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# CHINA DAILY

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## Xi reiterates support for private sector

Enterprises and entrepreneurs called on to give full play to capabilities

By MO JINGXI mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has reiterated China's commitment to boosting the private sector through concrete efforts to implement supportive policies and measures.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks on Monday in Beijing at a symposium on private enterprises. The gathering of high-profile participants came years after the previous such symposium was presided over by Xi in 2018.

Among the attendees were Huawei's Ren Zhengfei, BYD's Wang Chuanfu, New Hope's Liu Yonghao, Will Semiconductor's Yu Renrong, Unitree Robotics' Wang Xingxing and Xiaomi's Lei Jun. The six business leaders put forward their opinions and advice on the development of the private sector.

Speaking to a roomful of senior officials and private entrepreneurs, Xi said the government's basic principles and policies concerning the development of the private economy have been incorporated into the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and will consistently be upheld and fulfilled.

"They cannot and will not be changed," he said, noting that obstacles should be removed in order to facilitate private enterprises' equal access to factors of production and market opportunities in accordance with the law.

Xi said that as the world's second-largest economy further reforms and opens up, the enormous market with a population of over 1.4 billion will bring new opportunities for the greater development of private enterprises.

"On the new journey in the new era, the prospects for the development of the private economy are broad and promising. It is a prime time for private enterprises and entrepreneurs to give full play to their capabilities," he said.

As of the end of September last year, China had over 55 million registered private companies, accounting



President Xi Jinping shakes hands with Ren Zhengfei, founder and CEO of tech giant Huawei Technologies, at a symposium on private enterprises on Monday in Beijing. LI XUEREN / XINHUA



Ren Zhengfei



Wang Chuanfu



Liu Yonghao



Yu Renrong



Wang Xingxing



Lei Jun

for 92.3 percent of all businesses. They contribute more than half of the country's tax revenue, over 60 percent of GDP and over 80 percent of urban employment.

Regarding the difficulties and challenges currently facing the private sector's development, Xi said that these have generally emerged during the process of reform and development and industrial transformation.

"They are partial rather than general, temporary rather than long-term, and surmountable rather

than unsolvable," Xi said, stressing the need to stay focused on growth, maintain confidence in development and face up to the challenges with optimism.

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council have rolled out a series of policies and measures to spur the growth of the private sector.

China is also moving closer to its first basic legislation specifically focused on the development of the

private sector, as the draft law was submitted to the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress for deliberation in December.

During the symposium, Xi also called for continuous efforts to see that the competitive areas of infrastructure are open to market entities in a fair manner, to resolve the difficulties private enterprises face in accessing affordable financing, and to resolve overdue payments to private enterprises.

The government will protect the

legitimate rights and interests of private businesses and entrepreneurs in accordance with the law, Xi said.

But he noted that China is a socialist country ruled by law, and no type of illegal activities by enterprises, despite their form of ownership, can avoid investigation and punishment.

Xi stressed the role of private enterprises in advancing China's broader goals in terms of technological innovation, promoting rural vitalization and improving people's well-being. He urged entrepreneurs to focus on high-quality development, invest in their main businesses, strengthen their capacities for innovation, and increase their core competitiveness.

It is hoped that the vast number of private enterprises and entrepreneurs will take the lead in promoting common prosperity, thus making new and greater contributions to advancing Chinese modernization, he said.

WORLD WATCH

By Xue Yuxue

## UN faces an uphill battle in its world renewal endeavors

The year 2025 marks the Year of the Snake according to the Chinese calendar. In his Chinese New Year greeting, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, "The snake symbolizes wisdom, resilience and renewal. In these trying times, let us be guided by these qualities and renew our commitment to peace, equality and justice."

Commitment to peace, equality and justice has been a long-held spirit of the UN ever since its founding in 1945. Guterres used the word "renew" in his message in a nod to the "renewal" quality of the snake. It also reveals his concern that there have been disruptions or deficiencies in pursuing this spirit, and he wished to see that changed. Parenthetically, in his 2025 New Year message, Guterres similarly called for making 2025 a "new beginning."

It's no coincidence that on both occasions Guterres talked about a "renewal" of the world. In the current circumstance filled with increasing uncertainties, the world needs a renewal and a new beginning. The question is: Will the UN chief's calls for a renewed commitment be answered, and can the UN bring on a renewal of the world?

Guterres has many reasons to be concerned.

On one hand, the world is confronted with unprecedented difficulties and challenges that have never been seen before. In Guterres' words, throughout 2024, hope has been hard to find. Wars are causing enormous pain, suffering and displacement. Inequalities and divisions are rife, fueling tensions and mistrust. The globe has just endured a decade of deadly heat and the top 10 hottest years have been recorded in the last 10 years, including 2024 — a climate breakdown in real time.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 released recently by the UN paints an equally gloomy picture. The report finds that only 17 percent of the UN Sustainable Development Goals targets are on track, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over one third has stalled or even regressed. "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 makes for sobering reading. ... This situation is not going to improve on its own: Developing countries, as a whole face the worst medium-term economic outlook in a generation," said the UN chief.

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## Trump's Gaza plan upsets Arab nations

By CAI HONG caihong@chinadaily.com.cn

US President Donald Trump's vision for the future of the Gaza Strip has sparked a global outcry, with experts warning that the proposal will only deepen uncertainty in the region and ultimately threaten the security of the United States.

While hosting Jordan's King Abdullah II at the White House on Feb 11 — the first official visit by an Arab leader during Trump's second term — Trump insisted that Gaza could be entirely emptied of its residents, placed under US control, and transferred into a tourist destination. He has repeatedly proposed that the US "takes over" Gaza and relocates Palestinians from the war-ravaged territory, potentially to Egypt or Jordan.

Saudi Arabia has unequivocally rejected Trump's Gaza plan, as have many other world leaders. The Egyptian government has informed US officials that the displacement and annexation proposals jeopardize the Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1979 and could undermine diplomatic relations between Cairo and Tel Aviv.

King Abdullah II rebuffed Trump's proposal for his country to absorb Palestinians living in Gaza, but said Jordan would take in 2,000 Palestinian children suffering from cancer and other illnesses.



A demonstrator holds a sign on Saturday outside the United States Consulate General in Toronto, Canada, during a protest to oppose US President Donald Trump's plans to take over Gaza and displace Palestinian residents from the region. MIKE CAMPBELL / GETTY IMAGES

Many Jordanians of Palestinian origin — who make up the majority of the kingdom's nearly 12 million population — are wary of transforming Jordan into an alternative homeland for Palestinians. They fear that such a move would effectively deny Palestinians their "right of return" to the territories they fled in 1948 and 1967. Jordan's parliament has introduced a bill that bans the resettlement of Palestinians in the country. Navi Pillay, chair of the United

Nations Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, told Politico that Trump's plan to displace Palestinians from Gaza is illegal under international law and "amounts to ethnic cleansing."

Robert A. Pape, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, wrote in Foreign Policy magazine that Trump's Gaza proposal puts US citizens directly in the crosshairs of Islamist extremists — in the US and elsewhere.

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## HOME-COOKED, FROZEN MEALS SERVING NEEDS OF BUSY FAMILIES

Time-poor workers are preparing their food in advance for better nutrition, convenience

By YANG FEIYUE yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn



Every Sunday evening, as dusk settles over Shenzhen, Chen Jiamin blocks out the hum of the city outside her apartment window, and enters her kitchen with determined focus.

The 25-year-old, who works at a law firm in the Guangdong province metropolis, transforms her kitchen into a mini food production line.

She quickly unwraps a bulky parcel of food that covers a small cooking preparation table.

The carefully selected ingredients include fresh chicken, lean beef and fish as well as root vegetables such as sweet potatoes and carrots, and leafy greens that

she knows will freeze well.

Chen deftly picks off unwanted parts of the meat and vegetables, rinses the remains under tap water, and chops them into portions the right size for marinating with spices and sauces.

She turns on the stove and begins cooking in batches, pan frying or roasting the meat until it is tender, and carefully sauteing the vegetables so they retain both their nutrients and color.

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Newsstand prices: US\$1 Canada C\$1 UK £1.50 EU €1.50 Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 tbb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

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## PAGE TWO

# Frozen: Urbanites embracing easier, healthier lifestyle

From page 1

Once everything is cooked, she divides the food into five equal portions, packs them in airtight containers, and stores each one in the freezer as a ready-to-eat meal.

"The whole process takes only a few hours, but rids me of the trouble of figuring out what to eat for lunch at work the following week," Chen said.

This weekly ritual has proved convenient and cost-effective, and ensures a well-balanced, homemade meal for Chen throughout the workweek.

"I love to cook, but never thought I'd cook in bulk," Chen said.

Chen is among a rising army of urban workers who are joining the ranks of *dongmen*, or frozen door, and are freeing themselves from the burden of preparing meals every day.

"Frozen" has become an online buzzword for preserving food, while "door" expresses opening a pathway to an easier lifestyle.

Preparing an entire week's worth of meals in one go, and then freezing and reheating them allows city workers to avoid the grind of cooking every day. The procedure saves time and allows them to enjoy homemade food. It also serves as a healthy alternative to takeout food, particularly for people with busy schedules.

## Healthier, affordable

Cooking preprepared meals has evolved into a popular trend where people share recipes and tips for freezing dishes on social media and through online communities.

On the social media platform Xiaohongshu, the number of posts on topics such as how to make *dongmen* food taste better, have reached approximately 3.7 million.

Some nutrition experts have cautioned that the longer food is stored in the fridge, the more nutrients it loses. But for urban workers more focused on convenience and cost-effectiveness, this minor drawback is easy to overlook.

Chen used to spend about 20 to 25 yuan (\$2.75 to \$3.45) on a takeout lunch. The meals, however, were often greasy and did not have enough vegetables and meat or had a side dish she disliked.

"It cost more if I ordered better quality meals or those to my exact taste," Chen said, admitting that money was a big factor behind her decision to join the *dongmen* ranks.

Having started work only a few years ago, and facing other expenses, Chen started to prepare her lunch every day. But she soon found it took up too much of her time and energy.

"I had to prepare it the night

before, each time going through food processing and dishwashing," she recalled.

She noticed the rise in popularity of ready-to-cook food and the controversy around it, particularly some commercial products with questionable ingredients, and decided to pre-prepare her own food.

"It's more than just convenience, and it's healthier than takeout," Chen said.

"I get to decide how much oil or seasoning to use. Plus, I save money and I've got more time to focus on things that matter — like my health and fitness," she added.

On average, she spends just 10 yuan to make a satisfying lunch, which is nutritionally balanced with lean proteins like chicken and fish, and a mix of vegetables and whole grains.

It didn't take long before she began to see the positive results of her commitment to the *dongmen* lifestyle. "My energy and body shape have both improved," she said.

## The colder, the better

Tu Hongyu adopted the *dongmen* practice six years ago because of her daughter.

"She was quite picky with food, refused to eat takeouts and leftovers, and often demanded homemade dishes like sweet and sour ribs or curry beef. Unfortunately, after a full day of work, I found it nearly impossible to cook those fresh meals every evening," said Tu, a single mother living in Chongqing.

Tu said she has always loved cooking — whether baking cakes or experimenting with new recipes.

"But as a working single mom, I realized it was hard to find the time balancing my job in new media with raising my daughter," she said.

That was when she started preparing ribs and beef dishes in advance and storing meals in the freezer.

"It's really easy and quick, and in just 15 minutes, you can heat them in the pan and serve them like those that are freshly made," Tu said, adding *dongmen* meals have won over her daughter.

With prior bakery business experience, Tu has applied *dongmen* to more than just meals. "Using past experiences as a reference, I know cakes and other desserts are perfect for freezing," Tu said.

So far, her freezer has held almost all the answers to her family's culinary needs, from ready-made dishes to snacks and drinks.

In September, Tu took a leap into

the social media world and shared her *dongmen* lifestyle on Xiaohongshu.

"I casually posted a video one evening, showing how I quickly reheated a batch of frozen food, and within a few hours the video went viral," she recalled.

The huge flow of traffic surprised her: The video received 1.38 million views and 22,000 likes.

"I guess it resonated with many people, especially busy urban workers like me, who were looking for an easy, healthy way to manage their meals without spending too much time in the kitchen," she said.

It encouraged her to share her recipes and tips on meal preparation and freezer storage. "Root vegetables like sweet potatoes, yams, and carrots are all freezer-friendly, as well as low-water-content ingredients like corn," she said.

Tu advises the use of food-safe bags that are heat- and cold-resistant, and also outlines the optimum amount of food and time for the best freezer storage results.

She has become a *dongmen* influencer on Xiaohongshu, with over 35,000 followers and 400,000 likes.

"It became clear that my content was hitting a sweet spot — people loved seeing how I made it easy to prepare nutritious meals without compromising on taste," Tu said.

She has found that her followers are mainly women in their 30s from first- and second-tier cities. Many of them have full schedules, but still want to prioritize their health.

## Nutrients preserved

Xu Minjie, a nutritionist with Dingxiang Doctor, an online platform that debunks medical myths, said *dongmen* is a relatively healthy practice.

Numerous studies have shown that freezing food causes minimal loss of nutrients, she said.

While vegetables may experience a slight reduction in water-soluble nutrients, their fiber and minerals remain largely intact. Poultry, in particular, retains nearly all of its nutrients during the freezing process.

"The key to preserving these nutrients lies in using a big freezer with a fast-freezing function," Xu said.

She shared some tips for optimal freezing.

Before freezing vegetables like broccoli, peas and carrots, it's essential to blanch them briefly in hot water, followed by a quick plunge into cold water and thorough drying.

"Blanching helps preserve the color and removes surface microorganisms," she explained.

To maintain quality, airtight glass containers are recommended, as exposure to air can lead to rancidity.

Additionally, choosing a fast-freezing method is crucial, as it prevents the formation of large ice crystals that can damage meat cells, reducing quality and causing "dripping" when thawed, according to Xu.

After two years of following the *dongmen* lifestyle, Chen Jiamin has become a knowledgeable practitioner.

"Dishes should be frozen while they are hot from the pot, and many leafy vegetables shouldn't be frozen, because they lose their texture when reheated," she said.

Rectangular containers are preferred, as they fit better in freezers and bags.

Chen said she would continue looking for new recipes to add to her *dongmen* repertoire.

"I'll go and check the freezer section of the supermarkets to see what new ready-made food has been served to get inspiration," Chen said, adding that it's important to diversify a *dongmen* menu to ensure proper nutrition.

"The beauty of this practice is that it's always evolving. There's always a new dish to try, a new way to save time, or a new ingredient to discover," she said.



ART BY LUPING / CHINA DAILY

## I came, I thawed, I conquered — how to break bad eating habits



Yang Feiyue  
Reporter's log

Every year, as Spring Festival draws to a close and I embark on the seven-hour high-speed rail trip from my parents' home in Fujian province to Beijing, they always prepare a departure gift for me.

It usually consists of a heavy container packed with big, tender chunks of braised beef, firm cubes of tofu, and crisp bamboo shoots, all set in a dark, savory frozen brine.

This humble yet precious bundle tucks neatly into my suitcase and goes straight into the freezer the moment I step inside my apartment after the long trek. It saves me the hassle of grocery shopping and hurried takeout meals, when the last thing I want to do is cook upon my return to the bustling city.

This year was no exception. My mother had frozen an assortment of meals in handy portions for my convenience. On the first weekend I was back in February, I let the food thaw before heating it up on the stove. In minutes, my kitchen was filled with the comforting smells of my hometown.

As I indulged in those familiar flavors over the remaining days of my vacation, I realized this small family tradition aligned with the "frozen door" lifestyle that many young professionals have embraced.

The concept is simple: Prepare food in bulk, freeze it, and reheat it when needed — saving time and effort, and ensuring healthier eating habits.

Unfortunately, this lifestyle lasted only as long as it took me to consume the reheated food. The allure of greasy, tasty takeout usually seduces me. But the self-discipline I witnessed in the young professionals I interviewed recently — a clear commitment to healthy eating and a goal of achieving a leaner body — was a wake-up call.

I've often been swept up in the fads to eat like a fitness pro, purchasing vegetables and fresh meat

in bulk, especially after dining out left me with stomach discomfort.

But, too often my resolve to eat healthy faltered as inertia crept in. I'd watch fresh food spoil in the fridge. Mold would quietly take over forgotten broccoli, half-used tomatoes, and avocados. This wasn't just food waste — it was a failure of willpower, and a broken promise to myself to eat better.

As I gained weight during the recent holiday, I decided to give the "frozen door" a more serious try, by preparing quick, reheatable dinners.

I ordered chicken breasts, salmon fillets, broccoli, grains and storage containers — all delivered within 30 minutes via a major online shopping platform. Armed with a recipe recommended by several food influencers, I followed it to the letter.

I chopped the proteins into chunks and marinated them with black pepper, garlic and honey before pan frying them for three to four minutes.

I quickly blanched the broccoli, then tossed it with olive oil, soy sauce and garlic powder.

When I portioned the steaming food into three containers, a sense of accomplishment arose. It was the first time I had prepared this amount of food in one go, and all it took was 40 minutes. It was hardly a chore.

The real reward came over the next few days. Each evening, I only had to spend 10 minutes reheating my dinner — leaving me plenty of time to hit the gym or relax.

Moreover, I felt lighter, physically and mentally, which convinced me it was an act of self-care and mindfulness. I got to choose and pick my own ingredients, and keep the calories in check, while avoiding excessive takeouts and unnecessary food additives.

I'm not sure how long I'll continue this practice, but one thing is certain: The benefits are real, and I'll keep it in my routine as a change of pace and a way to bring more balance to my life.

In fact, I've already called my parents and have stewed another batch of beef and tofu under their guidance. I have put it in the freezer for the next time I need a quick, nutritious meal in a pinch.



## TOP NEWS

# Foreign firms to ramp up efforts in China

Despite slowdown in global trade, overseas companies confident in Chinese market

By ZHONG NAN  
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China's sustained efforts to boost domestic demand and reinforce supply chain resilience, as well as drive businesses toward green and digital transformation, will pave the way for deeper global business collaboration in its market this year, said executives of multinational corporations on Monday.

Despite the slowdown in global trade and investment growth in recent years, foreign companies remain steadfast in ramping up their investment in the Chinese market, they added.

Lan Qingxin, a professor specializing in cross-border investment studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said that as China embraces a new era of green and innovation-driven growth, global investors are increasingly focusing on digital solutions, supply chain optimization, high-end manufacturing, customized innovation and green businesses in the Chinese market.

Noting the widespread adoption of the advanced large language model DeepSeek among domestic and overseas users, Chen Shihua, deputy secretary-general of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, said that China's ability to attract foreign investment will be further enhanced this year.

DeepSeek, a two-year-old start-up based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, has created the open-source LLM of the same name at a cost much lower than its foreign peers.

Even though geopolitical tensions are rising, global demand remains subdued and certain countries have tightened investment regulations, China saw the establishment of 59,080 new foreign-invested companies in 2024, marking a 9.9 percent year-on-year increase, data from the Ministry of Commerce shows.

Cummins Inc, a United States-based engine manufacturer, plans to increase its market share this year in key application sectors within China, including power generation equipment for data centers and high-tech manufacturing.

"Together with local partners, we will also accelerate the innovation pace on the internal combustion engine system, including high-efficiency diesel, natural gas and hydrogen internal combustion engines," said Nathan Stoner, vice-president of Cummins.

Eager to seize more market share in China, Thai beverage company TCP Group, will commence operations of a production base in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region later this year to supply its popular energy drink Red Bull.

