

Acknowledging China's vision of high-quality development and high-level opening-up, he expressed a desire to strengthen cooperation with China in seeking possibilities and solving problems.

"My biggest gift in life is to have a relationship with China," said Perry, who is making efforts to develop young icebreakers to act as bridges to strengthen connections and cooperation with China.

"The fundamental reason that people work with China is that they have their hands out wanting to learn

from us and we want to learn from them," Perry said.

Tan Guoliang contributed to this story.

WORLD

Yoon faces impeachment vote, investigation for treason

SEOUL — South Korean opposition lawmakers said on Thursday they would vote this weekend to impeach President Yoon Suk-yeol for his botched attempt to impose martial law, and police said they were investigating claims of treason against him and top ministers.

Yoon's declaration of martial law late on Tuesday sparked outrage in the streets and concern among South Korea's international allies. The defense minister, who recommended the move, has resigned.

Lawmakers of the opposition Democratic Party planned to seek a vote in parliament to impeach Yoon at about 7 pm on Saturday, a party spokesperson told reporters.

"The Yoon Suk-yeol regime's declaration of emergency martial law caused great confusion and fear among our people," Democratic Party lawmaker Kim Seung-won told the National Assembly earlier.

Yoon's ruling People Power Party is divided over the crisis but said it would oppose impeachment, with the party in turmoil and two years left in Yoon's five-year term.

The Democratic Party needs at least eight of the 108 ruling party lawmakers to back the bill for it to pass with a two-thirds majority in the 300-seat parliament.

Fighting for his political future, Yoon accepted the resignation of Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun on Thursday and nominated his ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Choi



Students at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul call for the resignation of South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol on Thursday. YONHAP

Byung-hyuk, as a replacement, Yoon's office said.

Kim recommended Yoon declare martial law on Tuesday, according to the interior minister, a senior military official and the opposition's filing to impeach Yoon.

Kim also ordered the deployment of troops to the parliament, Vice-Defense Minister Kim Seon-ho said, adding that he was unaware of the

martial law order until Yoon declared it.

The chief of investigations for the national police confirmed to a parliamentary hearing that the force was investigating accusations of treason and other related crimes over the declaration of martial law. The complaint was filed by an opposition party and activists.

The probe includes Yoon, his

interior minister and the ousted defense minister.

On Wednesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Reuters the United States had not been made aware in advance of Yoon's declaration, while his deputy, Kurt Campbell, said Yoon had badly misjudged it.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

French political crisis deepens as PM resigns

No-confidence vote topples govt, leaves Macron to name successor amid turmoil

By MOHAMMAD ARIF ULLAH in Paris
For China Daily

French Prime Minister Michel Barnier has stepped down following a no-confidence vote in parliament, ending his government's three-month tenure.

The motion, supported by 331 of 577 members of the National Assembly, made Barnier the shortest-serving prime minister in modern France's history.

"The prime minister today submitted the resignation of his government" to President Emmanuel Macron, who has "taken note" of the resignation, the Elysee said on Thursday. Barnier and his ministers remain "in charge of daily business until the appointment of a new government", it added.

Macron, who returned early from a state visit to Saudi Arabia, was set to address the nation at 8 pm on Thursday, with the country facing political and economic uncertainty.

The vote came after fierce opposition to the government's austerity-driven social security budget. Barnier had invoked executive powers to pass the budget without parliamentary approval, sparking outrage from both the radical left and the far right.

Together, these unlikely allies secured enough votes to topple the government.

The political chaos reflects the challenges of governing a hung parliament, a result of a snap election in the summer that left no party with a clear majority.

Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Rally, justified her support for the no-confidence motion by calling the budget "technocratic" and harmful to ordinary citizens. She said during the debates, "The worst policy is to allow this government to stay".

Hard-left lawmaker Eric Coquerel described the vote as "the death knell of Emmanuel Macron's mandate". "This is not just about the government's failure. It is about a president who has become an obstacle to solutions for France," he added.

Conservative leader Laurent Wauquiez, whose members of parliament abstained, accused both extremes of destabilizing the country. "This will plunge France into greater instability, and we must hold the far right and radical left responsible," he said.

The vote marked the first success-

ful no-confidence motion to oust a French government since 1962. Political analyst Roland Cayrol told France 5 TV: "This collapse was predictable. There was no unity, no shared vision — just a prime minister placed in an impossible situation."

Meanwhile, Macron faces mounting pressure to resign, with opposition figures calling for immediate presidential elections. Mathilde Panot, leader of the radical-left LFI party, said on Thursday: "Macron should go. His presidency is a barrier to progress." Panot warned that her faction would block any future government not aligned with her party.

Macron now faces the challenge of appointing a successor who can navigate the fractured political landscape. National Assembly President Yael Braun-Pivet urged him to act quickly to avoid "prolonging the crisis". However, finding a leader who can command parliamentary support may prove difficult.

"We are witnessing the decline of stable governments in France," political scientist Pascal Perrineau told France 2 TV on Wednesday. "Without a parliamentary majority, future administrations will be weak and vulnerable to similar motions."

Investor confidence

Macron's government is also under pressure from financial markets. Analysts warn that prolonged instability could undermine investor confidence in France's ability to implement key fiscal reforms.

Despite calls for him to step down, Macron has rejected the idea, dismissing it as "political fiction" earlier this week. His national address was expected to outline steps for restoring stability, though details remain unclear.

Barnier's resignation underscores the fragility of Macron's administration, experts said. Elected without a parliamentary majority, his government has relied on tenuous alliances to pass legislation, a strategy that now appears unsustainable.

This historic moment has left France's political landscape in disarray. As Macron prepares to name a new prime minister, he must navigate a parliament where mistrust runs deep and opposition factions remain emboldened.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Subnational work key to Sino-US climate cooperation

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco
junchang@chinadailyusa.com

Top advocates of China-US collaboration on climate change have published an article urging provinces and cities in the two countries to expand their teamwork.

The article, published on Monday in the science journal Nature, is co-authored by China's former special climate envoy Xie Zhenhua, former California governor Jerry Brown, and scholars Fan Dai and Peng Gong from Hong Kong and Yi Wang from Beijing. It is titled "How provinces and cities can sustain US-China climate cooperation".

Citing the fruitful cooperation between China and the United States at the subnational level, the authors address in the article how subnational governments and non-state actors can play a "crucial part in supporting dialogue and collaboration" after US President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan 20.

Trump has indicated that federal policy on climate and environmental issues might shift drastically, the authors wrote, adding that Trump's proposed hefty tariff on imports from China "will have a pronounced impact on the US-China relationship, which is already fractious". Nevertheless, "it is important to

recognize that both countries share common vulnerabilities, including weather-related disruption caused by climate change, and have reasons to act jointly in some areas", they wrote, calling for "sustained engagement between the world's two largest economies".

On joint initiatives between California and Chinese agencies and provinces on clean energy and climate action, the authors highlighted areas in which "expanding subnational collaboration can be effective and lay out steps to advance the US-China partnership on climate change".

For example, they said, the two sides can exchange decarbonization technologies, improve power grids and markets, and expand climate financing.

Collaboration between California and China has grown over the past decade. In 2017, when Brown was governor, he met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and signed a series of climate- and energy-focused agreements between California and several of China's national agencies and provincial governments.

Those efforts strengthened earlier ties and built on California's first memorandum of understanding on climate change with China's National Development and Reform

Commission and Guangdong and Jiangsu provinces, according to the article. The memorandum was signed in 2013.

In 2021, Xie, then China's climate envoy, and US climate envoy John Kerry supported dialogue and cooperation on climate change, paving the way for a meeting in November last year between President Xi and his US counterpart Joe Biden in San Francisco.

The two nations then released a joint statement on enhancing cooperation to address climate issues, identifying areas for deeper bilateral collaboration, including exchanging know-how on the transition from coal to green energy, and the reduction of methane emissions and waste through more efficient use of resources.

Working groups were set up to exchange ideas in each of those areas. The groups' discussions culminated in a high-level bilateral meeting at the California-China Climate Institute in Berkeley, California, in May. Participants included the governors of California and Guangdong province and officials from five cities and four provinces of China.

As California looks to rapidly initiate offshore wind projects, it has turned to Chinese wind turbine manufacturers.

China, meanwhile, has modeled its new green-building regulations after California's Title 24 standards — a set of building codes that ensure energy efficiency.

"By sharing expertise, the United States and China can help one another to address their challenges," the authors wrote.

On future cooperation, they recommended several steps to enrich the climate-centered partnership.