The production base, set up with a total investment of 1.3 billion yuan (\$179.2 million), will

strengthen the supply chain network, empower upstream and downstream partners, and create another important link connecting the markets between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, said Saravoot Yoovidhya, CEO of TCP Group.

"The rapid response capability and strong execution power of China's supply chain enable us to quickly adapt to market changes and promptly adjust production and supply chain strategies to meet the diversified demands of markets worldwide," he added.

Yin Zheng, executive vice-president of Schneider Electric's China and East Asia operations, said that as a major engine of global economic growth, China has a huge market, a strong industrial base and abundant innovation resources, while its cultivation of new quality productive forces provides an even stronger impetus for industrial transformation and upgrading.

The French industrial conglomerate has continuously increased research and development investment in China and has established a series of world-class innovation institutes in China to support industrial upgrading and energy transformation.

"We have been introducing innovative Chinese solutions and advanced products to the global market, expanding China's impact and realizing the vision of 'in China for the world,'" Yin said.

According to a recent survey by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China, more than 58 percent of Japanese companies surveyed recognize China as a key market for their global operations, and they plan to maintain or expand their investment in the Chinese market this year.

Several factors have influenced their investment decisions, including increasing demand and rising orders. The chamber said that Japanese businesses are also more confident about the Chinese market this year, driven by an improved business environment, a visa-free policy for Japanese citizens, and government initiatives such as trade-in policies.

A Japanese business delegation of about 230 members arrived in Beijing on Sunday on a six-day visit to China to explore bilateral economic cooperation in areas including digital technology and green development, according to information released by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade.

The delegates met with leaders of the CCPIT on Monday in Beijing to discuss their participation in the third China International Supply Chain Expo, which will be held in the Chinese capital in mid-July.

## Inside

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## Winter misery

Cars sit in floodwaters on Sunday at a railroad underpass in Louisville, Kentucky, United States. At least 10 people have died in the floods after creeks swelled following heavy rain and inundated nearby areas.  
TIMOTHY D. EASLEY / AP PHOTO

# US steel tariffs could harm Canada's auto industry

By YANG GAO in Toronto  
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US President Donald Trump's plan to impose a 25 percent tariff on steel and aluminum imports can potentially affect industries reliant on cross-border trade, particularly from the automobile sector, experts said.

Kim Richard Nossal, professor emeritus at Queen's University in Kingston, Canada, highlighted the deep economic interdependence between the United States, Canada and Mexico in the auto sector. "Automobile manufacturers in North America have increasingly integrated their operations so that today there is essentially no border between the three countries," Nossal said.

The new steel and aluminum tariffs could dismantle that system, because auto parts routinely cross national borders numerous times before final assembly, he said.

"If such a part is subject to a 25 percent tariff every time it crosses into the US on its way to final assembly, it will quickly lead to a collapse of integrated supply chains."

The same applies to steel and aluminum, key materials for car production, which both Mexico and Canada export to the US.

"These measures will have the effect of closing down auto pro-

duction North America-wide very quickly," Nossal said.

The implications extend beyond Canada. With such high levels of integration, Nossal said the distinction between US and Canadian automakers is largely artificial.

"There is no such thing in a North American context as an 'American' automaker," he said, indicating that US manufacturers and consumers will bear the cost of the tariffs.

"Because of the high degree of integration, there are few measures that either Mexico or Canada could take on their own to protect the industry," he said.

According to him, the only way to protect such a highly integrated industry is to publicly warn the American president that his measures will have highly negative effects on Americans, too.

Canada and Mexico could also impose retaliatory tariffs or adopt other economic measures, such as restricting the sale of US alcoholic drinks in government liquor stores or encouraging boycotts of US goods and travel, he said.

"As we are all finding out, it is very hard for any country that is subject to American tariffs to counter these measures when the US president claims that it is the country being

tariffed that 'pays' the cost."

Mesbah Fathy Sharaf, a professor of economics at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, said that as one of the largest suppliers of steel and aluminum to the US, Canada will face significant economic repercussions.

"Canadian exporters could experience reduced demand from US buyers due to higher costs, potentially leading to decreased production and job losses," Sharaf said.

"Additionally, US companies that rely on Canadian steel and aluminum may seek alternative suppliers, leading to economic disruptions in Canada."

Sharaf also pointed to what he called the political motivations behind Trump's move.

"The tariffs are largely driven by Trump's 'America First' policy, which seeks to protect domestic industries from foreign competition," he said.

The actions are aimed at appealing to blue-collar workers in key election swing states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio, which have significant steel and aluminum industries, he said.

"Additionally, the tariffs could be a negotiating tactic in broader trade discussions," Sharaf said.

"Canadian steel and aluminum producers will face increased costs as they try to absorb part of the tariff burden or pass it on to US buyers, which may make their

products less competitive."

US companies may shift to domestic suppliers or nontariffed sources, making it difficult for Canadian firms to find alternative markets at the same scale, he said. Uncertainty surrounding the tariffs could also deter future investments in the sector, he added.

With less than a month before the tariffs take effect, the possibility of resolving the issue through negotiations remains uncertain.

"Canada may negotiate exemptions, similar to those granted to other allies," Sharaf said.

However, the Trump administration has shown reluctance to make concessions, with an insistence on using tariffs as a bargaining tool, he said.

Canada's best strategy, he suggested, would be to leverage diplomatic and economic channels to minimize the impact of the tariffs.

In the long run, Sharaf said he believes the tariffs could reshape Canada's trade policies. "These tariffs will likely accelerate Canada's push for trade diversification."

He pointed to existing agreements, such as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with the European Union and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, as potential avenues for reducing dependence on the US.

# UN: Core issues and challenges still remain unresolved

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To counter these challenges, the UN outlined at the beginning of the year the priorities for the organization's work in 2025, emphasizing the need for member states to collectively address the most pressing global challenges, including peace and security in Africa, combating the illegal use of small arms and light weapons, upholding human dignity in armed conflicts, eliminating child labor, increasing development financing and accelerating the promotion of Sustainable Development Goals, among many others. The long list of priorities speaks volumes about the daunting task facing the organization.

On the other hand, geopolitics adds more questions than answers. For example, just three weeks after Guterres' New Year message, the newly elected US President Donald Trump signed two presidential executive orders right on the day of his inauguration to withdraw his country from the World Health Organization, an important UN entity governing global public health, and from the Paris Agreement, a key international collaboration mechanism under the auspice of the UN to deal with climate change and global warming.

US withdrawal from WHO and the Paris Agreement no doubt dealt a serious blow to the UN's unity and commitment, as well as to the world's efforts to tackle the

many global crises and challenges under the UN's leadership. Just as one may think this is bad enough, merely two weeks later, the White House announced that the US would no longer "participate in the UN Human Rights Council and will not seek election to that body".

The world needs a strong and effective UN, and the UN needs continued support of the world. There is hope in Guterres' eyes. The Pact for the Future, adopted by the UN last September, was underscored by the UN chief as "a new push" to build peace through disarmament and prevention, reform the global financial system, and stick to the values and principles enshrined by human rights, international law and the UN Charter. Incidentally, in his Chinese New Year greeting, Guterres thanked China and the Chinese people for their steadfast support of the UN, multilateralism and global cooperation. Indeed, multilateralism and global cooperation are key, and China has been a staunch supporter of global cooperation within the multilateral framework of the UN.

Yet, the question remains. Can the UN unite the international community to work together to achieve a renewal of the world and create a better future for all in the Year of the Snake, as Guterres wished?

This warrants some serious thinking to answer in light of the many thorny issues and deep-rooted challenges troubling the world today. When talking about the work of the organization, the UN chief remarked, albeit somewhat reluctantly, "There are no guarantees for what's ahead in 2025." Well, in the views of many, one thing seems certain though — it will be an uphill battle to fight.

The author is former country director of the United Nations Development Programme. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

# Middle East: Takeover plan violates two-state solution

From page 1

Pape noted that research shows that foreign military occupation is a leading trigger for some of the worst acts of terrorism, and has contributed to the rise of deadly tactics employed by various terror groups. He warned that seizing Gaza would lend significant credibility to the long-standing Islamist narrative that the US is the real threat — an outcome that, he argued, ordinary US citizens will ultimately pay for.

Niu Xinchun, executive president of Ningxia University's China-Arab Research Institute, noted that the likelihood of Trump's Gaza plan being implemented was extremely low. For the US to take control of Gaza, the complete eradication of Hamas would be a prerequisite. Yet even after the first phase of the Gaza ceasefire began on Jan 19, Hamas has continued to demonstrate robust military and administrative capabilities in the territory.

Even if Hamas was removed from the picture, approximately 2.3 million ordinary Palestinians still reside in Gaza. According to Trump's proposal, at least 1.5 million of these people would need to be relocated to Egypt and Jordan. Both countries, however, are firmly opposed to accepting Palestinian refugees, making mass relocation an insurmountable challenge.

"Moreover, announcing this plan could disrupt the upcoming second-phase ceasefire negotiations in Gaza. Its implementation relies on the total elimination of Hamas, which would severely undermine its willingness to participate in further talks," Niu said. "The plan fatally undermines the two-state solution: if Palestinian territory is seized and its people dispersed, the prospect of establishing a Palestinian state evaporates."

Han Jianwei, an associate professor at Shanghai International Stud-

ies University's Middle East Studies Institute, said that Gaza is the lifeblood of Hamas, which will never relinquish this territory easily. "Based on the situation following the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel, Hamas still maintains significant operational strength in Gaza, intending to rebuild its power from this base and continue posing a security threat to Israel," he said.

Arab countries are adamantly opposed to accepting Palestinian refugees, fearing that an influx would impose severe economic, social and security burdens on their nations. While Trump might attempt to negotiate deals with these countries — offering incentives that could sway their current stance — the strategy is fraught with challenges. His idea is to coerce other Arab nations into accepting Gaza refugees, thereby paving the way for a US and Israeli takeover of Gaza under the guise of preventing further conflict.

Li Zixin, an assistant research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, said that Trump's approach will open a Pandora's box. "This plan blatantly violates the framework of a two-state solution and sharply diverges from the long-established policies of Middle Eastern countries. Even if these nations were willing to cooperate with some US initiatives, a smooth policy transition would be nearly impossible. In the process, regional conflicts could escalate further, and nontraditional security risks would likely increase," Li warned.

The Jordan Times reported that Saudi Arabia will host a summit on Feb 20 with the leaders of Jordan, Egypt, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to discuss Trump's proposal for a US takeover of Gaza. An Arab League meeting is scheduled to convene in Cairo on Feb 27 — a potential opportunity for Arab nations to formulate a counterproposal.

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## CHINA

# Cross-border mechanism to fight crime

China, Myanmar enhance cooperation to end transnational illegal activity

By CUI JIA  
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China and Myanmar have held talks on strengthening law enforcement and security cooperation, including establishing a regular mechanism to combat cross-border crimes such as online gambling and telecom fraud, according to a statement from the Chinese embassy in Myanmar.

The Myanmar government said it is committed to cracking down on such crimes, the statement said. Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Ma Jia and Chinese Assistant Minister of Public Security Liu Zhongyi met on Friday with Myanmar's Deputy Prime Minister and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Than Swe and Union Minister for Home Affairs Lieutenant-General Tun Tun Naung.

During the talks, the Myanmar officials outlined steps the government will take to combat online gambling and telecom fraud, and pledged to strengthen coordination with China and neighboring countries to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation, the statement said.

Chinese officials praised Myanmar's commitment to protecting Chinese citizens, emphasizing that online gambling and telecom fraud pose serious threats to lives and property.

According to Myanmar News Agency, discussions focused on efforts to crack down on online scams and gambling operations in Myanmar, a known hub for scam networks on the Myanmar border with Thailand. The two sides also discussed measures to rescue and

repatriate Chinese nationals and improve information-sharing regarding legal action and the expulsion of foreigners who enter Myanmar illegally.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said at a regular news conference on Monday that China is working closely with Myanmar, Thailand and other countries to adopt comprehensive measures to tackle the root causes of online crime and prevent criminals from exploiting regional borders.

"The recent surge in online gambling and telecom fraud in the Thailand-Myanmar border areas has endangered the lives and property of citizens in several countries, including China and Thailand, while disrupting normal exchanges and cooperation in the region," Guo said. "Resolutely combating these crimes is necessary to protect the common interests of regional nations and reflects the shared aspirations of their people."

According to the Bangkok Post, Liu visited Mae Sot in Thailand, across from Myanmar, on Sunday. Myanmar has transferred 261 victims rescued from the KK Park and Shwe Kokko scam hubs in Myanmar to Thai authorities for repatriation.

Liu previously visited Thailand two weeks ago, urging authorities there to take decisive action against scam networks in Myanmar, which he said pose a major threat to both China and Thailand.

On Feb 5, Thailand cut electricity, internet services and fuel supplies to five areas of Myanmar, including Myanmar, as part of its efforts to cripple the scam operations.

responses to this," he said.

Highlighting the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's role in bridging gaps by helping countries strengthen legislation, build enforcement capacities and foster multilateral collaboration, Hofmann noted that recent cooperation between China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, including Thailand and Myanmar, has created "a significant sense of momentum" for international efforts.

"It's really encouraging to see those efforts. The momentum that has been created at the moment is one that we haven't seen for some time now," he said.

China has provided crucial support to other countries in combating both drug-related crimes and telecom fraud schemes, he said, suggesting that China's approach to tackling telecom fraud, including active prevention measures, could provide invaluable experience for other countries.

"China has been very affected by this problem for quite a long time. And there's a lot that China has to offer from that experience and to other countries that are dealing with this in the region. And in that context, we've seen a lot of operational coordination and a lot of support coming from China to other countries in the region," he added.

While acknowledging increased regional awareness of telecom fraud and its impact, Hofmann said the complexity and evolving nature of these crimes demand stronger collaboration, in which China's role and experience would be essential.

"What we hope to see more of also in the future is the broader effort by countries in the region that looks beyond police responses, beyond sort of the immediate effort of closing down a center, but really look beyond the individual operations and look at how this problem can be addressed on a broader scale," he said.

## 'Yellow rose' harvest



Students from Nanjing Agricultural University harvest a special breed of cabbage dubbed "yellow rose" on a farm in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on Monday. Named for its resemblance to a rose with green leaves surrounding a yellow heart, the cabbage is a new variety developed by Nanjing Agricultural University over a period of 18 years. It is rich in nutritional value, with over three times the vitamin C content of other cabbages and six times the calcium content of milk.

WAN CHENGPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## HK receives second organ donation from mainland, benefiting baby girl

By LI LEI in Hong Kong  
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An 8-month-old girl became Hong Kong's second recipient of a heart donated from the Chinese mainland on Sunday, thanks to a specialized cooperation mechanism established after the first successful transplantation in 2022.

After waiting more than four months for a suitable donor, the recipient, identified under the pseudonym Whitney, underwent a 6.5-hour surgery at Hong Kong Children's Hospital that started at around 2 pm on Sunday.

Hospital officials said the operation went smoothly, and Whitney is now under close observation in intensive care. She is expected to remain in critical condition for at least 24 hours.

Due to donation regulations, authorities did not disclose details about the donor other than confirming they were from the mainland. Whitney received the heart after no other suitable recipients were found in the special administrative region.

During a Monday news conference, Whitney's father, who gave his surname as Cheung, expressed profound gratitude to the medical team and the donor's family, calling the transplant a miracle.

"This act of love and blessing

will provide my daughter with the strength she needs for her ongoing recovery," he said.

Whitney suffered cardiogenic shock on Sept 14 and was placed on the local heart transplant waiting list.

Because of the rarity of donors meeting the necessary criteria, a suitable heart was not identified until Saturday, when the hospital was notified of a match.

The hospital noted that this was Whitney's third open-heart surgery, increasing the complexity and risks, including the removal of previously implanted ventricular assist devices to minimize ischemia time for the donor's heart.

On Monday, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government thanked the central government and mainland authorities for facilitating the transplant, which marked the second cross-border organ donation between the mainland and Hong Kong.

The first took place in December 2022, when a 4-month-old Hong Kong girl named Tsz-hei received a heart from a brain-dead mainland donor, leading to the establishment of a case-based cross-border organ transplant mechanism.

Simon Tang, director of cluster services at the Hospital Authority, said that since the 2022 trans-

plant, authorities have worked to refine each step of the process.

Asked about the timeline for establishing a permanent cross-border transplant mechanism, Tang said it involves numerous regulations and procedures.

For now, the priority is expediting the transfer of suitable organs while adhering to legal frameworks in both regions, he said.

The latest operation followed stringent regulatory approvals and legal protocols.

Nicholson Yam, the lead consultant for the transplant at the hospital, said experts from the National Quality Control Center for Heart Transplantation procured the heart on the mainland before it was transported to Hong Kong via Shenzhen.

The delivery involved more than 100 personnel from 18 mainland agencies, including the National Health Commission, the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, and various customs and public security agencies.

Hong Kong Secretary for Health Lo Chung-mau said the case demonstrated enhanced cooperation between Hong Kong and mainland authorities.

"This successful case exemplifies the strengthened collaboration in cross-border organ transplants," he said.

## GBA rises as global hub for tech industry

By CHAI HUA in Shenzhen, Guangdong  
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Driven by collaborative efforts, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is emerging as a global powerhouse for future industries such as artificial intelligence and smart robotics, technology experts said on Monday at a forum in Shenzhen.

"Future and emerging industries such as AI, humanoid robots, brain-computer interfaces and life sciences have taken center stage in scientific and technological advancement and industrial upgrading," said Xu Xiaolan, former vice-minister of industry and information technology and a member of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee.

However, she noted that these industries are still in their early stages and require further scientific and technological efforts.

"The Greater Bay Area, with its unique geographical advantages, abundant innovative resources, rich talent pool and mature financial system, has become a hot spot for global investors and innovative enterprises," said Xu, who is also board chairperson of the Chinese Institute of Electronics.

The institute, in collaboration with several scientific research and industry organizations, unveiled an initiative for future industry cooperation in the GBA at the forum. The initiative proposes launching more application projects, attracting more international high-tech startups, establishing an open talent service ecosystem, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and facilitating diversified international capital investments.

The GBA consists of the two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao, along with nine cities in Guangdong province. With a combined GDP exceeding \$1.9 trillion, the region is one of China's most economically vibrant and home to many cutting-edge industries.

"The initiative is particularly timely for Hong Kong, which is at a pivotal moment in its industrial transformation," said Xi Ning, chair professor of robotics and automation and director of the Advanced Technologies Institute at the University of Hong Kong.

Lu Chuncong, head of the China Academy of Industrial Internet, said the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta and the GBA are evolving into strategic hubs for future development and global competitiveness in China.

"Among them, the Greater Bay Area stands out with unique advantages in advancing manufacturing, energy and information technologies," he said.

## UN official 'encouraged' by joint efforts against fraud

BANGKOK — The sophisticated and transnational nature of telecom fraud and related crimes requires concerted international efforts to address the challenges facing Southeast Asia, a United Nations official has said, noting that recent cooperation between China and countries in the region has been "encouraging" and has created momentum for further joint efforts.

Benedikt Hofmann, acting regional representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, told Xinhua News Agency in an exclusive interview that telecom fraud has expanded rapidly in terms of the number of victims, geographical reach and financial losses. The office estimates that annual economic losses from such scams in East and Southeast Asia range between \$20 billion and \$40 billion.

"It has really grown from a regional phenomenon into a threat to people around the world," he said.

The use of sophisticated tactics, including artificial intelligence, combined with the cross-border nature of these crimes, poses mounting challenges for law enforcement agencies in individual countries, Hofmann said.

He explained that criminal groups leverage cyberspace to operate from one country while targeting victims in others, even across continents, making it extremely difficult to identify the criminal networks behind them.

"It's really gotten more and more complex for law enforcement, for criminal justice systems in the region to address these issues," he said.

These challenges make unilateral actions by individual countries insufficient.

"Whether it's information sharing, operational coordination of police responses, or mutual legal assistance and cooperation in criminal matters, it's really key for the countries in the region and beyond to get together and find common

XINHUA

## Researchers discover sesame seed-sized ladybug

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou  
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Chinese researchers have discovered a new micro ladybug species in Haizhu Wetland Park in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, they announced on Sunday.

Named the Haizhu Ladybug, or *Eidoreus haizhuensis* Liu & Li, the species measures just 1.2 to 1.3 millimeters in length — about the size of a sesame seed — and is distinguished by its red-brown color, which appears lighter on its feet and antennae, and sparse yellow bristles.

The micro ladybug family, previously classified as a subfamily of the pseudo ladybug family, was recently elevated to an independent family based on molecular data. Globally, only seven genera and 19 species of micro ladybugs have been identified, most of them confined to specific islands in Central and South America and South Africa.

The Haizhu Ladybug was discovered during a 2022 insect survey in Haizhu Wetland Park, an urban oasis in Guangzhou's Haizhu district. Researchers collected more than 500,000 insect specimens



Details of the Haizhu Ladybug, or *Eidoreus haizhuensis* Liu & Li, are unveiled at a ceremony in Haizhu Wetland Park in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Sunday. CHEN CHUHONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

during the survey and examined tens of thousands under a stereomicroscope before identifying the new species.

Yu Yali, a researcher with the Institute of Zoology at the Guangdong Academy of Sciences, said the ladybug's tiny size makes it exceptionally difficult to find.

The discovery was made possible by Liu Zhenhua, a researcher

with a doctorate in entomology. Liu relied on his expertise, solid foundation in insect taxonomy and years of experience in ecological monitoring at the park to identify the subtle differences that set the new species apart.

The finding, published in the international journal *Zootaxa*, highlights the success of Haizhu Wetland Park's biodiversity conser-

vation efforts. The park previously gained attention for new species discoveries in 2021 and 2022, when researchers identified the Haizhu Firefly Leaf Beetle and the Haizhu Axis Beetle.

Fan Cunxiang, chairman of the science and technology association of the Haizhu district forestry and wetland management bureau, attributed the park's biodiversity successes to ecological restoration efforts that emphasize minimal human interference.

"Our concept aligns with the natural laws of ecosystem succession," Fan said. "With less human intervention, nature evolves on its own, allowing organisms to find their niche in the ecosystem and improving biodiversity."

The park continues to monitor ecological conditions and make dynamic adjustments to ensure restoration efforts are effective, he said.

Haizhu Wetland Park plans to use its species discoveries as a springboard for further ecological research and restoration. By leveraging the role of beneficial organisms such as the Haizhu Ladybug, the park aims to achieve multifunctional ecological development in the years ahead.

## CHINA

By ZHAO YIMENG

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The recent and rapid development of artificial intelligence has already impacted education on all levels in China, from primary and secondary schools to higher education. It has reshaped the sector by facilitating personalized and lifelong learning, more efficient teaching, as well as greater scientific evaluation and school management, experts said.

In December, the Ministry of Education released a guideline calling for increased efforts to strengthen AI education in primary and secondary schools, and stipulated that the technology should be prevalent by 2030.

The guideline aims to cultivate future-oriented talent, enhance students' problem-solving abilities and digital skills, and foster a spirit of innovation. It underscored the need to develop a systematic AI curriculum and implement regular AI education.

Artificial intelligence is making its way into numerous primary and secondary school classrooms, being applied in lesson planning and classroom teaching.

In February, the ministry announced a list of 184 primary and secondary schools selected as AI education bases to facilitate the implementation of AI education.

Understanding the latest technology has become integral in the nation's education system.

Fifth-grade students at a primary school in Shapingba district in Southwest China's Chongqing have designed their own smart creations such as voice-controlled lamps, humidifiers and smart fans, involving programming skills and voice recognition technology.

In a general technology class for first-year students at Yangzhou High School in Jiangsu province, the teacher used the example of identifying cherry blossoms and peach blossoms in spring to compare the differences and similarities between human and machine recognition, helping students understand the principles of machine learning.

An AI class at Changchun Experimental School in Jilin province includes robotics, drone operation and 3D printing. An AI club is also available for students interested in the technology.

Jia Kaichao, secretary of the school's Communist Youth League, said the club lowers the barrier for students to realize their ideas, enabling them to experience the charm of creation.

Students at the school frequently use photo translation apps or voice dictionary pens in their English classes.

"These tools provide quick and convenient answers. For instance, when facing difficult homework questions, we can simply take a picture and get the answer instantly. If we struggle with ideas for writing essays, these AI tools can help generate some creative thoughts," said Luo Jing, a student at the school.

The guideline urged that the development of AI teaching resources should be tailored to the needs of students and make AI education ubiquitous.

Mohamed Ally, a professor at Athabasca University in Canada, said AI can meet individual learners' needs and provide one-to-one tutoring for students, as well as facilitate lifelong learning.

Countries worldwide are trying to find ways to use AI more flexibly in education, aiming to deliver education to students in remote areas and



Left: Students exercise following instructions from an artificial intelligence-enabled display at a primary school in Beijing on Nov 21. CHEN JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: Middle school students operate a robot during a science class in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in September. LI HANCHI / XINHUA



# Artificial intelligence changing learning landscape

Technology encourages more innovative approaches to education at all levels

teach people the skills needed to build successful careers in the 21st century, Ally noted.

"China has become a leader in applying AI in education and training by developing smart learning systems and intensifying AI research," he said.

Last year, the ministry released 50 application scenarios integrating AI with higher education, including askpk.com, an AI-assisted education platform exclusively for Peking University educators and students to improve teaching and learning efficiency.

OpenEdu4Fin, a smart finance education platform based on a large language model designed by Dongbei University of Finance and Economics in Dalian, Liaoning province, is also on the list.

Similarly, a smart crop production case launched by Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University in Yangling, Shaanxi province, aims to enhance students' practical skills and innovative abilities in upgrading smart agriculture.

Wang Xuenan, deputy director at the Digital Education Research Institute of the China National Academy of Educational Sciences, said AI-driven education increasingly emphasizes advanced skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and recognizing AI-generated misinformation.

"AI enables a shift from uniform education to one that adapts to each student, focusing on individual development, potential and addressing weaknesses," she said.

Zheng Qinghua, president of Tong-



From top: Workers at a technology startup adjust a robotic arm in an innovation park for college students in Jinan, Shandong province, in September. ZHU ZHENG / XINHUA Education workers visit an exhibition of AI-powered classes at a primary school in Beijing in November. MA NING / XINHUA

ji University, said generative AI technology has become an essential tool for obtaining and disseminating knowledge.

Various models developed by internet companies and universities have been applied to educational activities. The majority of college students in China have used the technology, including Ernie Bot, an AI chatbot developed by Baidu Inc, he said.

These tools, with DeepSeek as a leading global example, can write essays and solve science problems, helping students with assignments and tests.

Generative AI also opens new possibilities for personalized instruction, said Wang Huashu, a professor at the Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation at Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Teachers can use AI to create realistic dialogue scenarios for immersive speaking practice, while students benefit from instant feedback on oral and written language skills, enhancing their communication abilities, Wang said.

"AI is not a threat but an opportunity to enhance educational quality and efficiency," he said. "By embracing AI while preserving the essence of education, we can cultivate a new generation of foreign language professionals who are both technically proficient and deeply humanistic."

Higher education institutions need to break through traditional education models and explore the application of AI in teaching, assessment and management, he added.

## AI in education evaluation

Yang Yi, deputy director of the Office of National Education Inspection at the Ministry of Education, said accurate profiles of assessment subjects, generated through machine learning, have dramatically improved the efficiency and accuracy of grading exam papers.

"AI and big data enable a more scientific analysis and interpretation of vast monitoring and evaluation data," Yang said, adding that these technologies help educators identify priorities in the evaluation process.

When combined with visualization tools, big data can present complex analytical results through charts and comparative graphs, allowing education administrators and decision-makers to understand the insights behind the data and implement more targeted actions.

"For evaluation subjects, these technologies can generate personalized reports, accurately identify individual needs and provide scientific support for adjustments and tailored interventions," Yang said.

David Osher, vice-president of the American Institutes for Research, highlighted AI's role in collecting high-quality data and offering actionable insights for educators. Specific applications include tracking classroom interactions and student engagement, as well as providing personalized feedback.

Osher shared a study at a conference on the effects of suspension from school on children, using AI to analyze 10 years of data collected from school children in New York. "By using AI, we were able to match students on 80 different variables and thoroughly examine the predictive consequences of suspension," he said.

Andreas Schleicher, director of education and skills for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, said assessing fixed subject content is easier than evaluating cognitive abilities and encouraging educators to change the way they assess students.

The demand for traditional cognitive skills is declining while technology intensive tasks are on the rise, calling for integrating AI into this shift, he said.

He emphasized that schools should help students understand their purpose, values, passions and the goals they want to achieve.

Keric Lee, vice-principal of S.K.H. Yuen Chen Maun Chen Jubilee Primary School in Hong Kong, said he is no longer capable of assessing students' work generated by AI.

During a forum held in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in December, he shared a case where sixth-grade students used AI technology to generate images based on stories created by second-grade students as part of a reading comprehension exercise.

In this process, the older students not only engaged in meaningful discussions and reflections but also created impressive works.

The AI era calls for teachers to rethink the purpose and direction of grading, shifting from simple understanding and memorization to higher-level creation.

"Teachers are no longer authoritative knowledge transmitters but rather knowledge sharers and guides, learning and reflecting alongside their students," Lee said.

Educators need to consider how to play new roles in the classroom, empower students and encourage them to review and appreciate each other's work, thus promoting progress. "This is the key to learning for the new generation," he added.

Xu Nuo contributed to this story.

## Caution urged around rapid embrace of transformative tech

Artificial intelligence has transformed the educational landscape and reshaped how learners think and learn, yet like a double-edged sword, it has also sparked concerns over its negative impact on learners as well as academic norms.

AI is becoming an ever-increasing presence among children, according to the sixth China Internet Usage Survey Report for Minors published by the Institute of Journalism and Communication of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Social Sciences Press.

Nearly 90 percent of internet users under 18 have heard of AI technology, 42.4 percent express a strong interest in it, and 19 percent have used generative AI products, the survey said.

However, some parents worry that developing AI courses will increase students' academic burden while doing little in enhancing their digital literacy.

Including AI in college and high school entrance examinations will make AI education overly focused on exams, according to Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute.

The 2024 Report on the Internet Use of Chinese Minors went so far as to caution that AI is jeopardizing the cognitive abilities of children in a way that can't be easily detected.

The report pointed out that children are more likely to fall into information cocoons and cultivate stereotypes with the widespread use of intelligent recommendation algorithms.

Excessive use of generative AI applications such as ChatGPT and Sora may hinder children's ability to discern real information from fake, the report said.

Li Yi, director of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission, in an interview with China Education Daily, said, "The introduction of AI raises

questions as to how to ensure data security, prevent algorithm biases, balance the roles of AI and human teachers, and avoid compromising students' social skills and critical thinking abilities as a result of excessive reliance on it."

The use of AI also gives rise to a series of ethical challenges regarding ensuring the fairness of assessment results. Yang Zhiming, a professor from Hunan Normal University, used ChatGPT to write an essay on innovative talent cultivation as part of a college entrance examination.

When the essay was assessed, 13 human experts gave an average score of 49 out of 60 points, whereas ChatGPT scored itself 54 points, and Chinese technology company iFlytek's AI chatbot even gave a score of 60.

"AI can serve as an assistant, but cannot be given the final say, because doing so may pose significant risks,

just as no one would dare to fully rely on a prescription written by AI," Yang cautioned.

In college, AI has been embraced by professors and students to assist their academic research.

A 2024 study on the use of generative AI among Chinese university teachers and students by MyCOS, a higher education consulting firm, suggested that among the over 3,000 university teachers and students interviewed, almost all had used generative AI in their studies and work, with only one percent of university lecturers and students never having used generative AI.

The study showed that university students mainly use generative AI for retrieving and compiling information (54 percent), analyzing and visualizing data (54 percent), and translation (34 percent). In addition, nearly 30 percent of university students write papers or complete assignments primarily by using AI.

Despite the benefits, AI technology is not without risks and limitations. Many university students have reported that the references of AI-generated papers are fake with links to papers inaccessible, authors' names made up and the publication information inaccurate.

Overreliance on AI technology in completing academic assignments may lead to an integrity crisis. Excessive and indiscriminate use of AI tools could alienate students to being mere puppets to technology, Wang Zhengqing, a professor at the School of Education at Southwest University told 21st Century News.

Incidents of AI-assisted paper writing have prompted a debate on whether it constitutes a violation of academic ethics.

Last March, a professor at a university in Beijing published a Science Citation Index paper in an international academic journal, which was later found to contain a common

ChatGPT prompter, sparking concerns on how AI may harm the accuracy and rigor of academic research.

Several universities have announced that they will pilot a system for the detection of the use of generative AI in undergraduate theses.

In November, Fudan University issued a regulation on the use of AI tools in writing undergraduate theses, which allows students to use AI in areas that don't require innovation, such as literature retrieval and formatting, but limits its use in research design and data analysis, data collection, visualizing results and translation and language polishing.

Shen Yang, a professor at the School of Journalism and Communication and the College of AI at Tsinghua University, was quoted in Global Times, saying, "Universities should establish clear standards, integrate AI into teaching practices, train students' logical thinking ability, enhance the transparency of AI technology and guide students to use AI responsibly."

CHINA DAILY

## CHINA

## TCM doctor finds international success

Overseas clinics attract business leaders, celebrities and public figures

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu  
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On the wall of Zhong Danzhu's clinic in Chengdu, Sichuan province, hangs a silk banner presented by Petru Lucinschi, former president of Moldova, inscribed with the words "Eastern Divine Doctor".

The banner is a token of Lucinschi's gratitude for Zhong, who restored his health through traditional Chinese medicine. The gift was given to celebrate the opening of Zhong's Donglutang TCM Clinic in May 2023.

Zhong, 51, has been dedicated to promoting TCM internationally for the past two decades. Over the years, his team has established 11 overseas TCM medical centers, receiving more than 210,000 patient visits annually.

"To meet patient demands from both home and abroad, I have to spend odd-numbered months working at international medical centers and even-numbered months at my domestic clinic," he said, adding that many patients even fly from abroad specifically to seek treatment at his clinic in Chengdu.

Born into a family of TCM practitioners in Longchang county, Sichuan, Zhong began learning traditional Chinese herbal medicine from his grandfather and father in childhood.

At 19, Zhong opened his own clinic and quickly gained recognition for saving a critically ill elderly woman using acupuncture, despite local doctors' pessimism.

In 1999, Zhong moved to Beijing to pursue advanced skills under renowned masters and began treat-



From left: Zhong Danzhu (second from left) treats foreign patients at his Donglutang TCM Clinic in Chengdu, Sichuan province. Zhong poses with Petru Lucinschi, former president of Moldova. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Introducing TCM to the world is no easy task. Western doctors at the hospital doubted TCM, even comparing it to witchcraft."

**Zhong Danzhu**, traditional Chinese medicine practitioner

ing international patients, including diplomats, and Moldova's then-president, Lucinschi.

Lucinschi, suffering from cere-

bellar lesions that caused mobility issues, sought Zhong's help after conventional treatments failed.

Following treatment, Lucinschi's hands no longer trembled, and he could raise a cup steadily with one hand without requiring the other for support, Zhong said.

Since then, Lucinschi has visited Zhong in China almost every year for follow-up treatments and care. Their long-term connection has blossomed into a close friendship, with Lucinschi even including a photo of them together in his personal biography.

Zhong's journey to promote TCM internationally started in 2005, when he led a team to Almaty, Kazakhstan, to establish his first overseas TCM medical center. Since

then, his network has expanded to countries including Azerbaijan, Russia, Moldova and Romania.

"Introducing TCM to the world is no easy task," Zhong said, recalling that when his team began working at the European Medical Center "UGMK-Health" in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2011, no patients came.

"Western doctors at the hospital doubted TCM, even comparing it to witchcraft," he added.

Zhong's breakthrough came when he cured Olga, the hospital's finance director, who had to use a wheelchair for work due to a neck problem. Using TCM's targeted rotation and repositioning technique, Zhong alleviated her neck pain almost immediately.

Overjoyed, Olga stood up from

her wheelchair and excitedly showed off her recovery to every department in the hospital.

"Olga became a living advertisement," Zhong said. "Many people, including doctors and their families, came to seek my treatment after hearing about her recovery."

Within several months, a TCM craze swept across the Ural region, drawing business leaders, celebrities and public figures to Zhong's outpatient department.

"In the Ural region, TCM has become a fashionable way to maintain health. Some even purchase our medical services as 'health gifts' for their families," Zhong said.

Zhong attributes his success to TCM's advantages in providing tai-

lored treatments based on patients' lifestyles. He believes TCM has great potential to address modern health issues such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes, which are often linked to poor habits.

To enhance TCM's global appeal, he suggests promoting it in a more contemporary and life-oriented way, turning it into a globally popular healthy lifestyle.

Currently, Zhong is exploring new ways to introduce TCM to children. He has launched a program to teach 20 children about TCM and herbal medicine, as well as other Chinese intangible cultural heritage, such as kung fu and dragon dancing.

"I hope to instill TCM as a healthy lifestyle in the next generation," he said.

## Cooperation in Shenzhen Bay protects mangroves

SHENZHEN/HONG KONG — In the heart of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Guangdong Neilingding Futian National Nature Reserve in Shenzhen and the Mai Po Nature Reserve in Hong Kong are safeguarding a vibrant expanse of mangrove wetlands.

These wetlands are ecologically linked and integral parts of the Shenzhen Bay (Deep Bay) wetland ecosystem, which serves as an internationally important overwintering site and a refueling station for waterbirds on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

In February 2023, Shenzhen's Futian mangrove was designated as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Together with the wetlands in Mai Po Nature Reserve, Shenzhen Bay hosts two internationally recognized wetlands of significance. "Mangroves are unique and complex ecosystems, often difficult for humans to access. Their dense canopy provides birds with quiet, undisturbed nesting areas, making them vital for wildlife conservation," said Simon Wong, a nature officer at the agriculture, fisheries and conservation department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government.

Moreover, mangroves protect coastlines from erosion caused by waves, while the mudflats they create harbor countless species and provide feeding and resting areas for migratory waterbirds, benefiting surrounding regions and other habitats, he added.

According to Wong, mangroves and their soil have a high capacity

for carbon sequestration through microbial activity, helping reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations and mitigating the impacts of global warming and climate change. Mangroves can also accumulate heavy metals, help degrade organic pollutants and exhibit an ecological interception effect against microplastics.

The wetlands of the nature reserves in Futian and Mai Po not only support rich biodiversity but also symbolize the close cooperation between Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

Since signing a framework arrangement for the conservation of Shenzhen Bay (Deep Bay) wetlands in January 2023, the cities have made significant strides in protecting mangroves and wetlands, offering valuable insights into the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

"Shenzhen Bay is essentially a shared wetland between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. Despite being separated by the Shenzhen River, the ecosystem remains consistent," said Yang Qiong, a senior engineer at Guangdong Neilingding Futian National Nature Reserve Administration Bureau.