The first is to support subnational cooperation. Both national and local governments need to empower regional initiatives, provide policy frameworks, and fund joint projects, even in challenging diplomatic periods, they wrote.

Second, broader participation is recommended, and more players are needed to aid meaningful climate-related exchanges, the article said.

The third suggestion is to prioritize what works. California's agreements with Beijing, Shanghai and several Chinese provinces offer a model for advancing multilateral efforts. The authors wrote that, as climate change is a global issue, subnational cooperation must eventually find its way back to the global stage.

No matter how formidable the obstacles are, collaboration remains the most viable path forward, they wrote.

Homeward bound

Honduran migrants who were deported from the United States board a bus to return to their communities, at Ramon Villeda Morales International Airport in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, on Wednesday.
MOISES CASTILLO / AP



Experts question Biden's Africa promises

By SHAO XINYING
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In the waning days of his presidency, US President Joe Biden made a rare visit to Angola, touting support for Africa and a key railway project. With his term ending soon, experts question whether these promises will be fully delivered.

Biden had promised to visit sub-Saharan Africa last year after reviving the US-Africa Leaders Summit in 2022. His trip, the first by a US president to the region since Barack Obama in 2015, was delayed until October and then postponed further because of Hurricane Milton.

"Biden's visit to Angola in the final month of his presidency raises concerns among African countries about the US' strategic priorities and the sustainability of its Africa policy," said Li Yincai, an associate researcher of African studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

A major focus of Biden's trip is the Lobito Corridor, a railway linking Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola. It aims to help transport critical minerals from the inland countries to the Atlantic via Angola's Lobito port.

It will cut transport time from 45 days to 45 hours, according to the US administration. Part of the project's objectives is to strengthen the US presence in a region rich in metals

and raw materials crucial to the production of electric vehicle batteries.

"The trip is a promise Biden must fulfill, especially against the backdrop of major country competition," Li said. "The so-called critical minerals play a significant role in this move. Biden hopes to achieve some tangible results before his presidency ends."

Chen Zheng, a lecturer on US politics at Beijing Foreign Studies University and a researcher at the Beijing-based think tank Taihe Institute, echoed these views, saying African American votes are a key support base for the Democratic Party.

Key voting bloc

In the global arena, the United States needs to maintain friendly relations with African countries as Africa is a key voting bloc for issues concerning global governance, she said.

On Wednesday, Biden announced another \$600 million for the 1,300-kilometer Lobito Corridor, bringing the US investment in the project to more than \$4 billion, as part of an international financing exceeding \$6 billion, the White House said.

"Despite the renewed investment commitment, the area lacks key infrastructure, including logistics and industrial facilities, which casts a shadow over the US' ambitious plans," Chen said, adding that past US promises have often fallen short of delivery. White House national security

spokesman John Kirby said completing the Lobito Corridor will "take years", with much of the project likely falling to Biden's successor, Donald Trump, who takes office on Jan 20.

Li of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences said that while it is unclear whether Trump will continue Biden's legacy, he is expected to support parts of the Lobito project and maintain a close partnership with Angola for critical minerals.

During his visit on Tuesday to Angola's National Slavery Museum near the capital, Luanda, Biden said the US was "all in on Africa", pledging \$1 billion of "new humanitarian support for Africans displaced from homes by historic droughts".

Li said: "Historically, US humanitarian aid often comes with political conditions or stipulations. While the main goal is to address crises like natural disasters or health emergencies, aid can also be linked to political, economic, or security objectives."

At the museum, which displays items from the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Biden acknowledged slavery as "our nation's original sin, one that haunted America".

"The history of slavery, along with the long impact of Western colonization in Africa, continues to evoke strong negative sentiments among African people," Chen said.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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COMMENT

Editorials

US appropriately handling Taiwan question might be watershed moment for relationship

In response to the United States' irresponsible moves, China has sanctioned the US companies providing weapons and associated services to China's Taiwan island in the multi-billion-dollar deals Washington has approved in recent months.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry announced on Thursday a series of countermeasures against 13 US arms, artificial intelligence, drone and telecommunications companies and six senior executives of five US enterprises in these sectors, in accordance with the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law.

Starting from Thursday, Beijing froze these entities' property in China and prohibited organizations and individuals in China from engaging in business transactions, cooperation and other activities with them. Also, visas will not be issued to the individuals concerned, and they will not be allowed to enter China.

Although China is open to foreign businesses and investment, and promotes international economic and trade cooperation, all of the business activities on Chinese territory, including Taiwan island, must follow Chinese laws and regulations. The sanctions are fundamentally different from the baseless sanctions the US imposes on Chinese entities for the purpose of thwarting China's high-tech catch-up, containing China's development and protecting the US' hegemony. Compared with the US' arbitrary sanctions and its suppression of hundreds of Chinese entities, China's measures are a rational, restrained and precise response to the US' moves related to Taiwan.

China's commitment to welcoming US companies and investment remains unchanged. But so too is its commitment to opposing any moves in support of the island's secessionists.

In contrast with Washington's across-the-board China-containment strategy, Beijing has prudently demarcated the line between foreign parties' normal economic and technological interactions with Taiwan and those that challenge the one-China principle. The US companies are well aware that the arms sales to Taiwan violate the one-China principle and the three Sino-US joint communiques, and their products and services threaten regional peace and stability.

The sanctions announced on Thursday are an acute reminder that the Taiwan question is the core of China's core interests, the foundation of the political foundation of China-US relations, and the primary red line in China-US relations. As the incoming US administration prepares to take office, there is an opportunity for a reevaluation of the US' approach to the Taiwan question.

The strategic ambiguity the US has adopted on the Taiwan question might have served the US' interests to some extent during the Cold War and when China didn't have the capacity it has now to keep the US from its doorstep. But if the US persists with trying to exploit the Taiwan question for its own ends, it will find itself caught in an extremely grave dilemma that is entirely avoidable.

It has been a common understanding of Beijing and Washington that the two countries have no reason not to properly resolve their differences in various sectors. A misstep by the US on the Taiwan question would nix that happening in an instant. The US should show some strategic foresight and step back from the minefield it is laying with its provocations on Taiwan.

If it refrains from gravely interfering in China's internal affairs, stops taking actions that threaten China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and handles the Taiwan question in line with its commitments enshrined in the three joint communiques and other documents of international law, the next US administration could create a watershed moment for the Sino-US relationship, putting it back onto a healthy trajectory.

China's foreign policy, including its policy toward the US, remains stable and continuous. No matter what changes happen in the US, China will always seek to improve and develop Sino-US relations based on the three principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

Despite the ups and downs in Sino-US relations over the past four years, China's goal of pursuing the stable, healthy and sustainable development of the China-US relationship has not changed; its position of firmly safeguarding its sovereignty, security and development interests has not changed; and its desire to continue the traditional friendship between the Chinese and American people has not changed.

Neighbors can sustain improvement in ties

Both China and India are at a critical stage of their national development and rejuvenation, and their relationship has transcended the bilateral scope and bears regional and global significance. Both are fast-developing countries, important members of the Global South and major players in a multipolar world. When they join hands in cooperation, it benefits not only the two countries but also the whole of Asia and the world at large.

It is regrettable therefore that their relationship nosedived to a historical low in June 2020 following a deadly clash between their border troops.

Given the damage India's subsequent politically motivated and shortsighted measures have inflicted on bilateral relations over the past several years, the latest developments following an agreement on disengagement in the border area concerned are encouraging, as they send a positive signal of a mutually beneficial restart of the cooperative partnership between the two Asian giants.

Beijing has long held that China and India, as good neighbors and good friends, should not let their bilateral relations be defined solely by their border disputes. Rather, they should work jointly to properly manage the differences that exist between them, and handle them through consultations and by addressing each other's major concerns.

The leaders of the two countries reached an important consensus that China and India are not rivals or threats to each other, but are partners that offer development opportunities to each other. This has provided a clear direction for bilateral relations.

It is therefore to be welcomed that now that the two countries have reached an agreement on patrolling arrangements along their disputed border, India is ready to consider "other aspects" of its relations with China, as Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar made clear.

"The conclusion of the disengagement phase now allows us to consider other aspects of our bilateral engagement in a calibrated manner," he told parliament on Tuesday. "Recent developments that reflect our continuous diplomatic engagement ... have set our ties in the direction of some improvement."

That India has indicated its readiness to turn a new page marks a major step forward in the two countries' efforts to bring their relationship back onto the track of sound and steady development.

Despite their long-standing border dispute, the world's two largest developing countries have become increasingly interdependent in trade and economic fields. China overtook the United States to become India's largest trading partner in the fiscal year 2024, with total trade between the two countries reaching \$118.4 billion.