According to the framework, Shenzhen and Hong Kong will collaborate on ecological baseline and waterbird monitoring, synchronized surveys of black-faced spoonbills and their habitats, protection of inter-tidal mudflat and native mangrove species, capacity building and experience sharing on environmental education.

The framework provides an excellent platform for sharing experien-

ces in the wetland ecosystem conservation in Shenzhen Bay, said Toby Cheung, a nature reserve officer at the agriculture, fisheries and conservation department.

The black-faced spoonbill, a key species in Shenzhen Bay and one of species under the State class-one protection, has experienced a notably impressive recovery in its population. From fewer than 300 individuals in the 1990s to 6,988 counted globally in January last year, the growth of the black-faced spoonbill highlights the importance of Shenzhen Bay's role in their protection.

To accurately monitor the numbers and distribution of black-faced spoonbills, Shenzhen and Hong Kong conduct synchronized surveys and smart monitoring. Monthly data reflects the status of the black-faced spoonbill throughout Shenzhen Bay, while annual global surveys provide a comprehensive understanding of population dynamics. High-definition cameras and AI-powered bird recognition technology are used for automated monitoring, particularly at night, reducing disturbance to resting birds.

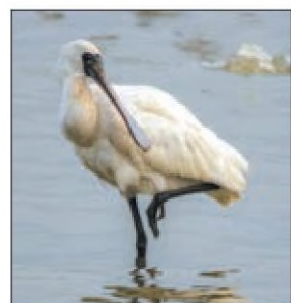
On Nov 6, an agreement was signed to establish the International Mangrove Center in Shenzhen, marking the beginning of deeper cross-border efforts in wetland conservation. The cities aim to build a more comprehensive protection model and extend their cooperation to global mangrove conservation.

Yang said that Shenzhen and Hong Kong can learn from each other's experiences and practices in wetland protection and implement joint conservation efforts. She noted that the model in Shenzhen Bay could serve as an example for exchange at the International Mangrove Center.

XINHUA



From left: The Futian mangrove wetland in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, is an internationally important site for migratory birds. LIANG XU / XINHUA A black-faced spoonbill roosts in Shenzhen Bay on Nov 16. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



## Inner Mongolian sunflower seeds shine bright in global marketplace

HOHHOT — At 57, Wang Fei is hailed as the "King of Sunflower Seeds" in his hometown of Bayannuur, in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

The title reflects not only his passion for the crunchy nut but also his remarkable achievement in transforming locally grown sunflower kernels into a global commodity, with markets spanning the Republic of Korea, Egypt and Germany.

If you enjoy eating sunflower seeds, there's a good chance they originated from the saline-alkali fields of Bayannuur — China's largest base for edible sunflower production. Last year alone, the region produced more than 940,000 metric tons of sunflowers, with exports spanning over 40 countries and regions. Wang is one of the local farmers who have leveraged the booming sunflower industry to become a successful entrepreneur.

## Challenging land

Bayannuur was once burdened by saline-alkali land, where traditional crops such as wheat and corn struggled to grow. The introduction of sunflowers in the 1970s marked a turning point for the city.

With its distinct seasons, abundant sunshine, vast plains and ample water resources, Bayannuur offered an environment strikingly similar to the sunflower's native habitat in North America, making it an ideal setting for this resilient crop, according to vice-mayor Zhang Ruhong.

In the 1980s, Wang began cultivating sunflowers on his family's saline-alkali land. "They are resistant to salt and alkali, drought-tolerant and easy to grow," he said.

By 2024, Bayannuur's sunflower planting area represented nearly half of the country's total. The city's sunflower industry has flourished into a comprehensive value chain, encompassing seed sales, cultivation, processing, exports, e-commerce logistics and even tourism.

Sunflowers are the world's fourth-largest oilseed crop, following soybeans, rapeseed and peanuts, said Zhang Haiyang, an oilseed industry expert.

He noted that sunflowers have gained prominence as a key spe-



A farmer harvests sunflowers in Bayannuur, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in September last year. YUAN PEIYE / XINHUA

cially oilseed crop in China, particularly in northern regions, thanks to their high nutritional and aesthetic value.

The sunflower seed market was valued at \$32.3 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of around 9.4 percent between 2024 and 2032, according to Global Market Insights, a market research and management consulting firm.

To take Bayannuur's sunflower industry to new heights, local agricultural scientists have successfully introduced high-quality seed varieties, as well as a resistant strain specially designed to combat broomrape, a parasitic plant that has long plagued sunflower production.

## Tiny seeds, big journey

In the run-up to Spring Festival, the factories of Bayannuur buzzed with activity as machines roared and workers hustled to sort sunflower seeds for export.

"We wanted to complete and ship all orders abroad," said Zhao Lei, general manager of Bayannuur Rong Da Company. "Our sunflower seeds saw strong overseas demand last year, with exports reaching 35,000 tons."

Across China, many regions have cultivated industries tailored to their local conditions. For instance, oranges from Ganzhou in Jiangxi province and strawberries from Dandong in Liaoning province have become key drivers of social

and economic development.

Bayannuur has also leveraged its local strengths, establishing 120 leading sunflower processing enterprises to seize market opportunities.

Wang Fei, who began trading sunflower seeds domestically in 1987, ventured into the international market in 2012. Last year, his company, Mintai Agricultural Trading, recorded operating revenues exceeding \$97 million, with exports making up the bulk.

"In China, people love eating sunflower seeds during festivals. Foreigners share this habit as well. Holidays like Christmas mark our peak export seasons," Wang said, adding that the holiday economy strongly stimulates consumption.

Over the past two years, Bayannuur has implemented innovative strategies to promote exports, such as fostering leading companies to establish overseas warehouses, advancing cross-border e-commerce, and streamlining customs clearance processes.

Challenges like rising shipping costs have also driven adaptability. Last year, Wang began shifting some shipments from sea to land transport, exporting sunflower seeds to Europe via China-Europe freight trains, significantly reducing costs. "My goal this year is to expand my sunflower seed exports into the Spanish market," he said with a smile.

XINHUA

## WORLDUS

# China sends warnings over Taiwan issue

Beijing calls US State Department change to website page 'a serious backpedaling step'

By ZHANG YUNBI in Beijing and CHANG JUN in San Francisco

Beijing sent stern warnings on Monday to countries including the United States and Japan over their provocative remarks and actions regarding the Taiwan question.

The US State Department on Thursday updated its website's "US Relations With Taiwan" fact sheet page and deleted the text vowing that the US does not support "Taiwan independence."

Such a change to the fact sheet is "a serious backpedaling step in its position on Taiwan," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a daily news briefing.

The move "seriously violates the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiques, as well as international law and the basic norms of international relations," Guo said.

This "sends a seriously wrong signal to the separatist forces for 'Taiwan independence' and is 'another example of the US stubbornly persisting in its wrong policy of using Taiwan to contain China'," he added.

Dong Xudong, founding president of the North California Hebei Association, told China Daily that the administration of US President Donald Trump "contains uncertainty and instability regarding its China policy."

"It demonstrates the lack of maturity and adeptness in US foreign policy, and should be reprimanded. We need to stay vigilant and pay close attention to the next move of the US," Dong said.

Guo, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, also mentioned the prevailing consensus of the international community that there is only one China, and that Taiwan is part of China.

"It is also a solemn commitment made by the US side in the three China-US joint communiques," he said. "History should not be tampered with, facts should not be denied, and right and wrong should not be distorted."

China demands that the US correct its mistakes immediately, faithfully observe the one-China principle and the three joint communiques, and handle the Taiwan question with great care and prudence.

Beijing asks Washington to stop using Taiwan to contain China, stop upgrading the substantive relationship between the US and Taiwan, stop helping Taiwan to expand its space in the international arena, stop condoning or supporting "Taiwan independence", and avoid further serious damage to China-US relations and the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait, Guo said.

Zhang Ruwei, founding president of the Shandong Friendship Association of California, said the US action "confuses the public, is deliberately disruptive, and impedes the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait."

As the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) officials in Taiwan expressed gratitude for the latest move by Washington, State Council Taiwan Affairs Office spokeswoman Zhu Fenglian warned the DPP on Monday that "relying on the US for seeking independence" will surely meet a dead end.

"No matter how Taiwan and the US collude, they cannot change ... the general trend that China surely will and must be reunified," Zhu said.

Zhang Jingjing, president of the China Peaceful Unification Western America, said "our Chinese compatriots in the United States express their firm opposition. Taiwan has been a part of China since ancient times. The Taiwan question is a legacy of China's civil war. Taiwan's return to the motherland is the trend of the times and the aspiration of the people."

Zhang said that all three joint communiques between China and the US clearly state that Taiwan is part of China. Successive US administrations have adhered to the one-China principle and did not support "Taiwan independence."

Zhang said it is hoped "that the US government will fulfill its promise to support China's peaceful reunification, implement its non-support for 'Taiwan independence' into action, and refrain from playing political intrigue to create obstacles to China-US relations."

He Konghua, president of the Beijing Association in the San Francisco Bay Area, told China Daily that "the relentless and capricious policies of a major country like the United States are simply disgraceful! Taiwan is China's territory; how to solve the Taiwan question is China's internal affairs!"

"No country has the right to dictate! And it is just like a mantis that tries to block a wheel, a doomed failure," He said.

Separately, Japan's Ministry of Justice has revised its ordinance, allowing naturalized Japanese citizens to list their place of origin as a specific region, rather than just a country, in their family register.

The change will enable individuals originally from Taiwan to list "Taiwan" instead of "China" as their place of origin.

Guo, of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are all Chinese, and the Taiwan question "allows no interference by any external forces."

"Japan invaded and colonized Taiwan, it bears a serious historical crime against the Chinese people, and it should have been even more cautious in its words and actions," he said.

Beijing urges Tokyo to strictly abide by the one-China principle and the spirit of the four landmark China-Japan political documents and refrain from making petty moves and sending conflicting and erroneous signals on the Taiwan question, he added.

In another development, the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral foreign ministers' meeting in Munich, Germany, expressed in a joint statement on Saturday their support for Taiwan's "meaningful participation" in international organizations.

At Monday's briefing, Guo said China "has made solemn representations to the countries concerned."

"We have always been firmly opposed to the relevant countries' assembling for cliques, interfering in China's internal affairs, attacking and smearing China, and inciting confrontation and antagonism," Guo said.

"Taiwan's participation in the activities of international organizations must and can only be handled in accordance with the one-China principle."

Contact the writers at zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn.



A Palestinian man and two girls stand amidst the rubble of homes, destroyed by the Israeli army's air and ground offensive against Hamas in Bureij refugee camp, central Gaza Strip, on Monday. ABDEL KAREEM HANA / AP

## Challenges remain amid Gaza truce deal

By MIKE GU in Hong Kong mkegu@chinadailyhk.com

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's remarks on Sunday that Hamas "must be eradicated" are putting the future of the fragile Gaza truce deal in further doubt as the first phase of discussions on the Gaza cease-fire deal is set to end in two weeks, while the second phase of talks has yet to be negotiated.

Rubio made the remarks when he met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in West Jerusalem on Sunday, at the start of his Middle East tour.

He said US President Donald Trump "has been very clear that Hamas cannot continue as a government (governing body) or military force", arguing that as long as the group remains in power, "peace becomes impossible".

"The gates of hell will be opened" if all the hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza are not freed, Netanyahu said, adding that he and Trump had "a common strategy", noting "we can't always share the details of this strategy with the public".

Netanyahu said Israel and the US were working "in full cooperation and coordination" on issues concerning the Gaza Strip. He thanked the United Nations for its "unequivocal" support for Israel's policies in Gaza.

Rubio arrived in Saudi Arabia on Monday, and he will also travel to the United Arab Emirates.

During his tour, Rubio is likely to face great pushback from Arab leaders over Trump's proposal to displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, a plan that human rights organizations have called "ethnic cleansing", according to Al Jazeera.

Steve Witkoff, the US special envoy to the Middle East, said on Sunday the second phase of talks on a cease-fire deal between Israel and Hamas would continue this week "at a location to be determined".

**'Productive, constructive'**

Witkoff told Fox News he had "very productive and constructive" calls on Sunday with Netanyahu, Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and Egypt's director of intelligence, where the leaders discussed "the timing of phase two, the positions of the parties, so we can understand where we stand, and we will continue the talks later this week".

The second stage of the hostage deal is "absolutely going to begin", Witkoff said.

Meanwhile, in Israel, the government on Sunday approved Eyal Zamir as the country's new chief of staff of Israel Defense Forces, following the resignation of Herzi Halevi in January over his failure to prevent the Hamas attack in October 2023.

Zamir, 59, has served as director-general of the Defense Ministry for the past two years and will officially assume his new role in early March.

In Gaza, the Hamas-run media office accused Israel of violating the cease-fire agreement on Sunday. "The occupation continues to breach the cease-fire agreement, as it blocked the departure of the 15th group of patients and the wounded today by delaying the release of their travel lists, preventing them from completing the exit procedures," the media office head Salama Marouf said in a statement.

On Thursday, the media office reported that only 452 injured and sick individuals, along with 620 others, left Gaza in 12 days of operation at the Rafah crossing, which was reopened under the cease-fire agreement.

"There are still 15,000 injured and sick people in Gaza who urgently need to travel for treatment outside Gaza Strip amid a severe shortage of medical supplies due to the ongoing blockade and Israeli aggression since Oct 7, 2023," the statement said.

Also on Sunday, the Gaza-based health authorities warned of a severe oxygen shortage in the enclave after Israel destroyed 10 oxygen stations during the conflict.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Briefly

## SAUDI ARABIA

### Rubio arrives in Riyadh for talks with Russia

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio arrived in Riyadh on Monday ahead of expected talks with Russian officials aimed at ending Moscow's nearly three-year conflict in Ukraine. The talks came after US President Donald Trump last week spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin by phone and ordered top officials to begin negotiations on the conflict, which he repeatedly vowed to end during his presidential campaign. The talks will be among the first high-level in-person discussions in years between Russian and US officials and are meant to lay the groundwork for a meeting between the US and Russian presidents.

## ARGENTINA

### Lawyers file fraud charges against Milei

Argentine lawyers filed fraud charges against President Javier Milei at a criminal court on Sunday for promoting a cryptocurrency on his social media, one of the lawyers told The Associated Press.

On Friday, Milei posted on X about \$LIBRA, a coin that he said was aimed at "encouraging economic growth by funding small businesses and startups". He deleted the post a few hours later and the value of the currency collapsed, causing millions of dollars in losses to its brief investors. The President's Office said in a statement on Saturday that Milei was not involved in any stage of the cryptocurrency's development and decided to remove the post to avoid speculation and limit further exposure, following the public reaction to the project's launch.

## AUSTRALIA

### Albanese's approval rating hits new low

The majority of Australian voters want the current Labor government out of office, posing a threat to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's reelection plans just months ahead of a national election. A widely watched poll showed on Monday that his approval rating has hit its lowest point. A survey conducted by NewsPoll for The Australian newspaper said a hung parliament would be the most likely outcome if the poll numbers were to be replicated at the election due by May.

## AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Africa pursues economic self-reliance at AU Summit

ADDIS ABABA — As deep-rooted scars of transatlantic slavery and colonization still haunt Africa, the 1.5 billion-strong continent is heading toward unity, self-determination, and collective prosperity with initiatives unveiled at the 38th African Union Summit.

Under the theme "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations", this year's 55-member group convened from Wednesday to Sunday at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

Beyond financial compensation, there is a united call for economic integration, which seeks to dismantle structural inequalities and establish Africa as an influential player on the global checkerboard.

While Africa boasts rich natural resources, the world's largest free trade area, and a market of more than 1 billion people, the continent has been suffering from resource extraction without development,

undervaluation of its economies in global credit ratings, and systemic barriers to trade and investment.

During the opening of the 46th Ordinary Session of the AU Executive Council, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Claver Gatete brought to the table the issue of "stark inequalities" plaguing the continent.

According to Gatete, Africa holds 30 percent of the world's mineral reserves, including 40 percent of its gold and up to 90 percent of its chromium and platinum. It also contains as much as 65 percent of the world's arable land.

Despite its rich resources, Africa merely accounts for less than 3 percent of international trade and only 1 percent of the world's manufacturing output.

"In global finance, it is also unjust that the entire African continent, with over 50 countries, has an IMF (International Monetary Fund) shareholding equal to that of

a single country, Germany," Gatete said. "Only two African countries, Botswana and Mauritius, hold investment-grade ratings, while others, despite sound economic fundamentals, are burdened with high-risk labels."

Moreover, Africa received merely 2 percent of the investment of \$10 trillion globally in clean energy between 2015 and 2022, but climate change is costing it up to 5 percent of its gross domestic product, he added.

"The transatlantic slave trade and colonial exploitation robbed Africa of its people, resources, and dignity, and left behind inequalities that persist in global financial systems, trade structures, and governance institutions to this day," Gatete warned.

To unlock a collective potential for development, discussions have been unfolding during the 38th AU Summit over the progress of intra-Africa economic integration,

encompassing visa openness, the African Continental Free Trade Zone, or AfCFTA, and the highly anticipated establishment of the Africa Credit Rating Agency.

According to the AU, over 50 percent of African countries require visas for most Africans, which hampers labor migration, business and trade, skills, and innovation — slowing development.

"In Africa, we are saying 'let's have collective sovereignty! We are creating a continental economy, starting with AfCFTA. In that way, we are subduing nationalism in the interest of Pan-Africanism,'" said Albert Mudenda Muchanga, the outgoing AU trade commissioner.

On Saturday, Djiboutian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mahamoud Ali Youssouf was elected as the new AU Commission chairperson for the 2025-2028 term.

XINHUA

## Illegally detained in US, Afghan back home after 20 years

CHAPARHAR, Afghanistan — Like hundreds of thousands of Afghans who endured imprisonment in US detention centers during the two-decade presence of US-led forces in Afghanistan, 57-year-old Khan Mohammad carries bitter memories of being illegally detained for years.

"My children were small when I was arrested. After my release and return home, I couldn't recognize any of them until they introduced themselves one by one, from the eldest to the youngest," Khan, the head

of a 10-member family, told Xinhua recently in his village.

Living in a mud-brick house amid a barren and ravaged garden in the remote village of Hadia Khil, the former prisoner alleged that he had been detained for nearly two decades by the US military without committing any crime.

"They (the Americans) accused me of orchestrating a major conspiracy to attack Jalalabad airport and kill many Americans," recalled Khan, who was recently freed from

US custody. "But I did nothing. I completely denied the allegations."

Arrested by US troops in 2006 from Jalalabad, the provincial capital of Nangarhar, he was sentenced to life imprisonment in the United States.

However, in January, he was released and returned home as part of a prisoner exchange deal between the United States and the Afghan interim government.

Despite being 57 years old, he appears at least a decade older. His hands tremble as he recounts his

ordeal. The former detainee said that when US troops captured him, they blindfolded and gagged him, and then placed him in a small room at Jalalabad airport before transferring him to the US military base in Bagram.

Eventually, he was flown to Washington, DC.

"My story is a long one," he muttered. "In Bagram, I was like the other prisoners. Then they (the Americans) transferred me to the United States. The journey was ter-

rifying. They tied my hands and feet, blindfolded me, and blocked my ears. The distance was long, and I was in pain the whole time."