The latest upturn in relations continues the pragmatic progress that has been made in resetting bilateral ties in recent months. Hopefully, the two countries will build on the trust they have gained from their sustained talks that produced the border arrangement, and work together to carry forward their cooperative partnership, which concerns not only the well-being of their 2.8 billion people, but also peace and stability of the region and beyond.

China has made clear that it is ready to enhance the synergy between the two neighbors' respective development strategies, share its experiences of advancing modernization with India and strengthen cooperation in economy, trade, science and technology to benefit the two peoples. Beijing is convinced that the two countries have enough wisdom and capability to properly handle their border dispute and find a solution acceptable to both sides, and it hopes to work with New Delhi to advance bilateral relations on a healthy and stable track.

Both sides should correctly view each other's strategic intentions and accommodate each other's core interests and major concerns, so as to build the mutual trust and mutual respect necessary to enable them to harness the good momentum that has been obtained from their talks to defuse the border tensions, and further strengthen their communication and cooperation in various fields.

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Luo Jie



Opinion Line

World trusts Beijing as mediator for resolving conflicts peacefully

As a responsible major country, China has proved to be an active mediator in numerous international and regional conflicts, a promoter of peace and a firm defender of security.

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, an ethnic resistance group, affirmed this when it issued a statement on Tuesday declaring an immediate ceasefire and offering to begin peace talks with the Myanmar army under Chinese mediation.

Thanks to China's continuous mediation, the representatives of the Myanmar army and Kokang and two other local armed groups in northern Myanmar successfully held peace talks in Kunming, China's Yunnan province, on Jan 10 and 11, and reached a formal ceasefire agreement.

Given the deep-rooted contradictions between ethnic minorities and the central government, Myanmar has been one of the countries that have suffered the most enduring civil wars in the world since World War II,

causing untold sufferings to the Myanmar people. In order to advance the peace process, successive governments in Myanmar have committed themselves to resolving armed conflicts through dialogue and negotiation with ethnic armed organizations.

China is concerned about the Myanmar situation, and has been urging relevant parties there to end fighting and reach a ceasefire, to avoid escalation of the situation and safeguard the areas bordering China.

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army's interest in talks with government forces will not only contribute to peace and stability, but also highlight China's constructive role as a major country. Maintaining the momentum of ceasefire and peace talks in northern Myanmar serves the interests of all parties in Myanmar and is of particular significance to peace and stability on the China-Myanmar border.

China has always advocated for

resolving conflicts through dialogue and negotiation and has contributed to regional peace and cooperation by exerting its role in international affairs. It hopes that all parties in Myanmar can earnestly implement the ceasefire agreement, exercise maximum restraint, resolve disputes through dialogue and consultation and push for substantive progress in the peace process in northern Myanmar.

China's fruitful mediation in Myanmar and other places not only demonstrates its diplomatic strength and coordination ability, but also shows how much the international community trusts it on regional matters. At a time when the world is in turmoil, conflicts continue to emerge in various places, and the use of force has failed to resolve fundamental problems, China's approach to resolving disputes through talks and peaceful means appears all the more valuable.

— WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

Festival for community with shared future for mankind

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has included Spring Festival and social practices of the Chinese people when celebrating the traditional new year on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In doing so, the 19th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held in Paraguay from Dec 2 to 7, recognized the festival for its wide array of rituals and unique cultural elements that engage all of Chinese society.

Spring Festival is the most influential among all traditional Chinese festivals due to its profoundness, rich content, as well as wide participation; almost every Chinese celebrates it annually.

Families reuniting after a whole

year's work, bidding farewell to the old and welcoming the new and seeking blessings and good fortune is so deeply rooted in Chinese tradition that it has survived despite modernization.

The number of people who watched the 2024 Spring Festival Gala on television screens, computers, tablets and smartphones reached 795 million.

It's also notable that celebration of the Spring Festival has crossed geographical boundaries, with many people in East and Southeast Asian countries observing local versions of the festival while cultural groups in the United States, Europe and other continents respect the customs thanks to globalization. In some sense, the Spring Festival is a symbol of Chinese culture that is universally accepted, recognized, and appreciated.

For every Chinese person, Spring Festival is a reason to never forget one's home; for every Chinese person living in a different country, observing Spring Festival helps renew cultural ties with home.

That's why the inclusion of this heritage project is of great significance for enhancing the cultural identity of Chinese people at home and abroad. The move helps to practice global civilization initiatives and promotes the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

With the Spring Festival added, China now has a total of 44 projects inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List and Register, ranking first in the world. With the influence of Chinese culture growing, more Chinese cultural activities will be added in the times to come.

— ZHANG ZHOXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

China's chip industry able to withstand sanction attacks

The United States' suppression of China's advanced chip industry has to some extent affected its catch-up in the sector. But that has greatly prompted the country to consolidate its foundation in the low- and middle-end chip industry and improve its overall competitiveness in related markets. China is using everything it can to do its own thing well.

China's semiconductor exports in the first 10 months this year reached a value of 931.17 billion yuan (\$128.18 billion), an increase of 21.4 percent year-on-year.

In other words, the US' sanctions over the past five years have not prevented the continued development and growth of China's chip industry, especially in the middle- and low-end semiconductor sectors.

The US government has continuously "patched" holes in its suppres-

sive policies targeting China's advanced semiconductor industry over the past five years. But the marginal effect of these sanctions is decreasing.

The global chip market does not have a large demand for advanced chips, though they are important. Over the past decade, the biggest driving force for the growth of the global semiconductor industry has come from smartphones and personal computers. Now, the demand driving the industry is from the automotive and industrial fields, and their requirement is for reliability, not high computing speed.

The US strategic community, represented by some think tanks, has noticed a phenomenon that the development of Chinese chip companies has accelerated and they have consolidated their position in the

low- and middle-end chip market amid Washington's crackdown, while US companies have lost their competitiveness.

US companies that specialize in one link in the industry chain and occupy a key position are becoming more and more determined to oppose the US' continued attacks on the Chinese chip industry which affects their access to the Chinese market. Therefore, many US chip companies have made it clear that they will not give up the Chinese market but will expand their business in China.

Therefore, the US strategy of blocking China from top to bottom in all links of high-end chips is failing. It had only succeeded in proving that the trend of economic globalization cannot be reversed.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

COMMENT

Harley Seyedin and James Eric Black

China, US have much to learn from each other

One of the top priorities of Donald Trump after he takes oath as US president may not be what American people, in general, think. Although he has vowed to impose additional 10 percent tariffs on all goods from China as one of his first executive orders, he has left the door open for action by China and made clear the issues which concern him most.

Though US Vice-President Kamala Harris criticized Trump's tariff threats during her failed presidency bid, the Biden-Harris administration retained tariffs Trump imposed on \$370 billion worth of Chinese goods, while also slapping 100 percent tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles.

Now, Contemporary Amperex Technology, the world's largest EV battery maker in terms of installation, is considering setting up a plant in the United States if Trump opens the door to Chinese investment. Chinese EV and battery makers have been shut out of the US market through a variety of protectionist trade measures supported by both Democrats and Republicans. Yet a Fortune magazine report said that Trump has reiterated his openness to Chinese automakers to manufacture cars in the US because that would boost the US economy, signaling a potentially different approach from the Biden administration which has sought to keep out Chinese-made cars.

Trump is more transactional than Biden when it comes to Chinese companies building cars in the US. Of course, there is a condition: automakers must make all their products in the US and employ American workers. The failure to comply would result in substantial tariffs on their imported vehicles. The US does have historical precedent of changing directions in times of societal shifts. Japan went from being persona non grata in the 1970s to the belle of the ball by establishing manufacturing units in the US.

China and the US are still struggling to overcome several problems, including the tariffs they have imposed on each other. But transitions are uniquely consequential moments in geopolitics. These are times when leaders can see potential opportunities. Perhaps that's why US companies operating in China remain optimistic about the future, recognizing that the US election result presents an opportunity for renewed focus on stability, cooperation and sustainable growth in US-China relations.

The US-China trade figures don't appear as a concern. While the political landscape remains dynamic, many businesses are certain that the new US administration will prioritize engagement, balanced trade poli-

cies, and predictability in global markets.

US companies have long valued the strong economic ties between the two countries, and continue to believe in the mutual benefit of innovation, job creation and cultural exchanges. We believe it's time the two countries got back to business and investing in each other.