Sitting on an old-fashioned traditional bed locally called "caat", and surrounded by his sons, grandsons, and friends, the bearded Khan spoke in a loud, determined voice: "Freedom is more precious than anything."

During its 20-year military presence in Afghanistan, which ended in August 2021, US forces committed a range of abuses, according to Afghan citizens.



Khan Mohammad sits outside his home on Thursday. SAIFURAHMAN SAFI/XINHUA

XINHUA



A tourist takes a photo of a snack at a market in Harbin. LIU YANG / XINHUA

# Catching the drift: Harbin ups game in snow culture

Step change in province as more visitors try out skiing and businesses develop products and services



Tourists ride a horse-drawn carriage in Harbin. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The Pingshan Shenlu Ski Resort, located more than 70 kilometers away from downtown Harbin, attracts enthusiasts who step onto snowboards and speed down the snow-covered trails.

The resort manager, Wang Xiaojing, has noted significant changes over the past two years: an increase in visitor numbers and expansions in skiing equipment, attire and instructors. The influx of tourists from southern China has sparked a newfound passion for skiing among many people in the northeast, leading to new friendship among local skiing enthusiasts.

Li Ying, a local resident learning to ski, started casually in the previous ski season wearing her old down jacket. As her interest grew, she gradually acquired new ski attire, helmets, goggles, kneepads and wrist guards. This ski season, she has entered an advanced level, setting aside a substantial budget for hiring a skiing instructor.

"This year, there are more people from the south, so we joined in the fun and skied with our southern friends. I always feel like I'm making progress, growing every day. Previously, I used to ski very simply, but now, after being taught by instructors, I have indeed improved in terms of technique."

Compared to the investment of longtime skiing friends, the spending of new customers constitutes the bulk of the ski resort's revenue.

To attract and cater to young skiers from all over the country, the Pingshan Shenlu Ski Resort has constructed children's ski trails and channels, preventing adult beginners from endangering them.

Within the ski resort, two mother-child pairs catch the eye, one of them being Liuliu and his mother from Shanghai. Although Liuliu is only in kindergarten, his skiing skills are comparable to those of teenagers. Despite the scarcity of ice and snow in their hometown, indoor ski resorts in Shanghai and some clubs equipped with skiing machines have helped the pair maintain their skills.

According to Liuliu's mother, there are quite a few skiing enthusiasts in southern China. Many skiing clubs organize various activities on weekends, such as trips to Beida Lake, Songhua Lake, Changbai Mountain and other areas. There are many parent-child camps and weekend adult camps.

In a factory building within the Harbin Xinyu Intelligent Manufacturing Industrial Park, an intelligent skiing machine weighing more than 6 metric tons is developed and manufactured.

Tian Mingzhu, president of the Harbin Sports Industry Association, said that this machine can help beginners reach an intermediate skiing level in about four sessions. People ranging from 3-4 years old to 60-70 years old can also safely learn to ski on the machine.

Not long ago, the State Council issued several opinions on stimulating the economy through the high-quality development of ice and snow sports. It proposed 24 measures in



The 9th Asian Winter Games holds its closing ceremony in Harbin on Friday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY



Tourists have fun with ice slides at Harbin Ice and Snow World Park in Harbin. LIU YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

eight aspects that go beyond the familiar realm of ice and snow tourism. They involve various aspects of ice and snow sports, equipment and more.

The document states that by 2030, ice and snow consumption will become a significant growth point for expanding domestic demand, with the total scale of the ice and snow economy reaching 1.5 trillion yuan (\$205.15 billion).

"From a global perspective, the development of the ice and snow economy relies on three pillars: resources, market and policies. We aim to combine ice and snow with culture, nature and artificial elements to create new products and business models," said Zhang Guihai, head of the Heilongjiang Ice and Snow Industry Institute.

Zhang added that the development of China's ice and snow industry stems from sports

and competition. Some major sports events have enlightened and popularized ice and snow consumption, tourism and culture nationwide.

"People are becoming more active, merging consumption concepts with our way of life in winter. There is also the intangible sports and champion spirit, cultivating people's consciousness to challenge themselves and fear no cold weather. This is an asset that

can generate sustained consumption," said Zhang.

## Warm-hearted design

In addition, Harbin has ignited the passion of designers nationwide. After a year of development, driven by industry associations, parks and other entities, the creative design system in Harbin has been substantially improved.

The Lilac Creative Design Award held in Harbin in 2024 received a total of 4,658 entries, with 98 winning LDA finalists. Twenty-four works won gold, silver and bronze awards and received financial rewards.

Yan Shi, the secretary-general of the Harbin Design Center, said: "Our role is to empower and expedite the realization of excellent creative design products into commercial success in the shortest time possible."

A company formed by students from Harbin Institute of Technology unveiled its intelligent thermal control clothing products for the winter season at an event. It showcased 11 intelligent thermal control clothing and wearable products tailored to the actual needs of Heilongjiang's cultural tourism market.

Drawing inspiration from the multi-energy design of the power grid, the team integrated new two-dimensional materials, intelligent algorithms, novel control systems and cutting-edge creative design to develop innovative products applicable in areas such as heating, sports monitoring and healthcare.

"Product superiority is a crucial factor for market competition," said Zhou Yang, a doctoral student from the School of Electrical Engineering at HIT. "As one of the core products of our company, the intelligent thermal control outdoor clothing based on the new two-dimensional material MXene and energy security system, can achieve rapid heating in one to three seconds at voltages of within 5 volts.

"With a small portable charger, it can achieve instant heating, just like having an electric blanket inside a down jacket, providing hardcore warmth that can withstand temperatures as low as -40 degrees Celsius."

In contrast to other products with constant temperatures, their products employ intelligent algorithms for temperature control, extending the heating time.

The company has reached cooperation agreements with several authorized production enterprises for the 9th Asian Winter Games, which opened on Feb 7 in Harbin and has assisted two large ski equipment makers in product processes and upgrades using relevant technologies.

Xi Yuyan, a sophomore from the school of architecture and design at HIT's Shenzhen campus, designed an intelligent thermal control hat and scarf set based on the Game's mascots Binbin and Nini, a pair of Siberian tigers.

"I hope my design can offer visitors heartfelt warmth and convey the enthusiastic emotional value of Harbin," she said.

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province in Northeast China, scaled new heights culturally and creatively as its ice and snow and design economies fused to bring forth a large number of innovative ideas and technological empowerment.

For instance, the sales volume of augmented reality refrigerator magnets featuring Harbin design elements has exceeded 20 million yuan (\$2.73 million).

"The customers can scan the refrigerator magnet with their phones and see exquisite images of Harbin's four seasons," said Wang Jing, general manager of Longyue Cultural and Creative Technology, the company that developed the product. "This winter, our cultural and creative products can also serve as personalized electronic albums. Tourists can store photos and videos taken during their trip to Harbin in the albums, and even record blessings for their elders and loved ones, creating a distinctive Harbin gift," Wang added.

Despite cold weather, many young people queued up in front of a traditional Chinese medicine tea and beverage shop named "Zhongqi Shizu" on Central Avenue to purchase traditional Chinese medicine ice cream.

"We combined different traditional Chinese medicine, related food ingredients and probiotic pretreatments, fully releasing the nutritional value of raw materials, which can make the ice cream healthier, and more distinctive in flavor," said Shen Xiaodi, director of its brand operation.

"With the original intention to manage health through food, we chose ice cream as a medium, adding the same origin of medicine

# Winter sports economy gets creative juices flowing with innovation and technology



Clockwise from left: Visitors tour near the cauldron for the 9th Asian Winter Games at Harbin Ice and Snow World Park. HOU JUN / XINHUA. Fireworks light up the sky of the Harbin Ice and Snow World Park. LIU YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY. Members of an ice hockey team from Daoli district play in a park in Harbin. XU YANAN / XINHUA



and food, so that people can easily enjoy food while managing their health," said Shen.

So far, they have opened three stores in Harbin, with daily sales averaging around 70,000 yuan per store.

"We are building a traditional Chinese medicine product processing plant in Mulan county of Harbin, which is expected to start production within the year, with an annual output value of up to 150 million yuan," he said. "In the future, we will be based in Harbin and promote our excellent creative products nationwide."

"Riding on the popularity of the ice and snow season, we will upgrade our products, expand consumer scenarios, and present a richer range of traditional Chinese medicine products to customers," he added.

The booming cultural and creative industry has also inspired talented young people to return to their hometowns.

Shao Weiwei, a member of the post-1990s generation, quit her job in Beijing in 2023 to become chief at the design team of Heilongjiang Sino Shine Media Group.

"When our team began to design, we took different routes for city walks to seek inspiration," she said. "We spent much time developing a complete and vivid design to make the appearance of the product match the inner spirit."

The team also created four sports-themed refrigerator stickers and cups based on Siberian tiger "Nini", one of the two mascots for the 9th Asian Winter Games.

Harbin's cultural and creative market not only opens up a new path for the ice and snow economy, but also serves as a sample of cultural and creative products in the national cultural tourism market.

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# BUSINESS

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## WeChat embracing DeepSeek for tech leap

By CHENG YU  
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WeChat, China's leading social media platform, is conducting small-scale tests to integrate DeepSeek's R1 large model, joining a group of Chinese tech and auto giants in embracing DeepSeek for greater artificial intelligence capability.

Tencent, WeChat's owner, confirmed to China Daily on Sunday that users included in the tests are able to see the "AI Search" label at the top of the search bar and access the full version of DeepSeek's R1 model for free, the company said.

Multiple Tencent products are exploring integration with DeepSeek, such as Tencent Cloud's AI code assistant, so as to offer users richer experiences and services, it added.

With WeChat, a super app that spans from social media to online payments and short videos, jumping on the bandwagon of DeepSeek's advanced large models, China's AI ecosystem is set to reach new highs, industry experts said.

Zhao Gang, director of Chinese market consultancy CIO Manage, said that the growing DeepSeek ecosystem will foster greater cooperation between upstream and downstream partners, businesses and individual users, which will ultimately strengthen China's AI sector.

As of Monday, at least 200 companies have announced their integration with DeepSeek, spanning multiple sectors including telecommunications, cloud computing, semiconductors, finance, automotive and mobile technology.

Major players such as Huawei Technologies and Alibaba Group have confirmed their use of DeepSeek's large models, while around 20 automotive companies have integrated it into intelligent engine rooms and AI-driven operations.

Chinese automaker Geely said it has started to use DeepSeek technology to train its own large language models, including vehicle control and in-car interaction, which is expected to significantly improve the vehicle's ability to learn individual driver and passenger preferences for greater user experience.

"On the other hand, the open-sourcing model of DeepSeek will reduce model usage costs. It will activate the enterprise application market, leading to rapid growth in industry collaborations and corporate customers for large model applications," Zhao said.

DeepSeek has also built a home-grown supply chain alliance, including 278 local companies, which has increased the domestic production rate of key intellectual properties from 19 percent in 2022 to the current 64 percent.

## Animated shopping experience



Fans of the blockbuster Chinese movie *Ne Zha 2* browse related merchandise at a store in Shanghai on Sunday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Market rally still has upside potential

Widespread AI adoption could boost EPS of China shares 2.5% annually

By ZHOU LANXU  
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The Chinese mainland stock market rally has room for more growth as artificial intelligence applications are set to boost productivity across various sectors, pointing to an almost 20 percent upside potential over the coming 12 months, prominent investment banks and asset managers said.

Nevertheless, they said that policy efforts to further reinvigorate domestic demand and confidence are still necessary for sustaining the gains, with the equity transfer of four State-owned financial firms a good sign.

Goldman Sachs said in a report on Monday that widespread AI adoption could boost the earnings per share of Chinese equities by 2.5 percent annually over the next decade. Such improving growth prospects and perhaps a confidence boost could raise the fair value of China equities by 15-20 percent.

These have prompted the US investment bank to raise its 12-month CSI 300 Index target from 4,600 points to 4,700 points, implying a potential 19 percent price increase from now, the report said, with sectors of data and cloud, as well as software and

applications, preferred as implementation gathers pace.

"Assuming Chinese companies are able to grow their aggregate market cap by \$3 trillion in the ensuing 12 months, we estimate that the Chinese AI story could attract as much as \$200 billion of net buying to the stock market, helping to partially reverse the conservative and underweight allocations in China equities from asset managers globally."

Sharing similar sentiments, Raymond Ma, chief investment officer for the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong at global investment management company Invesco, said that the application of DeepSeek will further boost various sectors like e-commerce, cloud services, consumer electronics, semiconductors and autos.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index edged up 0.27 percent, reaching 3355.83 points as of Monday's close. The rise was led by sectors that are integrating AI technologies in their businesses, especially education, healthcare and humanoid robotics.

Further strengthening investor sentiment was news that Central Huijin Investment, an arm of China's sovereign wealth fund, is set to take control of four major State-

owned financial institutions.

The move, according to analysts, will enhance the ability of State-owned distressed asset managers to resolve risks and help the so-called national team — a group of State-backed financial institutions acting as a stock market stabilizer — to better perform its role, while igniting hopes of potential mergers among relevant investment banks.

On Friday, three State-owned stressed debt managers — China Cinda Asset Management, China Orient Asset Management and China Great Wall Asset Management — along with China Securities Finance Corp, which provides margin financing to securities firms and is part of the national team, announced that their controlling shareholder, the Ministry of Finance, will transfer its shares to Central Huijin Investment at no cost.

The announcements caused relevant shares to rise on Monday, with Cinda Securities up 7.28 percent.

In an article published in Study Times on Monday, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council vowed efforts to strengthen market value management of centrally controlled State-owned listed companies, calling for "strategic restructuring and specialized consolidation".

## AI enhances China's cloud computing

By FAN FEIFEI  
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China's cloud computing industry is expected to usher in new development opportunities as the meteoric rise of Chinese artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek has challenged the belief that massive computing resources are essential for AI breakthroughs, experts said.

They added that with the maturity and application of AI technology, cloud computing services will be more user-friendly and efficient, usage scenarios will continue to expand, enterprises will play a bigger role in bolstering the integration of cloud computing and generative AI, and more technological advancements will be made in the intensifying global AI chatbot race.

Leading Chinese cloud computing companies, including Alibaba Cloud, Baidu AI Cloud, Tencent Cloud and Huawei Cloud have all integrated DeepSeek's AI models into their platforms after DeepSeek recently caused a global sensation with its open-source large language model developed at a fraction of the cost and computing power typically spent by foreign counterparts.

Alibaba Cloud said it had made DeepSeek's AI model available on its platform, and users can achieve the whole process from training to deployment to inference with zero coding. The platform simplifies the model development process, bringing developers and enterprise users a faster, more efficient and more convenient AI development and application experience.

Charlie Dai, vice-president and principal analyst at research company Forrester, said DeepSeek has had a huge impact on the cloud computing and AI industries in China as it accelerates the paradigm shift of AI model training, augments reasoning capabilities of AI for broader enterprise adoption and further boosts AI innovation.

He noted that major cloud service providers in China should step up efforts to capitalize on DeepSeek's popularity by integrating its capabilities into their services.

"On the one hand, they can focus on providing scalable cloud infrastructure to power AI workloads with the DeepSeek model at the core. On the other hand, they should develop innovative applications and solutions that leverage DeepSeek's AI power to enhance customer experiences and operational efficiency," Dai said. Additionally, ensuring data security and compliance with regulations is crucial to protecting sensitive information, he added.

Pan Helin, a member of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology's Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, said the emergence of DeepSeek has significantly reduced the cost of computing power and improved the utilization rate of computing resources, while promoting the upgrade of cloud services and signaling a shift in the global cloud computing landscape.

Pan said cloud computing not only provides crucial support for boosting in-depth research, development and applications for AI in the future, but also effectively speeds up the iteration and deployment of AI models, and provides a solid computing power guarantee for the rapid development of AI technology.

Data from global market consultancy Canalis show that cloud infrastructure service spending in the Chinese mainland stood at \$10.2 billion in the third quarter of 2024, representing 11 percent year-on-year increase and a return to double-digit growth.

AI is emerging as a significant driver of cloud adoption, with a growing number of enterprises embedding AI capabilities into cloud-based applications to enhance intelligence and streamline operational efficiency, according to Canalis.

Alibaba Cloud took the top spot in the Chinese mainland's cloud market, commanding a 36 percent share and achieving 7 percent year-on-year growth in the third quarter, largely driven by its public cloud business, followed by Huawei Cloud and Tencent Cloud.

Zou Dehao, deputy general manager of the AI industry research institute at market research firm CCID Consulting, said the rapid ascent of DeepSeek has reshaped the development pattern of domestic cloud computing.

In the past, major cloud computing companies took a dominant position with strong computing power and technological advantages, but small and medium-sized cloud service providers could quickly improve their service capabilities and attract a new breed of customers through cooperation with DeepSeek, Zou added.

Chinese cloud service providers have further elevated their capital expenditure, channeling resources into enhancing computing power, scalability and efficiency, said Zhang Yi, an analyst from Canalis.

"These investments aim to solidify their positions in key strategic domains, ensuring they remain at the forefront of technological innovation and market competitiveness in an increasingly AI-driven landscape," Zhang added.

## Nation ramps up energy security efforts

By ZHENG XIN  
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China has been intensifying efforts to secure energy independence amid trade tensions with the United States, by ramping up technological innovation, diversifying its energy sources and localizing critical supply chains, said industry experts.

These initiatives include increasing investments in renewable energy technologies, such as solar and wind power, alongside a focus on advancing electric vehicle infrastructure, they said.

China's investment in green innovation in recent years has helped it shift from low-cost manufacturing to high-value industries, reducing reliance on traditional exports that are vulnerable to US tariffs, said Wang Lining, director of the oil market department under the economics and technology research institute of China National Petroleum Corp.

Wang believes as geopolitical uncertainties persist, Beijing's bet on green innovation and energy self-reliance may not only insulate its economy from external shocks, but also cement its status as the dominant force in the

future of global energy.

"While the trade war aims to disrupt China's access to key technologies and markets, Beijing's push for self-reliance in green energy components, such as solar panels, wind turbines and batteries, has made its supply chains more resilient, ensuring long-term competitiveness."

The International Energy Agency said in a report that China, as a dominant force in the field of renewable energy, has several advantages over others, including the ability to approve and build transmission grids and renewable energy projects more efficiently.

Wang said China has long prioritized scientific and technological research to enhance energy security, strengthening its traditional energy supply while accelerating the growth of renewables.

In recent years, market-oriented reforms and innovation have unlocked new momentum in the energy sector, particularly in renewable energy. This comprehensive expansion has positioned China at the forefront of the global transition toward green, low-carbon energy, he said.

According to global consultancy Rystad Energy, China's total spend-

ing, to date, in solar and wind has outpaced the rest of the world, climbing from \$150 billion in 2020 to nearly \$400 billion in 2023.

Between 2020 and 2024, China made substantial investments in renewable energy infrastructure. While Europe and the US are also gradually increasing their capital expenditure, they are expected to lag behind China through the end of the decade, it said.

China controls around 80 percent of the global solar module supply chain, a share that is expected to grow further, with production projected to increase by 150 percent by 2030, said the consultancy.

The scale of China's investment capacity has had a profound impact on the global energy transition, said Lars Nitter Havro, head of Energy Macro, Rystad Energy.

According to Rystad Energy, vast manufacturing capabilities and infrastructure are the primary drivers behind China's leading position in the clean-tech sector, particularly its solar and battery supply chains.

Li Zhenguo, president of Longi Green Energy Technology Co Ltd, a key enterprise in the photovoltaic industry, said China's investment in solar power technological advances have made photovoltaic power gen-



Employees work on a solar panel production line in Hefei, Anhui province. RUAN XUEFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

eration a truly foundational energy source for energy transition and carbon neutrality worldwide.

"China has invested heavily in research and development of renewable energy in recent years, swiftly integrating technological advancements into production and operations to establish a competitive edge in technology, products and costs," he said.

The company achieved a module efficiency of 25.4 percent with its independently developed HPBC 2.0 solar cells last year, a new world record for crystalline silicon module efficiency. This is the first time

that a Chinese solar technology company has set the world record since 1988, breaking a 36-year monopoly held by overseas photovoltaic brands.

According to Rystad Energy, while countries like the US and India are aggressively investing in cell manufacturing and module assembly plants, their production costs remain significantly higher than China's.

Chinese modules cost around \$0.10 per watt, while US prices hover around \$0.30 per watt, affecting project economics and the overall pace of energy transition, it said.

### Briefly

#### NEV output, sales surge in January

China's new energy vehicles performed strongly, with production surging 29 percent year-on-year to 1.02 million units in January, industry data showed on Monday. NEV sales grew rapidly by 29.4 percent year-on-year to 944,000 units in January, accounting for 38.9 percent of total new vehicle sales last month, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. China's auto industry witnessed a steady start to the year, with both passenger car production and sales posting year-on-year increases in January.

#### Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 4 pips to 7.1702 against the US dollar on Monday, 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.

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## BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Digital payments enhance travel experience

Around 90 percent of millennials, Gen Z foreign travelers adopt mobile settlements, study finds

By LI JIAYING and YIN MINGYUE

As China continues to refine its digital payment service systems, foreign visitors are experiencing unprecedented ease in making cashless transactions across the country.

From seamless QR code transactions to cross-border digital wallet integration, the country's latest innovations are transforming travel — just in time for major international events like the recently concluded 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

With 37 point-of-sale terminals deployed across the event's venues to facilitate seamless payments via foreign bank cards, visitors from outside of China were able to experience firsthand the convenience such technology provides during their time there.

In addition, as a result of the nation's intensified efforts to improve the digital payment experience for international travelers, those visitors can now make payments through two options: one allows them to link their foreign bank cards directly to domestic payment platforms such as Alipay and WeChat Pay, while the other enables them to make payments using their own foreign digital wallets without downloading additional Chinese apps.

According to local government data, over 860,000 mobile payment transactions were processed for foreign visitors in Heilongjiang between January 2024 and January 2025, marking a 4.9-fold increase year-on-year. The total transaction value exceeded 190 million yuan (\$26.16 million) during the same period, up 8.1 times year-on-year, with more than 144,000 foreign users benefiting from these services, a 5.8-fold increase.

"Many foreign visitors are adopting mobile payments, and we as a bank are actively guiding them to experience the convenience of digital platforms like WeChat Pay and Alipay," said a representative from Harbin Bank, adding that based on their observations, most foreign users appreciate the seamless experience very much — whether shopping, dining or commuting — without the need to carry cash or physical bank cards.

"Paying for public transportation via QR codes in mobile apps is incredibly convenient," said Ho Xuan Ni, a Malaysian student at Beijing Foreign Studies University. In contrast to physical transport cards, Ho said digital payments have greatly helped eliminate the need to carry extra cards and constantly check account balances.

A recent study by BFSU on the mobile payment experience of foreign visitors in China found that around 90 percent of millennials and Generation Z foreign travelers adopted mobile payment methods, showing their widespread global popularity. Additionally, about 78 percent of all surveyed visitors reported using mobile payments



while in China, with 74.36 percent were already aware of these options before their trips.

"The high pre-travel awareness and actual adoption rates of mobile payments among foreign visitors indicate that China's digital payment ecosystem has to some extent posed a spillover effect on global payment habits, but because of the different payment habits there is still a customary gap for foreign travelers," said Wu Hao, executive director of the Institute of Silk Road Studies of BFSU.

Driven by the evolving travel landscape, an enhanced visa-free policy and the first Chinese New Year since securing its latest UNESCO heritage recognition, China's inbound tourism sector has recently surged like a rising tide, drawing waves of foreign visitors eager to experience the country's rich culture and modern conveniences.

Unlike earlier, visitors can now enjoy digital payment services in more scenarios such as ride-hailing, hotel bookings, attraction tickets, public transport access and tax refunds.

"With the gradual adoption of emerging payment methods in China, such as 'tap-and-go', palm print recognition and facial recognition, foreign visitors are expected to experience a wider range of payment innovations in the country," Wu said.

The impact of the improved payment system is reflected in rising transaction volumes. According to data from the People's Bank of Chi-



Top: A foreigner uses an Alipay code on his mobile phone to buy coffee in Shanghai in April 2024.

Above: A foreign tourist uses his mobile phone to pay for goods in Shanghai on Jan 1. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The high pre-travel awareness and actual adoption rates of mobile payments among foreign visitors indicate that China's digital payment ecosystem has to some extent posed a spillover effect on global payment habits, but because of the different payment habits there is still a customary gap for foreign travelers."

Wu Hao, executive director of the Institute of Silk Road Studies of BFSU

## Exploring Spring Festival culture with a trip to China



Foreign visitors experience a dragon dance performance during a Lantern Festival event in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Feb 11. ZHANG YING / FOR CHINA DAILY

na, the country's central bank, during the seven-day Spring Festival holiday (Jan 28 — Feb 3), foreign visitor payment transactions processed by China UnionPay and NetsUnion grew by 127.3 percent in volume and 93.5 percent in value year-on-year, respectively.

Taking a closer look at digital payment platforms, data from fintech major Ant Group also showed that during the first five days of the holiday, foreign tourists' spending via Alipay more than doubled compared to the previous year, while the number of Chinese merchants catering to foreign customers through the platform also doubled. Meanwhile, WeChat Pay reported a 134 percent leap in cross-border transactions during the holiday period as well.

The surge in foreign visitor transactions underscores China's blossoming role as a global tourism and business hub, with the continuous refinement of payment services at key commercial hotspots and entry points acting as the wind in this rising tide, said Liu Bin, director of the financial research office at the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone's research institute.

"Payment data serve as a crucial window into China's economic vitality and consumption trends. The progress is underpinned by strong policy support and the concerted efforts of payment institutions, financial organizations and fintech companies in advancing payment convenience," Liu said, adding that the growth in transaction volumes

is driven by both high-frequency, small-scale payments (such as online red envelopes and dining purchases) and larger expenditures (like travel and home appliances).

To further enhance payment convenience, domestic fintech players have introduced a slew of innovations for inbound travelers. For example, Alipay has allowed foreign users to directly link their international credit or debit cards to their digital account, while Alipay+ cross-border services allow visitors to make purchases in the Chinese mainland using their e-wallets, such as AlipayHK (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), MPay (Macao SAR), Touch 'n Go eWallet (Malaysia) and TrueMoney Wallet (Thailand), among the 13 overseas e-wallets from 10 countries and regions.

Between Jan 28-31, transactions made through Alipay+ supported overseas e-wallets in the Chinese mainland nearly doubled year-on-year, said Ant Group.

"The surge in cross-border payment demand, particularly in tourism-driven and holiday spending ... serves as a real-world testament to the resilience of China's payment infrastructure, showcasing its increasing internationalization level and expanding inclusivity," said Ye Yindan, a researcher at the Bank of China Research Institute.

However, despite progress, some foreign travelers still face challenges such as complex identity verification and language barriers.

"I've seen my Chinese friends make payments using facial recognition, while we still have to scan QR codes, which can be inconvenient in certain situations," said Tong Ho Phuong Thuy, a Vietnamese expatriate in China, who also called for payment apps to provide more human-operated customer support tailored to overseas users.

In this regard, payment platforms are expected to further integrate with international application ecosystems, streamline account registration and identity verification processes, and consolidate key travel services into a one-stop platform, said Zhang Jingze, a researcher involved in the BFSU study.

"A unified travel service app — combining payments, transportation, accommodation, ticket bookings, dining, navigation, recommendations and translation — would significantly enhance the experience for foreign visitors," Zhang said.

Zhang also noted that during the research, some older foreign travelers expressed a preference for having their younger companions handle the mobile payment transactions for them, indicating that there is still room for improvement in making current mobile payment platforms more senior-friendly.

Zhou Lanxu contributed to this story.

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SHANGHAI — Dazzling fireworks, stunning drone shows, festive lantern displays and parades were among the Chinese New Year celebration activities and features that were appreciated nationwide during the eight-day holiday from Jan 28 to Feb 4.

This year, an increasing number of international tourists chose to experience China's most important festival. Data from Trip.com show that inbound travel orders during the 2025 Spring Festival surged by over 203 percent compared to the previous year.

At the start of the New Year holiday, Xinhua News Agency interviewed dozens of international visitors in Shanghai, a city beloved by global travelers. Last year, Shanghai welcomed over 6.7 million inbound trips, an 84 percent increase from the previous year, thanks to China's relaxed visa policies that have sparked a "China Travel" boom.

On the first day of the 2025 Chinese New Year, Xinhua met French entrepreneur Domin Gaurier and his friends at the Bund in Shanghai. They were en route from Paris to Vietnam and chose to stop over in Shanghai specifically to experience

the Chinese New Year atmosphere. Impressed by the dominant red color, Gaurier was looking forward to immersing himself in the charm of the various festivities available in the city.

Currently, Spring Festival customs are celebrated in nearly 200 countries and regions, with almost 20 nations designating it as an official public holiday. However, in China, where Spring Festival customs form the cornerstone of its cultural identity, the holiday carries additional significance and appeal for travelers.

Let us look at Gaurier as an example. This was his first visit to China, but he had already enjoyed Chinese cuisine and was interested in Chinese culture and history before traveling to the country. China's visa-free policies have made it easier for people like him to pursue his enjoyment and interest by visiting China and directly experiencing the country, its food, culture and more.

Strolling past Shanghai's landmarks, one could find visitors from almost all over the world. Carla Uhrmacher, who works for a Germany-based company, had just concluded her business trip in China and

decided to extend her stay by three days to soak in the festive atmosphere. She ended up visiting Yuyuan Garden, a historic and cultural landmark in Shanghai that transforms into a festive wonderland during Chinese New Year.

After crossing the Jiuqu Bridge, which translates as Zig-Zag Bridge, and savoring soup dumplings, Uhrmacher told Xinhua that the core customs of Spring Festival, including family reunions and wishes for good fortune, resonate deeply with people across cultures. She believes that for people of different nationalities, it is nice to get to know China and the new visa policies make it easier for them to visit the country. Notably, Uhrmacher revealed that ancient architecture and steamed meat buns had made a strong impression on her while in China.

Before 2019, China's inbound tourism market was predominantly driven by traditional travel agencies, with most foreign visitors arriving in tour groups. However, market growth today is increasingly fueled by individual travelers who are attracted to China by posts on social media platforms.

Influenced by travel vlogs, Joohee

Park, a tourist from the Republic of Korea, expressed excitement in an interview about being in Shanghai for the first time. During her time in the city, she visited Shanghai Disneyland, the magnificent Bund and the Wukang Building — a historic and architectural landmark that embodies the rich cultural heritage of the city. All of these sites are highly recommended on social media platforms.

In 2024, China received more than 20 million visa-free trips, a year-on-year increase of 112.3 percent. With the rapid growth of inbound tourism, which was a feature of this year's Spring Festival travel market, the "China Travel" hashtag is likely to get even more popular in 2025.

As Spring Festival continues to gain global recognition, its potential for fostering international understanding remains evident and vast.

The global spread of the Chinese Spring Festival culture is about more than just celebrating a holiday, it is about sharing the values of family, renewal and good fortune, fostering unity and building bridges between cultures.

XINHUA

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Implementation of policies crucial to beef up performance of private sector

Be it at the constitutional, legal, regulatory or practical level, there should be no doubt any longer about the indispensability of the private sector to the overall national economy, as major job creators, innovators and taxpayers.

In the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the ruling Party of the world's second-largest economy vowed to build "a high-standard socialist market economy", and to that end it pledges to "unswervingly encourage, support, and guide the development of the nonpublic sector" and let the market play "the decisive role in resource allocation".

A series of laws and policies have accordingly been rolled out to "provide an enabling environment for private enterprises, protect their property rights and the rights and interests of entrepreneurs in accordance with the law, and facilitate the growth of the private sector". Many concrete actions have been taken to improve the modern corporate system, encourage entrepreneurship, and help Chinese companies become world-class. China's comprehensive national strength, deepened reforms, and sci-tech have provided the foundation, impetus and opportunities for the growth of the private sector.

However, the private sector still faces challenges regarding market access, allocation of resources, financing and investment, and supply of services. And the increasing uncertainties and risks of the external environment and the mounting downward pressure on the economy at home further highlight the urgency with which the country's policymakers should help the private sector to resolve its challenges.

In that sense, the symposium, between the Chinese leadership and some representatives of private enterprise owners that President Xi Jinping presided over in Beijing on Monday, represents the latest endeavor of the country to beef up the performance of its private sector at a time when its roles connecting production and consumption, research and development, financing and investment, are sorely needed by China and the world. The symposium provided both sides with a valuable opportunity for face-to-face communication, allowing the representatives of the private sector to voice their concerns directly to the country's leadership.

The important remarks Xi made in the symposium should serve to consolidate the market's confidence in the central authorities' resolve and ability to invigorate the growth of the private sector. As Xi said, the challenges faced by the private sector are local rather than overall, temporary rather than long-term, and can be overcome rather than being unsolvable.

President Xi stressed the importance of maintaining policy consistency and stability, and ensuring that policies aimed at supporting the private sector are implemented without compromise. Relevant authorities should resolutely remove all obstacles to the equal use of production factors and fair participation in market competition in accordance with the law, continue to promote the fair opening up of competitive infrastructure fields to various business entities, and continue to make great efforts to solve the problems private enterprises face in securing finance and the high cost of doing so.

On their part, private enterprises should improve their corporate governance structures in accordance with the requirements of the modern enterprise system, and seek to play a greater role in promoting the country's self-reliance in high tech.

That there were some new faces of entrepreneurs at the symposium, including those born in the 1990s whose start-ups have proven their potential in many cutting-edge fields, reflects the strong endogenous power of China's innovation system and the passing down of the entrepreneurship from the old to the new generation. The headwinds it has encountered have only served to stimulate the country to foster endogenous innovation.

The top-down decisions and guidance should be the stimulus for different departments at various levels to form workable and pertinent solutions to help private enterprises overcome the difficulties they face.

## US sends risk-laden message

The US State Department has removed a statement on its website that it does not support "Taiwan independence". In addition, the page, which was updated last week, has added a reference to Taiwan's cooperation with a Pentagon technology and semiconductor development project, and says that the United States will support the island's membership in international organizations "where applicable". Given that the Taiwan question is a core interest of China and is one of the most sensitive issues in the Sino-US relations, the changes are concerning.

In their telephone talk on Jan 17, President Xi Jinping told then US president-elect Donald Trump that the Taiwan question concerns China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and he expressed the hope that the new administration would handle it with caution. Also, in a telephone call one week later, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told US Secretary of State Marco Rubio that Taiwan has been an integral part of China since ancient times, and Beijing will never allow the island to be separated from the motherland. Wang reminded Rubio that the US has made solemn commitments to abide by the one-China principle in the three China-US joint communiqués and said that it should not renege on them.

Beijing's position on the island's participation in the activities of international organizations is consistent and clear, that is, it must be handled under the one-China principle, which is also a basic principle enshrined in United Nations resolutions.

The Democratic Progressive Party authorities on the island have stubbornly stuck to the separatist position of "Taiwan independence", which means that the political foundation for the island's participation in the activities of international organizations such as the World Health Assembly no longer exists.

It is reasonable for Beijing to interpret what the US State Department has done as the US again playing the trick of "strategic ambiguity" over a question that entails a clear-cut noninterference stance. Washington should be aware of the ripple effect such moves will have on the situation across the Taiwan Strait, and on the development of relations between China and the US. Pushing the envelope on the Taiwan question will only be detrimental to the healthy development of Sino-US ties. The fact that those secessionists on the island responded to the State Department's move by saying that they "welcomed the support and positive stance of the US" suggests that Washington has sent a wrong signal to those who harbor the intention of separating the island from the motherland.

The US administration should be clear that there is a limit to the Chinese mainland's patience and the latter will take whatever action it thinks appropriate if there is any move toward "Taiwan independence" by the secessionists on the island.

The Chinese mainland will do its utmost for the peaceful reunification of Taiwan, but it will never give up the option of reunification by force. Beijing treasures the sound development of Sino-US relations, which it believes is not just in the interest of both countries and both peoples, but also important for world peace and stability. The US administration should really handle the Taiwan question with due caution.

The worsening relations across the Taiwan Strait are not what Beijing, or the world, wants to see. Neither are the worsening relations between the world's two largest economies. The US should earnestly abide by the one-China principle and the commitments it made in the three China-US joint communiqués, observe international law and not send any wrong signals to "Taiwan independence" separatist forces.

Qiu Jiong



## Opinion Line

## Strict governance of the Party guarantee for a strong country

The Communist Party of China Central Committee has steadfastly promoted comprehensive and strict governance of the Party since 2012, and established a system for this unwavering mission, which has made the Party stronger and more energetic, and helped the country make historic achievements.

Party building in the new era is a systematic project and improving the system of comprehensive and strict Party governance is the shared responsibility of the whole Party. All Party members should become more conscious of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, follow the leadership core, and keep in alignment with the central Party leadership.

The task of strictly governing the Party in the new era is onerous and complex, and must be systematically planned and pro-

moted. Only by forming and improving a system for comprehensive and strict governance of the Party can the Party provide a strong guarantee for national rejuvenation through advancing Chinese modernization.

The key to comprehensive and strict governance of the Party is to uphold the authority and centralized and unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee and ensure the unimpeded implementation of the decisions made by the top leadership. Given that grassroots Party organizations are the foundation of the Party's governance and the source of its power, it is necessary to effectively improve the ability of grassroots Party organizations to lead community-level Party governance.

To advance comprehensive and strict governance of the Party, a strict supervision system should be established, through

which precise efforts can be made to deal with both the symptoms and root causes of the problems. That discipline inspection and supervision organs across the country received 3.56 million complaints from the public in 2024, handled 2.18 million clues to relevant problems, put 877,000 cases on file, and disciplined 889,000 people shows the Party's unwavering determination and persistent action to promote its integrity and discipline.

Improving the oversight system, integrating oversight forces, and forming joint oversight forces are powerful measures to advance comprehensive and strict governance of the Party. A closer watch should be kept on all aspects of public power to promote the organic unity of the Party's self-supervision and people's supervision.

— QUSHI MAGAZINE

## EU looks to get on front foot after 'friendly' push

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said that Ukraine and the European Union would be part of any "real negotiations" to end the Ukraine crisis that has already lasted almost three years, suggesting that the US president's telephone talk with the Russian leader on Wednesday was to see how serious he was about peace.

But that statement didn't come until one European leader after another expressed their objection to the United States' move. "There will be no credible and successful negotiations, no lasting peace, without Ukraine and without the European Union" involved in the talks, said President of the European Council António Costa.