US businesses operating in China are committed to contributing to a positive, stable and mutually beneficial economic partnership that will support the long-term prosperity of both countries. China is a critical trading partner of the US as well as a major competitor. In order to improve bilateral relations, the two sides will have to take some conciliatory measures. We see US-China economic relations as a solution, not as a part of the problem.

Leaders of both the US and China face daunting tasks, which require tough decisions in the coming months. China has been trying to boost its economic recovery after the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic but its efforts are being hampered by the downturn in the real estate market and slowdown in the world economy. The country also faces structural head-



winds that could become more pronounced as the 2020s progress. Some impetus from the US market may just be the thing the Chinese economy needs to boost its recovery.

That does not mean Trump will, metaphorically, give all the US' major trading partners flowers at the beginning of his term. He recently vowed to impose huge tariffs on goods imported from the US' three largest trading partners — Canada, Mexico and China — detailing how he will implement his campaign promises.

Trump won the presidential election primarily due to voters' anger and bitterness with inflation and the condition of the US economy. Therefore, the new US administration has promised monumental reforms involving nearly every aspect of government, which will likely face fierce opposition from many fronts. Turning around a \$1.83 trillion hemorrhaging deficit in itself will be a herculean task.

China has some problems of its own. According to the United Nations, China's population is projected to decline to 1.31 billion by 2050, drop below 1 billion by 2070 and below 800 million by 2100. Besides, Chinese women are less willing to have children due to the rising costs of living. Although China's demographic situation is not exclusive to the country, it needs

to be timely addressed. The US, Japan, Germany, the Republic of Korea and many other countries are facing similar problems.

We believe that investing in fields with proven track records is a sure bet to improve bilateral relations. It is therefore imperative that China and the US continue to open their markets to each other, allowing cross investment in areas of mutual benefit.

The two largest economies in the world can and must manage their differences, and prevent competition from veering into confrontation or conflict by maintaining open lines of communication and advancing cooperation in areas of shared interest. We think the solution is to allow Chinese companies to invest in the US so as to make bilateral cooperation flexible. It is good for both economies when China is totally focused on business.

Harley Seyedin is the president of the American Chamber of Commerce in South China and winner of the 2017 Oslo Business for Peace Award; and James Eric Black is the Schumann Endowed professor and chair of Mercer University's Department of Journalism and Media Studies and author of *Walt Kelly and Pogo: The Art of the Political Swamp*. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Chen Weihua

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Ukraine conflict must be resolved via diplomacy, not escalated

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has shifted his stance on how Ukraine's conflict with Russia can be ended. In his interviews with Fox News, Sky News and Kyodo news agency in the past weeks, Zelensky said he would agree to end the conflict with some kind of territorial concession with Russia but receive NATO's security guarantee for the rest of Ukraine's territory.

It is a major departure from the "10-point Peace Plan" he put forward in late 2022 and the "Victory Plan" he promoted in October but received no endorsement — not even from the United States or the European Union.

Most non-NATO member countries have been calling for a cease-fire and dialogue to resolve the conflict because they know no dispute or difference can be resolved on the battlefield. Unlike most NATO members, these countries have maintained good relations with both Russia and Ukraine and therefore their stance is less biased.

For such countries, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is like seeing two friends engaged in a fight. Hence, their natural response is to urge both sides to back off, instead of giving a knife to one to stab the other. The US and NATO, however, have been doing exactly that, literally turning the conflict into a prolonged proxy war against Russia.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte's remarks on Wednesday are the latest signal for a new round of escalation. After the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels, he said "we must provide enough support to change the trajectory of the conflict".

The US and NATO have tried to change the trajectory on the battlefield over the past 33 months by providing weapons including tanks, ammunition, F-16 fighter jets and long-range missiles, but the result has been more casualties and destruction and setbacks on the battlefield for Ukraine.

Ukrainian civilians have borne the brunt of the conflict. A Gallup poll released last month showed that more than half of the Ukrainians want their country to negotiate an end to the conflict as soon as possible. Also, Zelensky's approval ratings and people's confidence in his government both have been declining over the past year. And last week, the Associated Press reported that more than 100,000 soldiers have been charged under Ukraine's desertion law since 2022. These facts partly explain why Zelensky has changed his stance on the conflict.

For more than two years, I have been asking EU officials why they have not resorted to diplomacy to help end the conflict. Their answer has always been that Russia is not sincere about ending it. When I raised Russia's concern over NATO's eastward expansion, they simply dismissed it as Russian propaganda. In a word, there has been no real debate on the conflict, let alone how to help end it, in Brussels.

That's exactly what Charles Kupchan believes. Kupchan is a Georgetown University professor who served as senior director for European affairs at the National Security Council during former US president Barack Obama's administration. A brilliant scholar, Kupchan talked about his book, *How Enemies Become Friends*, when we first met in New York in 2010.

At a Quincy Institute seminar in late October, he asked, "Why can't we have a realistic debate about Ukraine?" The justification given by people about why Russia should not worry about NATO's expansion ever closer to its border, he said, flies in the face of "Geopolitics 101". He added that the US spent the 19th century trying to kick every European power out of the Western hemisphere. He also said that some in the US even use words such as "treason" to describe his stance on the Ukraine crisis.

The US and the United Kingdom sabotaged the peace talks that were progressing well between Russia and Ukraine in the spring of 2022. If the past two and a half years have proved anything, it is that we should not let the US and NATO hijack the will of most of the Ukrainians, who want an end to the conflict as soon as possible.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Manila's move threatens regional peace

Editor's note: The deployment of the US' Typhon missile system in the Philippines has raised widespread concerns, with critics arguing that such a weapon system far exceeds the defense requirements of Manila and, instead, risks escalating tensions in the South China Sea, while serving the US' geopolitical interests at the expense of regional peace. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

An open attempt to disrupt regional peace

The US' Typhon medium-range missile system, which was transported to the Philippines for a joint military drill earlier this year and should have left the country's shores by September, has remained in northern Philippines since April at the request of the Philippine government. Manila is considering deploying it permanently in order to counter the so-called threat from China.

Neighboring countries have criticized the Philippines for deploying the medium-range missile system in the region, saying its decision is a betrayal of its promise to maintain peace and a threat to the collective security of the region. The US may have cajoled some Philippine politicians into agreeing to permanently deploy the missile system, but the Philippine government's decision does not serve the country's security interests. Instead, it will undermine regional security and deceive the Philippine people into believing their

government's move is in their interest.

Medium-range missiles are offensive weapons and have the potential to severely disrupt the strategic stability and security of a region. During the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, banning the deployment of such weapons. But the US pulled out of the INF Treaty in 2019, and colluded with a few Philippine politicians to deploy the medium-range missiles in the Asia-Pacific region to maintain its global hegemony. This is a coercive act which will disrupt the regional strategic balance, posing a serious threat to regional countries and exacerbating geopolitical tensions.

The deployment of medium-range missiles doesn't serve the Philippines' security needs. The destructive and deterrent capabilities of such offensive weapon systems far exceed the defense requirements of the Philippines. Manila has cited the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty to justify the deployment of the missiles. But the missiles will not bolster its security; rather they will put it at greater risk, because offensive weapons are prime targets when conflicts break out.

Moreover, medium-range missiles are "luxury items" on the US government's arms export list. The Philippines faces some serious economic challenges such as inflation. Many Philippine people are worried about their incomes and employment. So it would cause grave harm to Philippine taxpayers and ordinary citizens if some

politicians resort to populism and seek foreign military help to divert people's attention from the burning domestic economic issues.

The deployment of medium-range missiles in the Philippines has not upset China as a few US military conspirators think nor does it increase the Philippines' military power as some Philippine politicians believe. Instead, the missile system poses a threat to the security and development of all the countries in the region, and endangers the safety and interests of the Philippine people.

Yang Xiao and Lin Ziqin are experts in maritime studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

Missiles threaten China's security

The Philippine defense minister, according to foreign media reports, has said that Manila is considering purchasing the Typhon medium-range missile system from the US. This is Manila's latest move to undermine Sino-Philippine relations and regional stability.

Since April, Manila has been saying the medium-range missile system was deployed in the country for the US-Philippines joint military exercise and will be shipped back to the US. But Manila, going back on its word, now intends to permanently deploy it.

The Philippines' move poses a direct

threat to China's national security. The Typhon medium-range missile system is an offensive weapon which can launch Tomahawk cruise missiles that can hit southern China. Therefore, the missile system's deployment will exacerbate tensions in the South China Sea and the region beyond.

Although the Philippine government claims it has been trying to ease tensions in the region and rebuild mutual trust with China, it has repeatedly violated the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and provoked incidents around China's islands and reefs, including Huangyan Island, in the South China Sea.

Manila's possible purchase and deployment of the missile system will further threaten regional peace and stability, while serving the security interests of the US and encouraging it to interfere in the South China Sea issue. With a new US administration about to take office, Manila's high-profile announcement of its intention to purchase the Typhon medium-range missile system exposes its intention to curry favor with US president-elect Donald Trump to seek his government's military protection.

Du Jifeng is an associate researcher at the National Institute of International Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategic Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

DONALD RAMOTAR

Modernizing the Global South

China's leadership has always based its policy and its relations with the developing world on the principle of solidarity, mutual benefits and the promotion of win-win cooperation

The socioeconomic development of the Global South is in the interest of all mankind. It can become a major contributor to the welfare of the whole world. This is not recognized universally and as a result two approaches have emerged toward advancing progress in the Global South.



The first approach is correlated to the attitude of the United States and the former colonial powers in Europe toward the Global South. Their position is to try to take control of the resources of the Global South to enrich the multinational corporations and to develop their own societies.

After World War II, at Bretton Woods they created organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to control the developing countries. The bodies established then are very formidable to this day. The control of these organizations is firmly in the hands of the US and some of its allies in Europe. Countries are made to accept economic programs dictated by those banks.

All the programs are geared to create favorable conditions for the exploitation of the developing countries' natural resources and the exploitation of cheap labor.

As a result, the developing countries are actually net exporters of capital to the developed countries. In a paper published in the journal *New Political Economy*, it is estimated that the scale of the drain through the unequal exchange from the Global South to the Global North was some \$150 trillion when accounting for their lost growth from 1960 to 2018.

The mechanisms used to extract so much wealth from the Global South include interests on debt, repatriation of profits and unfair trade practices (selling at high prices and buying cheap), among others.

In the meantime, conditions in the Global South are extremely grim. Poverty is extremely high, and people are mostly underemployed or unemployed. Social infrastructures such as education, health and housing are all in a terrible state. This leads to migration and a brain drain.

The physical infrastructure is also in an extremely poor state. Insufficient roads, mostly unpaved, lead to general underdevelopment.

The second approach is the one pursued by the People's Republic of China. The leadership of China has always based its policy and its relations with the developing world on the principle of solidarity, mutual benefits and the promotion of win-win cooperation.

As China has developed, it has shared its prosperity with the rest of the Global South. It has invested in many least-developed countries that could not get loans from the World Bank and the IMF. Many of them were regarded as "credit risks".

Now China has emerged as a very powerful country economically, and it has proposed several revolutionary programs that have captured the imagination of peoples everywhere.

In 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, which is a breathtaking proposal. This initiative connects countries and regions by roads, ports and railways. It entails investments to establish vital infrastructure, which was sorely lacking in the developing countries. The absence of those physical projects was a fundamental reason for the underdevelopment of the Southern Hemisphere. The investments in Belt and Road projects are intended to accelerate economic progress in a very sustainable way.

The scale of the initiative is very exciting. Already more than 150 countries have signed up to be part of this massive modernization push.

The BRI is bringing together peoples everywhere and integrating countries' economies in a way never done before. At the same time, it is contributing to the sovereignty of the various countries, allowing them to participate as equal partners.

While I have tried to show that the Belt and Road projects help promote wealth creation, and it is designed to allow countries to add value to their products and to break out of the vicious cycle of underdevelopment, there is another important consequence of these projects — it brings people closer to each other.

It is apposite at this point to show the qualitative difference between Chinese investments in the Global South as compared with those of the US and European countries.

As pointed out above, the Chinese

investments are all oriented to building much-needed infrastructure for the Global South. This promotes economic activities, and encourages added value and sustainable growth. These investments are indispensable for overcoming backwardness.

Western investments in the Global South have always been geared to the exploitation of the natural resources of the countries concerned. In the Caribbean for instance, Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica have been major producers of bauxite for many years, but they still have a long way to become notable aluminium producers. This is largely because the West never developed their energy potential and therefore processing is done by one or more of the imperialist countries.

The same could be said of other minerals such as gold, diamond, manganese, etc. In agriculture, we are mainly producers of raw materials. For example, sugar is still in its raw stage while we import industrial sugar.

It is here that we have to look for the real reason for the "attacks" of the Western powers on China. In order to keep their historical position of exploiter in the Global South, they try to stop China from building win-win cooperation and mutual respect. This is how they hope to keep the Third World poor, heavily indebted and dependent.

Thus, the hostility and slanders toward Chinese partnerships are being intensified.

In order to overcome the mindset of the West, China continues to hold out its hands of friendship and to offer cooperation instead of cutthroat competition.

On March 27, President Xi made a speech at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. He returned to the theme of a community of shared destiny. He said: "We should encourage different civilizations to respect each other and live in harmony."

So, the difference between the different approaches of China and the West to several global issues is profoundly philosophical.

The Western approach is based on the philosophy of domination and control of the world resources and economies. It pays little or no attention to various cultures and norms. Its goal is to impose its systems and values on all mankind, which leads them to be extremely aggressive, imposing sanctions, blockades and even going to war to get their own way.

The Chinese approach is one of promoting mutual benefits in economies and international trade, respecting cultural differences, seeking to understand each other better and promoting peace and friendship among the various civilizations.

I am convinced that the approach of the Chinese leadership is more viable. This approach will resonate even with some countries in the West who want an environment conducive to doing business.

The struggle to promote the goals set by China will not be easy as there will be resistance from those who crave hegemony and domination. However, the examples are becoming more profound, and masses are breaking away from domination as we see in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Global South is finally putting an end to neocolonialism and it is playing a greater role in international relations largely due to the possibilities that have opened up due to China's new approaches to global issues.

The outbreak of the Ukraine crisis is a reflection of the fundamental shift in the global landscape. For three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a structural contradiction in the Commonwealth of Independent States region between Russia and the West. This ultimately led to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, which has changed the global landscape in the following ways.

First of all, the balance of power among major countries has shifted. A "collective West" has



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

PANG DAPENG

Historical turning point for Europe

While EU thinks of 'de-risking' to cope with uncertainties, China and Europe should, instead, coordinate to inject more stability to the world

The Future of European Competitiveness report, which was unveiled by the European Commission on Sept 9, stated that Europe faces an "existential challenge". The report believes a deteriorating external environment is hindering the economic growth of



Europe, and the three conditions that have underpinned Europe's prosperity — an open global market, cheap energy and a stable geopolitical environment — are eroding, leading to shrinking trade, an energy crisis and security threats.

Europe has long been seeking solutions to a world in flux. In June 2023, the European Union published its first European Economic Security Strategy. In January this year, it introduced the European Economic Security Package. At the heart of the EU's approach to a changing world is "de-risking", which aims to bolster supply chain resilience and protect Europe's economic security.

In a joint article published in the *Financial Times* on May 27, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that "Europe is experiencing its *Zeitenwende* (historical turning point)" and it must strengthen its sovereignty. The vision of the Future of European Competitiveness report is in line with the approach taken by the EU following the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis.

The report proposed that the EU should be a leader in new technologies, a beacon of climate responsibility and an independent player on the world stage. These goals reflect the consensus of the era and the common pursuits of countries around the world.

The outbreak of the Ukraine crisis is a reflection of the fundamental shift in the global landscape. For three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a structural contradiction in the Commonwealth of Independent States region between Russia and the West. This ultimately led to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, which has changed the global landscape in the following ways.

First of all, the balance of power among major countries has shifted. A "collective West" has

formed, with NATO and the EU expanding. The EU has evolved into an organization that integrates the political, military, security and foreign affairs of member states, and NATO has become an increasingly expansionary and aggressive military bloc, with the two groupings strengthening their coordination.

Second, as the Russian development path after the collapse of the Soviet Union lacks appeal among CIS countries, the region has witnessed a growing division in geopolitical security, a trend that has only been exacerbated by the Ukraine crisis. It is inevitable that the Eurasian region will see turbulence and divisions, even a reshuffling of power.

Third, bloc confrontations are escalating. The Asia-Pacific region is the center of the global economy, where the strategic interests of major countries, such as the United States, China, Japan, Russia and India, converge. The region has inherited much of the geopolitical legacy of the Cold War. By pushing its "Indo-Pacific" strategy, the US aims to contain China through military encirclement, and thus preserve its hegemony in the region.

Fourth, the world faces increased risk of an arms race that threatens global security. As relations between Russia and the West deteriorate, geopolitical tensions among major powers are mounting, and countries are preoccupied with preventing potential conflicts, terrorism and extremism lurking. The risk that the global economy faces has also reached a new high.