Rubio's remark came on Sunday, the last day of the Munich Security Conference. Before that, the new US administration had

already claimed that negotiations to end the Ukraine crisis would start "immediately". On Friday, US Congressman Michael McCaul, who was attending the conference, revealed that Rubio and other officials are to meet with Russian officials in Saudi Arabia to discuss issues related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The US' move is widely interpreted as an attempt to "unilaterally" negotiate in the Ukraine crisis without Europe, of which Ukraine is a part.

The EU foreign ministers held a meeting on Sunday for a discussion before closing the Munich Security Conference, on which Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen tweeted that Europe "unitedly supports Ukraine" and "is strongly committed to the defense of the free world".

That defensive posture might be better facing westwards against those claiming to be in the same camp.

As Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said at the Munich forum, the US president has a method of operating called "reconnaissance through battle: You push and you see what happens, and then you change your position. ... And we need to respond".

That response needs to be united and quick. That is why French President Emmanuel Macron hosted an emergency summit in Paris on Monday, saying the meeting could lead to other formats "with the objective of gathering all partners interested in peace and European security".

— JOEY ZHANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Loss of trust and credibility also weighs in trade balance

US President Donald Trump announced his decision last week to impose "reciprocal tariffs" on other countries in the coming weeks or months. This means that all US trading partners are facing new tariff threats. That involves about 5,000 kinds of commodities from 186 countries and regions, forcing relevant parties to negotiate with the United States to avoid a tariff war.

Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars. The Trump administration seems addicted to that tactic in a firm belief that it serves the US' interest.

But its practices of weaponizing tariffs, wantonly destroying the international trade order, and using coercion to maintain so-called US interests have shaken the foundation of the postwar world order created by the US itself by undermining the trust of various countries in rules and order.

Reviewing the US' development since early last century, Nobel-winning economist Daron Acemoglu observed in a recent article that a key pillar of what is regarded

as the American Century has been the country's ability to shape the world order in a way that benefits its own economy. But the US' tariff war puts the US' efforts to boost its own interest against those to consolidate and improve the world order.

Smart businesspeople value their credibil-

ity. Only the opportunistic gold rushers and speculators blindly chase immediate interest. Washington should weigh the impacts of its tariff policy on the US' credibility, and trust in the US-led world order.

Even for US allies, such as the European Union and Canada, the US' tariff war undermines their trade relations with and trust in the US. In addition to their promises to take countermeasures, the responses made by these affected parties invariably convey their confusion and disappointment with the Trump administration's unscrupulous resort to tariff wars to ensure "America first".

"This is a moment," said Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau commenting on Trump's tariff intimidation. "This is a time in our country's history that really matters."

"It is also important that everyone sticks together. Difficult times require such full solidarity," said Prime Minister Donald Tusk of Poland, which holds the EU presidency.

The EU's attitude toward China has become significantly more open in the past month. One of the causes is that after the Trump administration's constant threats to increase tariffs on the EU, the bloc's decision-makers increasingly believe that the US has changed from a seemingly unquestioned ally to an unreliable factor, if not a threat to the bloc's immediate economic interest.

After Trump took office on Jan 20 — the new US leader started negatively commenting on the EU from day one — European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on different occasions that there

was space to deepen trade ties and even "find agreements" with Beijing, in "an era of hypercompetitive and hyper-transactional geopolitics".

"We will keep de-risking our economic relationship — as we have been doing in recent years. But there is also room to engage constructively with China — and find solutions in our mutual interest," she said in a speech before the EU's diplomatic corps in Brussels earlier this month.

The bloc's reaction to the new US administration was further reinforced after US Vice-President JD Vance lambasted European governments for betraying their values at the Munich Security Conference on Friday. In his closing remarks at the security forum on Sunday, Christoph Heusgen, chairman of the MSC, said emotionally: "This conference started as a transatlantic conference, after the speech of Vice-President Vance on Friday we have to fear that our common value base is not that common anymore."

The crisis of confidence in the US will inevitably spread to other economies, forcing them to seek alternative trading partners to reduce their dependence on US trade and accelerate the de-dollarization of international trade, which will weaken the international status of the US dollar and shake the foundation of US financial hegemony.

These collateral damages of the US' tariff war have to be taken into account to assess the US' gain and loss from its "reciprocal" duty campaign.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Liu Dongmei

## AI spread validates power of human progress

DeepSeek has launched a series of innovative, large-model AI products, creating a global sensation. In the intensifying technological containment battle, DeepSeek's rise not only shows the breakthroughs China has made in AI but also reveals a reality: In the era of high-tech competition, administrative measures can no longer block market-driven diffusion of technology. When high-tech development resonates with market demand, administrative interventions cannot stop the spread of advanced technologies.

Strong market demand is the fundamental driving force behind the diffusion of technology. And the diffusion of technology is not a scientific experiment but a complex socio-economic development process, in which market demand plays the role of "natural selection". Across the world, industries, particularly the finance, healthcare and e-commerce sectors, require efficient data processing and precise analytical capabilities to thrive. Businesses need to leverage AI for effective marketing, personalized services, and even medical diagnoses. This powerful market demand becomes the main force behind the diffusion of AI and AI-related technologies.

As an innovative technology, DeepSeek's performance has been extraordinary. It has great potential in data mining, information retrieval and intelligent analyses. DeepSeek can quickly and accurately process vast amounts of data and significantly enhance value, improving business decision-making, scientific research and social governance. Indeed, the diffusion and acceptance of DeepSeek shows a clear "demand-supply" reinforcement mechanism.

Real-world applications such as shorter drug development cycles, intelligent reorganization of teaching resources, and reducing downtime in manufacturing are creating value and driving the development of new technologies.

The United States-led West thinks imposing sanctions on China will halt its technological progress. But, ironically, the sanctions have prompted China to expedite independent research and development, and build alternative supply chains. In the global AI race triggered by ChatGPT, DeepSeek has chosen a technological path to "encircle cities from the countryside," with its team adopting a "model distillation-heterogeneous com-



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

**Standing at a critical point of society's digital transformation, we ought to rethink the essence of technology diffusion: Not just the spread of code and algorithms, humans also need to break through cognitive boundaries.**

puting" approach to train a trillion-parameter model on consumer-grade graphics cards. This "computing guerrilla warfare" significantly reduces training costs.

The biggest irony of regulations on the technology sector is that it hastens the development of the regulated sector. This paradox of "regulation birthing innovation" is common in technology: in the

1990s, the US restricted the export of encryption technology, which accelerated, instead of slowing, the spread of open-source encryption protocols such as PGP. Recent regulations on chips have intensified the "computing guerrilla warfare", with Chinese companies continuously improving large-model parameter efficiency through heterogeneous computing and model compression technologies to achieve better performance with the same computing power.

Administrative intervention is like a dam trying to block floodwaters; in the short term, it may change the direction of the flow, but in the long run, it would expedite the formation of new channels. This "counter-sanction evolution" is evident in DeepSeek: the model architecture shifted from Transformer to the more resistant Hyena hierarchical structure, training data moved from publicly available corpora to UGC crowd-sourcing, and computing power shifted from centralized procurement to computing node crowd-funding.

Innovation mechanisms are breaking through geographical boundaries and established organizational forms. The diffusion of advanced technologies has evolved into a multi-dimensional, multi-layered ecosystem competition, and any administrative intervention that violates economic principles is unlikely to achieve the intended result.

DeepSeek's open-source community brings together developers from across the world who continuously improve their technologies or creations based on DeepSeek's core principles, facilitating the application and diffusion of technologies in a more flexible manner and on a wider scale. This decentralized grid-type distribution system has strong intervention-resistant capability, making it difficult to control individual nodes influencing the technology's development direction.

Also, the "dark web effect" of talent mobility further weakens administrative control. Top global AI talents have formed an academic community that transcends borders, sharing knowledge through academic conferences, open-source projects and joint research. Intangible knowledge dissemination is a driving force behind the diffusion of technology. This "digital spore" type of diffusion makes national regulations increasingly powerless.

When it comes to diffusion of technologies, market demand has always been a stronger underlying operating system than any administrative force. DeepSeek's rise is essentially the transcendence of technological innovation laws over traditional governance thinking. The core of modern technological governance lies in building channels that facilitate innovation, rather than building dams to block the floodwaters.

Standing at a critical point of society's digital transformation, we ought to rethink the essence of technology diffusion: Not just the spread of code and algorithms, humans also need to break through cognitive boundaries. In this sense, the unstoppable diffusion of technologies validates the irreversibility of human progress.

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Kang Bing

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## Hard work and govt support are key to success in sports

When the phrase "No pain, no gain" is paraphrased into Chinese, it becomes "no plowing, no weeding — no harvest." As an agrarian society for thousands of years, we know too well that we can't get a good harvest without working hard. That is true not only for farming but also for sports.

China's impressive 85-medal tally with 32 golds at the just-concluded 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, and its third place on the medal tally at the 2022 Winter Olympic Games are the result of decades of hard work in winter sports. When the First Asian Winter Games was held in Japan in 1986, Chinese won only four gold medals. In the previous Asian Winter Games, it was third on the medal tally.

When I started my journalism career 43 years ago, only people from the cold northern China could play ice and snow sports for a few months each year. Skiing was out of reach of most people because the country hardly had any skiing venues. Even ice skating was considered a luxury because a pair of skates could cost a whole month's income.

**Therefore, it should not come as a surprise if Chinese players rank among the top in international tennis in a decade or two.**

China's increasing investments have enabled an increasing number of people to take part in winter sports. There are reportedly more than 3,300 winter sports venues in China today, with quite a few in the southern region. About one fourth of the venues, both indoors and outdoors, are for skiing. And more than 300 million Chinese people have been taking part in skating, skiing or other winter sports. Backed by such a huge number of winter sports athletes and fans, we expect China to do even better on the world stage.

The same phenomenon was seen in tennis. When I was asked to cover a tennis tournament in the early 1980s, I had zero knowledge about aces or love. Beijing had only a handful of tennis courts for the national team to train and for sports universities and sports schools to teach their students. I brought back a second-hand tennis racket when I returned after studying in the United States, which I never had a chance to play with, because I couldn't get access to a tennis court. I still have the racket — rusted like me.

Today, there are nearly 50,000 tennis courts in China, next only to the US in number. More than 20 million Chinese play the sport as professionals or amateurs, making tennis one of the most popular sports in the country. Last year, China held close to 100 tennis competitions, many of them international tournaments, in 48 cities.

The popularity of tennis has lured many youngsters to the sport and enabled the country to cultivate good talents. About a dozen Chinese players, especially women players, are winning competitions worldwide and are climbing up the WTA rankings. Li Na made history in 2011 by winning the French Open; she went on to win the Australian Open in 2014. Zheng Qinwen won gold at the Paris Olympic Games in 2024 and became the second Chinese woman to reach a Grand Slam final at the Australian Open.

Encouraged by Zheng's success, as well as by the outstanding performances of other players, more and more young fans are taking tennis lessons, enriching China's talent pool. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise if Chinese players rank among the top in international tennis in a decade or two.

Except a few sports that only a small number of people can take part in because of the high costs or other special requirements, good talents in most other competitive sports emerge mostly from among amateurs. A country is likely to shine in a particular sport when it has a lot of fans. That has proved true for China in table tennis and badminton before.

When I say Chinese players succeed in a particular sport because of hard work and government support, I mean it with exceptions. Soccer is by far the most popular sport in China but the national team's global ranking has been going down over the past two decades despite support from the government and fans. Why is the development of soccer an exception? Well, that's another story.

Maya Majueran

## Open China continues to drive global growth

China's economy exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability in 2024, maintaining its growth momentum and achieving a growth of 5 percent despite the domestic and external challenges. The growth rate is in line with the government's GDP growth target of "around 5 percent". According to the National Bureau of Statistics data, China's GDP reached 134.91 trillion yuan (\$18.80 trillion) in 2024.

The Chinese government has implemented several policies to boost domestic demand and maintain financial stability. These policies have not only facilitated growth in key economic areas, including industrial output, but also, to some extent, helped stabilize the real estate market.

Through targeted reforms, fiscal support, strengthened trade relations, promotion of innovation and implementation of strategic economic initiatives, China has boosted domestic confidence. These developments have consolidated China's pivotal role in shaping the global economy and influencing technological advancement.

China accounted for nearly 30 percent of global economic growth last year, profoundly impacting the global economy. China's contribution reaffirms its status as a leading economic powerhouse, and highlights its critical role in advancing international trade, fostering investment and driving technological innovation.

China's foreign trade reached a record high in 2024, with its total value reaching 43.85 trillion yuan, up 5 percent year-on-year. Exports increased by 7.1 percent year-on-year to 25.45 trillion yuan while imports grew by 2.3 percent to 18.39 trillion yuan.

China's growth generates ripple effects across multiple sectors, including manufacturing, technology and services. Its strong economic performance stabilizes global markets, creates demand for exports from other countries, and helps the economic recovery of regions most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

China's contribution to global growth in 2024 further cemented its prominent role in post-pandemic global recovery. Notably, China's growing imports are helping developing countries to boost their exports and expedite their economic recovery. By granting zero-tariff treatment to all least-developed countries with diplomatic ties with China, the country has shown its commitment to fostering global economic development and acting as a responsible economic partner.

This policy not only strengthens trade ties with these countries but also helps them integrate into the global economy, promoting sustainable growth and helping reduce poverty. A major driver of Chinese exports continues to be the Global South, especially countries involved in infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road framework. In fact, in 2024, Belt and Road countries accounted for more than 50 percent of China's total foreign trade for the first time. This underscores the growing importance of the Belt and Road Initiative in strengthening trade ties and economic cooperation between China and other developing countries, consolidating the country's role as a key player in global trade and infrastructure development.

China has been expanding its export markets in the Global South, promoting mutually beneficial trade. While the Global South seeks access to China's vast market for its raw materials, China's investment in infrastructure under the

Belt and Road framework creates for these countries critical development opportunities, fostering economic growth and connectivity. This synergy not only strengthens trade ties but also promotes sustainable development and economic cooperation, benefiting both China and its trade partners in the Global South.

China's exports to the United States now account for 15 percent of the total, down from 20 percent in 2018, which shows China is not solely reliant on the US for its exports' growth. At the same time, China remains the most cost-effective source of many products imported by the US, significantly benefiting US consumers and manufacturers. As a matter of fact, this dynamic supports many US jobs, highlighting the interconnectedness and mutual benefit of the China-US trade relationship despite the shifting global dynamics.

The diversification of China's foreign trade underscores its growing focus on expanding ties with the Global South and Belt and Road-partner countries, and shows that the country is reducing its reliance on the traditional Western markets, the US and the European Union in particular.

More important, China's rapid technological advancements cannot be hindered by unethical trade barriers or baseless investigations, measures often perceived as attempts to curb China's peaceful rise. China will continue to promote innovation and strengthen its position as a global leader in trade and technology, while diversifying its export portfolio by focusing on high-tech products, including electric vehicles, 3D printers and industrial robots, all of which are experiencing strong growth — thus transforming the country from a manufacturer of low-cost goods to a global leader in advanced technology and innovation.

New forms of trade, such as cross-border e-commerce, are booming, extending China's reach in the global market. Given the rising protectionism, trade tensions and geopolitical challenges, concerns about the future of globalization are growing. Yet free trade remains a cornerstone of a competitive global economy, because free trade promotes prosperity, generates socioeconomic benefits and creates more jobs.

By fostering more efficient and competitive industries, free trade enables countries to thrive in an interconnected world. China's continued commitment to open trade and economic cooperation underscores its role as a stabilizing force in the global economy and a proponent of shared growth and development.

Therefore, the US and the EU should focus on fostering healthy competition with China rather than adopting protectionist policies to curb China's rise, because that will hinder innovation and economic progress. Instead of building trade barriers and adopting restrictive policies, they should invest in research and development, especially in the high-tech sector, to enhance their global competitiveness. By advocating for open trade, establishing strategic trade and investment partnerships, and adopting innovation-driven policies, the US and the EU can create economic opportunities that benefit their people and businesses. A competitive approach, instead of a confrontational attitude, will help them build economic resilience and gain global leadership.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

WARWICK POWELL

## Pursue green development on their own

The developing countries should embrace increasingly accessible and affordable green energy and technologies while the US withdrew from the Paris Agreement

The Donald Trump administration's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement has been widely criticized as a retreat from global leadership. President Trump's dismissal of climate change as a "hoax" and his administration's pursuit of fossil fuel expansion — epitomized by the slogan "drill, baby, drill" — have raised concerns about the global fight against climate change. After all, the US is the world's largest economy in nominal terms and one of the largest carbon emitters. Its refusal to cooperate on decarbonization efforts arguably undermines global ambitions to combat climate change.



However, while this withdrawal is often framed as a setback, it also presents an opportunity — an opportunity for the rest of the world, particularly developing nations, to take the lead in shaping a sustainable future. The US' retreat reflects the insecurities of a declining empire, clinging to outdated notions of exceptionalism while the world moves forward.

The Paris Agreement was designed as a global framework to coordinate efforts to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. While the agreement was a landmark achievement in multilateral diplomacy, its implementation has been uneven, with developed nations often failing to meet their commitments, particularly in providing financial and technological support to developing countries. The US' withdrawal, while regrettable, removes a significant obstacle to progress by freeing the rest of the world from the constraints of US exceptionalism and its often self-serving approach to global governance.

For developing nations, the US' retreat is an opportunity to pursue climate action on their own terms. The technologies needed for green development — renewable energy generation, battery storage, electric vehicles and more — are increasingly accessible and affordable, thanks in large part to China's leadership in these sectors. China, now the world's largest producer of solar panels, wind turbines and electric vehicles, has demonstrated that green technologies can be rapidly and cost-effectively scaled up. The US' moves to place tariffs on

these technologies will not stymie China's ability to make them available to the world.

China's rapid expansion of green technology exports to the Global South is a testament to developing nations' growing demand for sustainable solutions and the effectiveness of China's strategy in positioning itself as a global leader in renewable energy and green technologies. This trend also underscores the limitations of efforts by Western powers to curtail China's green technology sector, as market forces and the urgent need for climate action in the Global South are driving demand that cannot easily be suppressed.

Moreover, the US' withdrawal highlights the need for a more equitable global climate framework. Developing nations have long argued that climate action must be aligned with their economic development goals. The failure of advanced nations to agree on substantial funding at COP27 to assist developing countries in their climate transitions underscores the deep cleavages in global climate negotiations. By moving forward without the US, developing nations can prioritize investments in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure and climate resilience — initiatives that not only reduce emissions but also drive economic growth and job creation.

The US' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is not just a policy decision. The US has long viewed itself as the indispensable nation, the leader of the free world, and the arbiter of global norms. However, its retreat from multilateral agreements such as the Paris Agreement and its inward-focused "America First" policies reveal a nation grappling with its diminishing influence in a rapidly changing world.

The rise of China as a global economic and technological powerhouse has challenged the US' dominance. China's commitment to renewable energy and its leadership in green technologies stand in stark contrast to the US' reliance on fossil fuels. While the US debates the merits of climate science, China has built the world's largest renewable energy infrastructure, positioning itself as a leader in the global energy transition. This shift in power dynamics has left the US clinging to outdated industries and ideologies, unable to adapt to the realities of a decarbonizing world.

At the same time, the US' retreat reflects a broader crisis of

confidence. The US political system, plagued by polarization, has struggled to address pressing global challenges. By withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, the US has abdicated its role as a global leader, ceding ground to nations that are more willing to embrace the future.