In a changing geopolitical landscape and intensifying major-country competition, Europe faces unprecedented challenges. In such a context, it needs to find a new anchor of stability, and a healthy China-Europe relationship can be a source of its stability.

First, China and Europe do not have fundamental conflicts of interest or strategic contradictions. They have greater common interests than differences. Reeling from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine crisis and a deluge of US industry subsidies, the EU faces a worsening security situation, an energy crunch, and outflows of capital and industry. As a result, the EU's overall strength is declining, and it is struggling to attain strategic autonomy.

China, on its part, is committed to cooperating with Europe, believing that China and Europe are partners rather than adversaries, and opportunities rather than threats to each other. China promotes the healthy development of bilateral ties, and supports Europe's endeavor to achieve strategic independence.

Second, China-Europe cooperation can enhance the supply chain resilience and economic security of Europe. Last year, the bilateral trade volume reached \$783 billion, and the two-way investment stock exceeded \$250 billion. The China-Europe freight train service, which was launched in 2011, has reached the milestone of 100,000 trips, transporting more than 11 million twenty-foot equivalent units of goods, valued at more than \$420 billion.

China and Europe also have shared interests in tackling global challenges such as the digital transformation and climate change.

By collaborating on clean energy, the digital economy and artificial intelligence, the two sides can advance the sustainable development of the world. To this end, China, which is committed to promoting higher-level opening-up, will provide an open, transparent and inclusive business environment for European enterprises. As two of the world's major economies, China and Europe are inherently important to each other.

Today's world faces traditional and non-traditional security threats, and an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape. Uncertainties in the world economy are growing, and security threats are becoming more prominent. Under these circumstances, China and Europe should respect each other, strengthen cooperation and enhance coordination. By bolstering bilateral relations, they can better meet external challenges, achieve their development goals and inject more stability and certainty to the changing world.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



From left: The Romance of West Chamber, a classic of Chinese drama based in Shanxi, is performed at the Shanxi Night gala. A Chinese folk music concert is held during the event. Pottery and porcelain products made in Shanxi on display. PHOTOS BY FENG SIQUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ENTREPRENEURS MAKING ALL THE RIGHT CONNECTIONS WITH SHANXI

More than 1,500 guests descend on Hangzhou for trade and investment networking event that celebrates culture

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The North China province of Shanxi values major events in the country as opportunities to network with traders and investors from across the world.

This was the case with the seventh World Zhejiang Entrepreneurs Convention, which opened on Nov 28 in Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang province. This session was attended by more than 1,500 entrepreneurs from all over the world, including more than 1,320 from Zhejiang.

At this networking event, a unique offering was the Shanxi Night gala, which was held on the evening of Nov 28, on the sidelines of the convention.

The Shanxi Night gala, held at the banquet hall of the Zhejiang People's Great Hall, was jointly hosted by the Shanxi provincial government and other provincial governmental institutions for commerce, investment and cultural tourism.

The gala was not just about trade and investment but presented Shanxi as a dynamic province. Shanxi is transforming itself toward modernization, yet it upholds its traditional appeal of culture and tourism.

Consisting of local arts and cultural heritage performances, a buffet reception and an exhibition, the gala functioned as an opportunity to display Shanxi's unique resources to businesses in and outside China.

Guests invited to the event, mainly businesspeople in Zhejiang, as well as representatives from Fortune Global 500 companies and leading enterprises in China, were treated to a banquet featuring food unique to Shanxi, a performance of Shanxi and Zhejiang's traditional music, and an exhibition of Shanxi's local cultural heritage.

At the banquet, guests enjoyed a feast including *sushi* made from millet of Qinzhou, fragrant pear and sea-buckthorn custard from Xinzhou, quinoa jelly from Jingde, double-colored icy cake from Jincheng and apple-flavored buns from Wenxi. Some representatives from Zhejiang said that the sweet and light cuisine of Shanxi perfectly fits local tastes.

The show featured performances of Shanxi music by the national music troupe of Shanxi Song and Dance Ensemble and Zhejiang music by the Zhejiang Traditional Orchestra.

An official from Shanxi said the joint performance between Shanxi and Zhejiang is testimony to the fruitful exchanges of the representative cultures in northern and southern China.

"The Taosi relics site in Shanxi's Xiangfen and the Liangzhu relics site in Zhejiang's Yuhang are both among the origins of Chinese civilization. It was their convergence and integration that contributed to the formation of the Chinese nation," the official said. "And the cultural integration is still going on, which is manifested in incorporating Shanxi's paper-cutting art, in Zhejiang's silk products design, and Zhejiang's wood-carving art in Shanxi's furniture production."

The official noted that, in the commercial field, Shanxi and Zhejiang have been complementary to each other.

"In history, our people bought silk and tea from Zhejiang and sold salt and iron products to Zhejiang," he said. "And the renowned Shanxi merchants, who were said to dominate China's foreign trade sector



Clockwise from top: The Zhejiang People's Great Hall is decorated with lanterns to welcome guests to the Shanxi Night gala. A guest poses for a photo with Wukong, the protagonist of the hit video game *Black Myth: Wukong*. Chengni ink slabs, which are made with techniques listed as a cultural heritage item in the Shanxi county of Jiangzhou, are exhibited. Iron kettles crafted by artists in Jincheng city on display at the event.

during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, purchased tea and silk from Zhejiang and sold them to the Far East and Europe. The businesspeople from our two provinces had jointly contributed to the economic development of China for many centuries."

He added that a recent example of cooperation between Zhejiang and Shanxi is the production of the hit video game *Black Myth: Wukong*.

On Aug 20, the game made its domestic and global debut, immediately becoming a hit in the industry. The game was developed by Game

Science, a company based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. Of the 36 scenic spots featured in the game, 27 are located in Shanxi.

"Shanxi's landmark sites of ancient buildings, such as Foguang Temple, Nanchan Temple and Jingde Temple in Xinzhou; Xuankong Temple in Datong; Shuanglin Temple in Jinchong; Chongfu Temple in Shuozhou; and Yuhuang Temple in Jincheng, have lent inspiration to the game developers," the official said.

"On the other hand, these sites in Shanxi got instant fame among game enthusiasts and other tourists,

leading to a tourism boom during the National Day holiday in early October and the boom looks set to continue in the years to follow," the official added.

He said that as the result of win-win cooperation, Shanxi's tourism authorities and operators have been authorized to use the game to promote its cultural tourism attractions. A tourism promotional campaign call Travel in Shanxi with Wukong has been launched, capitalizing on the success of *Black Myth: Wukong*.

At the Shanxi Night gala, an exhibi-

tion zone was set up to promote Shanxi's business opportunities and cultural and tourism attractions. An interactive show of the video game and related tourist resources was the centerpiece of the exhibition.

The exhibition zone also brought Shanxi's 10 major emerging industries to light, including new energy vehicles, advanced manufacturing, wind power equipment, hydrogen energy and synthetic biology.

Shanxi's products with distinctive local characteristics — like white liquor and white liquor-based cocktails made by Xinghuacun Fenjiu;

porcelain from Huaiaren; glassware from Qixian; beef from Pingyao; and yellow wine from Daizhou — were also on display at the exhibition.

Some businesspeople from Shanxi viewed the Shanxi Night gala as an opportunity to learn from the experiences of businesses in Zhejiang and in the rest of the country and the world.

Zhao Haijun, deputy general manager of Shanxi-based Jinqin Technology, a fledgling player in the digital service industry, was present at the gala.

"Zhejiang is one of powerhouses of China's e-commerce industry," Zhao said. "We are here to learn, to network and we hope to establish partnerships with Zhejiang's e-commerce companies to help to boost the development of the industry in Shanxi."

Entrepreneurs from both Shanxi and Zhejiang praised the Shanxi Night gala as a platform for networking and cooperation.

Yang Jun, chairman of the Shanxi Chamber of Commerce in Hangzhou, attended the gala. He is a Shanxi native who established a business in Zhejiang province.

"It's a pleasure to attend this Shanxi event in Hangzhou," Yang said. "It gives us a better understanding of the strong development momentum and business opportunities in Shanxi. I believe businesses in Zhejiang and Shanxi can cooperate in many fields through sharing advantageous resources of both provinces."

Liu Duoxia, branding manager of Lu'anfu Silk Group based in the Shanxi city of Jincheng, said she was happy to network with her counterparts in the same industry in Hangzhou.

Liu's company is a producer of *lu* silk products. *Lu* silk is a variety developed in southern Shanxi areas like Jincheng and Changzhi, with a production history of many centuries.

"Silk products made in Hangzhou are renowned globally for their high quality and exquisite design, and *lu* silk is the representative of the silk industry in northern China," Liu said. "Here in Hangzhou, I feel we can have better exchanges with our counterparts, drawing inspiration for designs from them and expanding channels for cooperation."

Wang Hongjin, chief of the Shanxi Department of Commerce, one of the organizers of the event, said this is the fifth time for Shanxi to host the Shanxi Night gala since 2023.

"We have hosted the gala during China's major international events, like the China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, and the China International Import Expo in Shanghai," Wang said. "The gala is a great showcase for Shanxi to display its business opportunities and cultural and tourism resources to the world and it is also a great platform for exchanges and cooperation."

Yang Chunquan, head of the Shanxi Investment Promotion Bureau, said at the gala that Shanxi is in the process of receiving industrial capacities transferred from the Yangtze River Delta region, which includes Zhejiang province.

"We are here to present the business opportunities in Shanxi," Yang Chunquan said. "We welcome more enterprises in Zhejiang, as well as the rest of the country and the world, to invest in Shanxi for mutually beneficial development."

Liu Cong contributed to this story.

LIFESHANGHAI

Nepalese doctor reflects on city's ever-evolving tapestry

Surgeon's journey leads to contributions that are appreciated and recognized with prestigious awards

Walking through the *People's City* exhibition at the Shanghai Exhibition Center, Ashish Maskay feels a profound connection. Among the 900 photographs and 353 real-world examples showcasing the city's recent progress in serving its people, he witnessed not just Shanghai's transformation over the past five years but a reflection of his own journey.

Born in 1971 and arriving in Shanghai in 2003 as a young surgeon from Nepal, he navigated the city with a red Chinese-English dictionary in hand, marveling at the towering Jinmao building, one of the few skyscrapers gracing the skyline at that time.

"The 2003 China and 2024 China are very different," he reflects.

Today, Maskay is the director of Shanghai expatriate healthcare and section chief of assistant surgeons at Shanghai United Family Hospital. His journey, however, has extended far beyond the surgery room. He's also the founder of Bloodline, a non-profit connecting expats with children battling blood cancer, a testament to the community he found in Shanghai.



His dedication was recognized in 2020 and 2022 when he was awarded the Shanghai Magnolia Silver Award and Shanghai Magnolia Gold Award, respectively, recognizing his significant contributions to the city's development and international exchanges.

Shanghai began awarding the Magnolia Silver Award to expats in 1989, later introducing the Magnolia Gold Award in 1992 and Honorary Citizenship in 1997. Over the past 35 years, 1,877 foreigners have received these honors, underscoring the city's appreciation for their contributions.

Maskay's story is interwoven with the city's evolution.

He recounts early struggles — navigating unfamiliar streets, the lack of English signage and the then uncommon sight of a foreigner, especially in outlying districts.

"They were so fascinated to see foreigners," he laughs, recalling children chasing him and his friend, shouting "Look, *laowai!*"

But alongside these challenges, he found kindness, a willingness to bridge the language gap with a smile and a helping hand. "My teachers and other Chinese friends, colleagues and so on, were extremely good to me," he recalls.

This spirit of helpfulness fueled his desire to contribute. The creation of Bloodline, sparked by a critical need for a rare blood type for a



Clockwise from top: Ashish Maskay and his family upon accepting the Magnolia Silver Award in Shanghai in 2020. Maskay donates blood at Shanghai Children's Hospital Putuo in May. The Magnolia Gold Award Maskay received in 2022, given by the mayor of Shanghai. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

French girl, epitomizes his philosophy: "When Shanghai cries, I cry. When Shanghai smiles, I smile." He sees the organization, with its

diverse 3,000-plus members representing over 68 countries and regions, as a microcosm of the city itself — a "mini United Nations"



joined for a common purpose. He has witnessed firsthand the government's commitment to creating a "People's City", where feedback

is not merely heard, but acted upon. He cites the example of raising concerns about inconsistencies in how foreigners' names were registered

across different systems. To his surprise, his feedback sparked change, including the creation of multilingual informational videos and the streamlining of processes.

"It's quite remarkable to see," he says, observing how these efforts have made the city significantly more welcoming to foreigners.

He recounts encountering the Nepalese parliamentary delegation at the local government office in Hongqiao area, where a display illustrated how residents' suggestions were collected and sent to Beijing. "It goes all the way up, all the way down," he remarks, impressed by the system's inclusiveness and efficiency.

Maskay believes technology plays a crucial role in enhancing residents' lives. He points to the seamless integration of digital tools — from food delivery apps to sophisticated medical technologies — that have become integral to daily life in Shanghai.

He envisions a future where Shanghai leverages AI and digital advancements to further bridge cultural gaps, particularly in healthcare, suggesting the potential for medical tourism that combines top-notch treatment with immersive cultural experiences.

However, for Maskay, the essence of Shanghai goes beyond its impressive infrastructure and technological prowess. He compares the city to "hot pot" where diverse cultures and individuals come together to create a vibrant, ever-evolving tapestry. He's particularly drawn to the symbolism of the magnolia flower, Shanghai's emblem, representing peace, unity and a shared sense of belonging.

He carries this message of ownership and belonging to the younger generation, urging them to "have ownership, belong to the city, and don't just be a mister whoever in the city". He believes that embracing this spirit of shared responsibility and contributing to the city's growth is key to ensuring its continued success.

"The true harmony and true real-world peace come from people mixing, from communication, from interaction," he adds.

His vision for Shanghai is a city where smiles are the universal language, cultural barriers continue to dissolve, and everyone feels a sense of ownership and pride in being a part of its ongoing story.

Luo Bin contributed to this story.

CHINA DAILY

New ski resort sees more people sliding into winter sports

By HE QI
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Imagine beginning and ending your ski day right at your doorstep without any additional traffic. For winter sports lovers, there's nothing more exciting than skiing straight from your doorstep onto the slopes.

The much-anticipated Shanghai Snow World Hotel, featuring 17 groundbreaking ski-in/ski-out suites that offer guests direct access to the slopes — the first of its kind in China — officially opened in Shanghai's Lingang new area on Nov 29.

The hotel, a new property under InterContinental Hotels Group, is situated within Snow World of the Shanghai L+Snow Indoor Skiing Theme Resort, the world's largest real-snow indoor skiing facility certified by Guinness World Records. It is considered an important affiliated facility to the resort which opened on Sept 6.

As a key tourism investment project for Shanghai's 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), the resort integrates dining, accommodations, entertainment, shopping and leisure activities, aiming to fill the void in Shanghai's ice-and-snow tourism facilities.

The resort's construction began in September 2019, in the run-up to the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. It has



Left: Visitors to the Shanghai L+Snow Indoor Skiing Theme Resort, the world's largest indoor skiing resort. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY
Right: The Vignette Collection Shanghai Snow World Hotel is opened on Nov 29 at the Shanghai L+Snow Indoor Skiing Theme Resort. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

been hailed as a new landmark commercial complex in the city and a popular tourist attraction for ski enthusiasts from home and abroad.

"Residents of Shanghai and the Yangtze River Delta are passionate about winter sports and snow-related tourism," says Yin Kang, executive deputy manager of Shanghai L+Snow Indoor Skiing Theme Resort. "We built this project to fulfill people's wishes, which has filled a gap for those seeking ice and snow tourism."

The Beijing Winter Games catalyzed the upgrading of winter tourism

across the country in recent years. According to an industry report, the number of people engaging in ice-and-snow leisure tourism in China during the 2024-25 winter season is projected to exceed 500 million, a significant increase from the 385 million reported last winter.

In the eyes of experts, for warmer places like Shanghai, which do not have cold winter seasons, having an all-in-one skiing facility is of great significance.

The increase in ice-and-snow facilities in China's southern region will attract more people to fall in love

with winter sports, Luo Hao, an official with the skiing association of Jing'an district of Shanghai, tells Xinhua News Agency. "It also provides a nurturing ground for developing local competitive sports teams. They can train on real snow more often, which not only improves competition, but also attracts more participants; in particular, young people."

The resort hosted Shanghai's first student ski championships on Nov 19. Featuring two competition categories — alpine skiing and snowboarding — the event attracted more than 300 students from over 80 schools across

the country, including primary, junior and senior middle schools, and international schools and colleges.

Hosting such an event aligns with a national plan released by the State Council recently to boost the winter sports industry.

According to the plan, China will grow its ice-and-snow economy to 1.5 trillion yuan (\$206 billion) by 2030. It focuses on fostering a full industry chain and forging a synergy across a wide range of elements, such as winter sports, tourism, cultural promotion and equipment manufacturing, to create a vibrant

Fact box

The Shanghai L+Snow Indoor Skiing Theme Resort spans an area of nearly 350,000 square meters.

Its Snow World, covering over 90,000 square meters, features four skill levels, including a 340-meter-long advanced slope with a gradient of 26 degrees and a slope for beginners with coaching and a teaching trail.

The venue offers more than 20 snow-themed entertainment activities.

HE QI

Zhang Zile contributed to this story.

LIFE



A rehearsal of the first musical commission *War and Peace* by the National Centre for the Performing Arts, adapted from Leo Tolstoy's full-length novel of the same title, at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre. Based on the iconic work, it will premiere on Dec 20 in the capital. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In a remarkable fusion of artistic vision and cultural exchange, the classic Russian literary masterpiece *War and Peace* is being re-imagined as a Chinese musical.

This ambitious project by the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing marks the first time that the famous novel by Leo Tolstoy is given a musical adaptation on the Chinese stage. It will premiere at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre on Dec 20 and runs until Dec 29, vice-president of the national center Zhang Yao, announced during a news conference in Beijing on Nov 20. Leading cast members also appeared at the conference, and gave a performance of *Great Comet*, a song from the musical.

A distinguished team of artists, including Russian theater director Alina Chevik, composer Shu Nan, and playwright Yu Rongjun, came together to breathe new life into the epic tale. "We spent two years working on the musical. Our vision was to capture the grandeur of Tolstoy's novel, while translating its complex characters and deep philosophical themes into the vibrant, emotional language of musical theater," says Zhang. "This collaboration between Chinese and Russian artists reflects not only shared artistic goals, but also the spirit of international cooperation that brought this project to fruition."

Zhang adds that since its establishment in 2007, the national center has emphasized the diversity of performing arts, achieving remarkable success in the creation of productions, including operas, dances and dramas. *War and Peace* is the first musical by the institution, and its 112th production overall.

Tolstoy's literary classic is widely regarded as a monumental work of Russian literature. It is set against the backdrop of major historical events in the early 19th-century Russia, and follows the lives of four aristocratic families amid the tumultuous events of war and peace.

Singing Tolstoy's praises

War and Peace in a Chinese musical adaptation represents international cooperation, **Chen Nan** reports.



From left: Director Alina Chevik, choreographer Irina Korneeva and Shu Nan, music director and composer, at the news conference at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Nov 20.

It has been adapted many times into films, TV series, operas and other art forms, and is loved around the world.

Chevik has worked in the genres of musical theater and operetta for many years. The musical of *Anna Karenina*, another adaptation of a Tolstoy novel and also directed by Chevik, was staged at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre in October.

The director brings her deep emotional connection to this icon of Russian literature into the musical.

Having worked closely with the cast, Chevik provided in-depth character analysis and meticulous direction and throughout the creative process collaborated with the composer and playwright to spark the artistic inspiration necessary to present this classic in a modern perspective.

"Turning *War and Peace* into a musical presents a number of unique challenges, primarily due to the complexity of the source material and the requirements of the musical theater format," the director says. "It is a sprawling, multilayered epic, with a vast array of characters, intricate storylines and deep philosophical themes. It spans several years, covering key historical events, and delves into personal journeys, love, betrayal and the meaning of life. Translating this expansive narrative into the concise, emotional storytelling format of a musical is inherently challenging."

She adds that the creative team worked together to find innovative ways to visually and musically represent the novel's grand scale, from battle scenes to intimate social gatherings, while maintaining the integrity of the original material.

Chevik invited longtime collaborators — choreographer Irina Korneeva, and set and costume designer Vyacheslav Okunev to be part of the production. They had worked together on the *Anna Karenina* musical.

"I've worked many times with Alina, and we know each other's artistic style and way of working," says Korneeva. "The choreography for this musical is rooted in the Russian classical tradition, and incorporates elements of European court dance, waltz, polonaise and Russian folk dance, reflecting the aristocratic life described in Tolstoy's novel."

"Condensing such a complex story without losing its depth, context and emotional resonance is not easy," says Yu, who also wrote the lyrics for the Chinese adaptation. "*War and Peace* is deeply embedded in Russian history and culture. To stay true to its origins, the musical adaptation must respect the cultural and historical setting while also making the story appealing to a contemporary audience. This includes depicting Russian aristocracy, military life, and the sociopolitical landscape in a way that feels authentic, but is also understandable and relatable to a Chinese audience."

"What this production offers audiences is a reflection on how to draw strength from life's struggles. No matter what hardships one faces, one must have the courage to continue living. We can find our strength within ourselves, as it is the source of happiness," Yu says.

Shu, who is known for the soundtracks for films, including *The Founding of a Republic* (2009) and *Let the Bullets Fly* (2010), composed the songs for *War and Peace*.

"It's definitely a highlight of my career to write songs for this musical," Shu says. "I tried to write songs that both represent the complexity of each character and move their individual stories forward, while ensuring that the musical numbers are emotionally powerful and thematically relevant. Each character's journey must be distilled into memorable musical moments that resonate emotionally with the audience."

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Volunteer 'Pals' bridge cultures and share Hong Kong's hidden stories

HONG KONG — When he takes off his suit after a long day as a financial professional, Hong Kong resident Marco Kwok happily embraces another identity: host to visitors from around the world.

A volunteer in the Hong Kong Pals, a program organized by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, Kwok takes joy in sharing his city's hidden gems with visitors.

"As a cultural ambassador, I not only give visitors the information they need, but also learn from their cultural backgrounds and share this valuable experience with my friends and family in Hong Kong. It's a form of mutual enrichment," he says.

Launched in 2009, the program has brought together around 100

individuals from different backgrounds, united by their shared passion for their beloved city, enthusiastic citizens who want to showcase Hong Kong's lifestyle and cultural heritage, offer local insight and advice, and ensure that every visitor feels the city's warmth and allure.

Agnes Tam's journey as a volunteer is filled with memories. The retired multinational corporation executive once helped an elderly man who had been born in Hong Kong and who was revisiting after leaving for the United Kingdom when he was 5, relive his childhood memories of the city through old, yellowing photos. "We found 19 of the 20 locations he had photos of," she says, her eyes gleaming with happiness. "When we

parted, he gifted me his precious photo album to express his gratitude."

Tam's post-retirement schedule is busier than ever, filled with volunteer activities. "I increasingly find that volunteering not only enriches my life but also allows me to discover self-worth and happiness in giving," she says.

Lee Ka-lun, a PhD candidate in education at the University of Hong Kong, chose to sign up for the program to help others discover his city's charm as a cultural and artistic exchange hub. "I'm honored to be part of the program," he says.

For many Hong Kong Pals, volunteering is not just about offering help, but also about rediscovering the city they call home. During preparations

for the Tai Hang Fire Dragon Dance, a century-old Mid-Autumn Festival tradition and a national intangible cultural heritage, civil servant Agnes Lo discovered another captivating aspect of her city.

"I was amazed by the intricacy of the craftsmanship behind the tradition and gained a deeper understanding of its rich history," she says. "I eagerly wanted to share this experience with everyone visiting Hong Kong."

During the event, Lo was joined by fellow volunteers Kwok, Tam and Lee. With his sleeves rolled up, Kwok dove into the task of bundling the dragon out of pearl grass, while Tam took on the role of interpreter for two foreign students. Lee, who was also

helping out, was moved by the ambience. The four Hong Kong residents, varying in age and profession, were brought together by the common aspiration to share, learn and keep up with the pace of development.

"Over the past 14 years, our volunteers have contributed nearly 70,000 hours of service," says Bakky Cheng, director of visitor services at the Hong Kong Tourism Board, who has seen firsthand the growth of the volunteer team, and the transformation of Hong Kong's tourism sector.

In the 2023-24 fiscal year, the volunteers and the board's visitor service team gave travel advice to about 2 million tourists, answering more than 2.3 million inquiries.

As the program thrives thanks to

an unprecedented number of applications, tourism in the city continues to evolve.

"Hong Kong's tourism sector is becoming increasingly diversified," Kwok says. "A decade ago, visitors primarily came for shopping and food. Now, many come for international sports events and tennis tournaments."

What remains unchanged is the city's hospitality. "Through comprehensive training, we ensure every volunteer is kept abreast of the latest tourism trends and masters the art of hospitality, so they can tell a better Hong Kong story to the world," Cheng says.

XINHUA