As the US withdraws, the rest of the world can seize the opportunity to forge ahead, building a new framework for climate action that prioritizes equity, innovation and collaboration. Developing nations, in particular, have much to gain from taking the lead in this effort. By investing in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, they can reduce their dependence on fossil fuels, create new economic opportunities, and position themselves as leaders in the global energy transition.

As the world's largest producer of green technologies, China has the capacity to drive the global energy transition. Other nations, such as India and Brazil, are also making significant strides in renewable energy, demonstrating that climate action and economic development can go hand in hand.

At the same time, the world must address the funding gap for climate transitions in developing nations. The failure of advanced nations to provide adequate financial support at COP27 highlights the need for new mechanisms to mobilize resources. Direct public investment, green bonds, climate funds and public-private partnerships can all play a role in financing the energy transition. By working together, nations can create a more equitable and effective global climate framework — one that does not rely on the US for leadership.

Let's not forget, as most of the needed technologies can be sourced from places other than the US, there is no need to rely on the US dollar to finance such initiatives either.

There's no need to lament the US' withdrawal from multilateral coordinated action. Instead, the rest of the world can seize the moment and forge ahead, building a sustainable future for all.

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CAI CUIHONG AND ZHANG RUOYANG

## Damage control

China needs to formulate a comprehensive response strategy to gain more initiative in the global technological competition

As countries around the world accelerate their strategic technological deployments, traditional global geopolitics are shifting toward "techno-politics". That is, with the unprecedented rise in the role of technology and under the logic of international political competition, the organizational structures and behavioral patterns of nations, as well as the means and content of major power competition, are undergoing significant changes. Technological factors have become core variables in economic competition, national security and even ideological confrontation.



Cai Cuihong



Zhang Ruoyang

Technological innovation and industrial transformation are key forces shaping the global development landscape and competitive dynamics, while geopolitical factors influence or even dictate technological development. Against this backdrop, the global technological competition exhibits three prominent characteristics.

First, a new nationwide resource mobilization system aimed at achieving breakthroughs in core technologies across key fields has been strengthened.

Given that technological development entails high risks and high rewards, the State-led, socially engaged model of large-scale scientific research, technological breakthroughs, talent cultivation and industrial planning has become more pronounced.

For example, the United States has increased its investment in semiconductor R&D through the CHIPS and Science Act, while the European Union has adopted the European Chips Act to reduce reliance on external supply chains. In emerging technology fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and life sciences, countries across the globe are strengthening national-level R&D plans to compete for technological leadership.

Second, technology competition is increasingly intertwined with security concerns and ideological considerations.

Technology now plays a pivotal role in national security, value systems and international influence, particularly in strategic fields such as artificial intelligence and semiconductors. To vie for dominance in technological systems, Western countries, led by the US, frequently cite risks such as "tech leakage" and "economic coercion", hyping the so-called China threat. They aim to conflate security, economic, technological and even scientific issues to further constrain competitors in the latest wave of global technological revolution and industrial transformation, thereby consolidating their dominance in emerging technologies.

Furthermore, the US has incorporated technologies such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence into its national security framework, tightened export restrictions on critical technologies to China, and pressured its allies to join a "de-risking" alliance aimed at curbing China's technological development through systematic blockades.

Third, competition over technological ecosystems has intensified. Future technological competition will extend beyond the advancement of individual technologies. More importantly, it will encompass entire technological ecosystems, including technological standards, supply chains and the integration of talent and market resources.

Under the pretext of "de-risking", some Western countries have recalibrated their economic and technological relations with China by implementing policies that promote selective decoupling. As a result, the global technological landscape faces increasing fragmentation, with some technological fields already exhibiting signs of systemic division.

Facing this challenging landscape, China needs to formulate a comprehensive response strategy to safeguard its technological development

and strive to gain more initiative in the global technological competition.

First, China should fortify its independent innovation system to accelerate breakthroughs in core technologies.

Currently, the epicenter of global technological competition lies in basic research and achieving breakthroughs in core technologies. China should increase investment in strategic and forward-looking technologies while promoting synergy between basic science and applied technology. The government should further bolster self-reliance and controllability of technological R&D by scaling up dedicated funds, optimizing research management systems and deepening industry-academia-research collaboration.

Additionally, China needs to build a robust technological reserve, focusing on next-generation information technologies, advanced manufacturing and renewable energy, etc. to secure a long term competitive edge in the technological revolution.

Second, China needs to advance tech diplomacy to build an open and inclusive international technological cooperation system.

Against the backdrop of an increasingly fragmented global technological landscape, China should adopt a more proactive approach to deepen interaction with the global innovation system.

On the one hand, China should broaden technological cooperation with developing countries and emerging markets, especially under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. On the other hand, China should take on a more active role in global technological standard setting, international research collaborations, and joint innovation efforts. Expanding its network of technological partnership will help China mitigate the risks of isolation imposed by technological blockades.

Third, China needs to strengthen the resilience of the domestic industrial chains and enhance the competitiveness of its technological ecosystem.

Future technological competition will involve not only specific technological capabilities but also the integration of entire technological

ecosystems. Therefore, China must strengthen the coordinated development of upstream and downstream industrial chains and improve the self-sufficiency of its supply chains.

For example, in the semiconductor industry, China should beef up support for the entire industrial chain, including chip design, manufacturing and packaging, to enhance self-sufficiency and technological autonomy. Additionally, it is imperative to promote the greater alignment of domestic technological standards with international standards to ensure China's voice in the global technological system.

Last but not least, China should push back against the increasing overuse of security rhetoric in technological competition and pioneer a more balanced model of technological governance.

Amid escalating technological restrictions imposed by the US and its allies, China should enhance the transparency and global credibility of its tech policies while promoting a fairer and more inclusive model of technological cooperation.

By formulating more competitive policies on data security and AI ethics, China can enhance global trust in its technological system and improve global market confidence in Chinese technology.

China needs to ensure technological self-reliance while simultaneously fostering a more open, inclusive and cooperative global technological system. By strengthening independent innovation, optimizing technological governance, deepening international cooperation, and improving its industrial chain ecosystem, China can seize greater strategic initiative in reshaping the future of global technological competition and advance a fairer, more sustainable model of global technological cooperation.

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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

LIFE



Left: German manager Markus Hofmueller organizes a pop-up bread stall at a local museum in Changsha, Hunan province, in June last year. Right: Chefs of Bach's Bakery present the bread and cakes they made after they participated in a competition in June 2024. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



# All you knead is love

Bakery gives hearing-impaired an opportunity to contribute more, reports **Zou Shuo** in Changsha.



Top: Chefs present a loaf they made in the kitchen of the bakery. Above: They whip ingredients before the baking process. Center: Hofmueller shows a group of children how to make bread at an event in September 2024.

It has been two years since Markus Hofmueller took over the management of a bakery from his fellow German compatriots, saying he made a good decision. Bach's Bakery, located in Changsha, Central China's Hunan province, is popular among the locals for hiring bakers with hearing impairments.

Hofmueller always believed that running the bakery was a good opportunity to learn about management, finances and customer service, he says. "I am busy every day. We start at 7 am and I spend most of the time in the office and leave the bakery to the chefs," he adds.

In the first year, he spent a lot of time in the kitchen, but believed interpersonal relations were the key to the bakery's success. All enterprises can face tension among the employees, so ironing out difficulties and overcoming issues is crucial.

The bakery's employees are a priority. "I'm happiest when I see them grow in the job," he says. "They accumulate more skills and knowledge and keep improving, which I value the most."

Hofmueller says that the bakery exists because of the bakers. He wants people to learn skills to support their families or even own a business in the future.

Chief baker Wang Ting has worked there for seven years and says that working helped her improve her baking and management skills. She is also Hofmueller's sign language teacher, helping him to better communicate with other employees.

Hofmueller thinks that attention to detail is what makes the bakers special. "Because they cannot hear, they pay more attention to what they see, especially details others tend to overlook," he says.

Such attention to detail is important for the bakery because bread quality can be judged by its appearance, he explains.

Hofmueller recalls that he had no hesitation when he took over the management of the bakery from the previous owner Uve Brutzer and his wife in 2022. They ran the bakery for 11 years and returned to Germany because they felt homesick.

"When I stepped into the store, I knew it was what I wanted. Whenever I make big decisions like this, I follow my heart," Hofmueller says.

His love for baking and an interest in the hearing-impaired were his prime motivations.

He and his wife have added new flavors and launched a WeChat account and mini-program. In one of the bakery's WeChat posts, it states that the bakery wants to become a meeting place for everyone.

Being an expat, whenever Hofmueller would see foreign customers in the store, he would make a point to chat with them.

During last Thanksgiving Day, the bakery made pumpkin pies to celebrate. When an American couple came into the store, Hofmueller taught them how to say "sweet", "coffee" and "hot chocolate" in sign language.

They later returned to the store with roses for each employee.

Meanwhile, many people in Changsha have supported the bakery, according to Hofmueller. Guests come to the store to eat and gather, and he often jokes that the people of Changsha run the store with him.

When Hofmueller made a post asking where he should buy an oven on his WeChat moments, he received many suggestions. After he posted about one of his employees falling ill last year, local doctors suggested remedies.

Cao Xuechi, 19, a college student in Changsha, says that he came to the store by accident. After he heard that the bread is made by hearing-impaired bakers, he found it more meaningful.

The bakery aims to assist and train more people, not just the hearing-impaired, Hofmueller says, adding that he wants to continue training more extensively and professionally.

He also wants to work with vocational schools so his employees can learn bakery skills with other students.

"No matter what I do, I feel a strong sense of destiny. It is not to say that I will do this for the rest of my life but I am certain I want to do this now. I trust my heart," he says.

Hu Sirui contributed to the story.

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Top: Hofmueller helps out in the kitchen, working side by side with a young chef. Above: Pouring the mixed batter into cake cup molds.



## Net gains for sports company's goal of innovation

CHANGSHA — A volleyball net, shaped like a cross, designed for a four-player match, and a baseball pitching target with a half-hollow net surface that allows the ball to pass straight through are not exactly standard forms of sports equipment.

These are just two of the innovative creations of Hunan Xinghai Sports company, based in Central China's Hunan province. So distinctive and complex are these products that they are listed in the company's product catalog simply via serial numbers, rather than names.

Its parent company, Hunan Xinghai, has a nearly 50-year history of fishing net production. But it began to rethink its business model, as many fishermen sought alternative livelihoods, since the government had ramped up efforts to protect fishery resources in the Dongting Lake, China's second-largest freshwater lake, and the Yangtze River, the country's longest waterway.

Recognizing that sports nets

shared similar manufacturing elements with fishing nets, the company founded Xinghai Sports in 2016, and started engaging in the manufacturing of sports nets.

According to Zhang Yong, general manager of Xinghai Sports, compared with fishing nets, sports nets require greater resilience and durability to withstand the impact of high-speed balls, so the company improved its manufacturing techniques.

While improving manufacturing techniques was straightforward, finding a market for their nets proved more challenging. As China's traditional sports net market was already saturated with established brands, Xinghai Sports had to spend a lot of time looking for new business opportunities. The breakthrough came when it noticed numerous niche sports nets being

sold on Amazon.

"We realized unlike in China at that time, where sports were traditionally associated with specific locations and techniques, many other countries treated sports as a lifestyle — accessible to anyone, anytime and anywhere," Zhang says. "This meant that leisure sports nets designed for different ages, groups and settings were always among the best-sellers in such markets."

With this insight, it began reaching out to international dealers and agents via email, and by attending trade fairs worldwide.

Initially, it produced net products such as portable football goals and tennis rebound nets, which, though

**2.8**  
trillion yuan  
the country's  
sports market value that is  
expected to reach by 2025

not yet mainstream, were in demand. Thanks to its fine craftsmanship and competitive pricing, it gradually gained recognition among overseas customers.

As the brand grew, it started receiving custom orders from creative clients. Last year, it welcomed two international clients to Hunan, who brought with them a design draft for a cross-shaped volleyball net. They had invented a volleyball game where four players compete individually, requiring a net unlike any other.

"It seemed easy at first, but the net required advanced craftsmanship, especially in ensuring the connections had both the necessary

hardness and toughness," says Deng Zhuobin, manager of the company's R&D department. After about 15 days of design efforts, it managed to successfully deliver 1,000 nets.

"These creative and personalized net products have inspired us to explore the market further," Zhang says, adding that it has partnered with sports schools and associations in China to develop niche net products tailored to the country's emerging sports market demands.

As China continues to promote extensive fitness-for-all activities, its sports population has grown, driving a surge in demand for sporting goods. Data shows that the country's sports market value is expected to reach 2.8 trillion yuan (\$390.48 billion) by 2025.

The 2024 sports consumption report highlights how niche and

emerging sports are transitioning into mass-market activities in the country, effectively broadening the scope of sports consumption.

Currently, Xinghai Sports offers more than 1,300 types of net products across 11 ball games, including football, volleyball, basketball and baseball. Over 100 of these are innovative designs tailored to niche markets.

The annual sales of the company exceeded 120 million yuan last year, with 53 percent of its products exported to countries, such as the United States, Canada, Chile, the United Kingdom, Germany and France.

"Many globally popular sports originated as simple games, and we apply the same concept to our products and business," Zhang says. "What starts as an innovative product, which cannot be accurately named yet, may become a household name in the future."

XINHUA

## LIFE



**Left:** Zhao Deling (left) and Sheng Mingfen (middle), dedicated rangers at Dashahe Nature Reserve in Guizhou province, watch infrared surveillance footage during a patrol. **Middle:** From the Tonkin langur monitoring point, Zhao and Sheng oversee the nature reserve, a vital sanctuary for the primates. **Right:** The couple examine surveillance footage at the forest fire prevention checkpoint. PHOTOS BY YANG XIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Conservation is a family matter

Married couple dedicate themselves to protecting nature reserve's ecosystem, following in the footsteps of the husband's father, **Yang Jun** and **Tu Jiayi** report in Guiyang, Guizhou province.

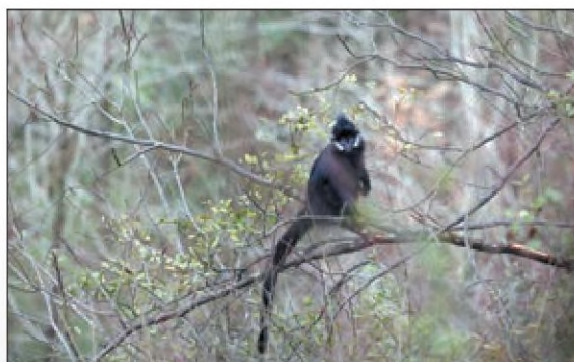
During the Spring Festival holiday, a family remained steadfast at their post in the Xianyu Cave (Fairy Cave) management station of the Dashahe Nature Reserve in Guizhou province, celebrating the vacation time doing guard duty. The dedicated couple Zhao Deling and Sheng Mingfen oversee nearly 7,000 *mu* (467 hectares) of protected areas, ensuring the safety of wild animals and greenery.

Dashahe Nature Reserve was established in 1984. With a total area of 26,990 hectares, it is a forest ecosystem nature reserve focusing on the protection of rare and endangered species such as *Cathaya argyrophylla* (commonly known as the Cathy silver fir) and *Trachypitecus francoisi* (Tonkin langur), as well as their natural habitats.

Elevated to a provincial-level nature reserve in 2001 and further upgraded to national-level in May 2018, the reserve's conservation efforts are commendable.

Zhao, 50, serves as a forest ranger in the reserve, while his wife Sheng joined the team in 2020 after another ranger retired.

Located within the Daozhen Gelao and Miao autonomous county in Zunyi city, the management station can be reached by following a winding downhill road to the forest fire prevention checkpoint where Zhao and Sheng are stationed. This checkpoint is a



**Left:** Tonkin langurs, a first-class national protected animal, inhabit the nature reserve. One of them rests on a branch. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Right:** Macaques forage for food. YANG XIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

crucial access point to the protected area, requiring round-the-clock surveillance year-round.

As forest rangers, Zhao and Sheng commence their duties at dawn. One is responsible for guarding the checkpoint to prevent unauthorized entry, while the other patrols the forest, navigating 13 river bends. Their tasks include recording the growth and activities of wild flora and fauna, managing waste washed downstream, clearing weeds around boundary markers, signs and infrared camera equipment, and regularly replacing memory cards in the infrared cameras for data collection and retrieval.

Excluding inclement weather

periods, completing one round-trip patrol takes over three hours. Between winter and spring, the river is biting cold, but Zhao steps right in every day, saying, "It's fine once you get used to it."

Although there are no developed roads in the protected area, it still does not stop people from sneaking in. "A momentary lapse can allow people to slip in unnoticed," he adds.

The checkpoint is near Chongqing and during summer, many people arrive to escape the heat. There is an iron gate that cannot fully block the riverbanks. During the non-flood season, it is possible to walk along the shallow riverbeds deep into the core protected area.

The couple can't relax for a moment from dawn until midnight. There are some people who, when told this is a core protection area and entry is prohibited, will leave, but there are a few, who don't respect the rules. The ecosystem is frail here and is home to many endangered species. They must



report any trespassing to the management station and make sure they escort those people out.

Some people also enter through mountain trails for fishing or hiking. This is why patrols cannot be interrupted for even a moment. Along the way, if they find such individuals, they must persuade them to turn back. This is not only to protect the plant and animal habitat but also to ensure the visitors' safety.

Loneliness is inevitable. The network connection at the checkpoint is very weak and the core of the protected area is isolated. During their daily three-hour patrols, they never know what kind of wildlife they will encounter that could put their lives at risk. However, intriguing occurrences help the couple confront the solitude.

"Observing the changes along our path makes time pass easily. You can find many subtle changes day by day," Zhao remarks. "For instance, if you find the bush collapsed in a section, it means wild boars were there looking for food. In winter, we feed the macaques regularly. Every time

we clang the bowls, they flock to us. If we forget to give them food on time, they shake the branches angrily, like little kids."

To feed the macaques, Sheng prepares peanuts, corn and walnuts. She cracks the nuts carefully to make them easier to eat.

In 2003, Zhao's father, a former village cadre, assumed the role of station chief for an artificial ecological public welfare forest construction project within the reserve. Leveraging his local influence, he mobilized nearby villagers to partake in tree planting and protection efforts. Within a year, 15,000 *mu* of forest were planted, laying the groundwork for a substantial increase in forest coverage.

In 2005, Zhao succeeded his father in this position, dedicating

himself to guarding the area and embracing the forest as his home, following in his father's footsteps.

Through their hard work generation by generation, the forest coverage of Dashahe Nature Reserve has significantly increased from 61.79 percent in 2002 to 84.67 percent in 2024. Currently, the reserve is home to 27 groups of Tonkin langur, totaling 166 individuals.

With improvements to the ecological environment, the population of wild macaques is also steadily increasing, with over 1,200 macaques now residing within the reserve. Behind these numbers is the hard work and unwavering dedication of the forest rangers.

Having known each other since their early teens while living in the same village, Zhao and Sheng built a family and raised two daughters. Their elder daughter works in Sichuan province while the younger daughter attends high school. During Spring Festival, their daughters visit the checkpoint for a family reunion, bringing food specialties and more to mark the occasion and celebrate the coming New Year.

"Maybe the station is not as good as the house in the village, but once our family is together, happiness fills every corner of the checkpoint," Sheng says.

Zhao Yandi contributed to this story.

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Situated in the Daozhen Gelao and Miao autonomous county in Zunyi city, Guizhou province, Dashahe Nature Reserve boasts a rich biodiversity. HAN KECHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Robotic exoskeletons keep elderly mobile

JINAN — During this year's Spring Festival, Taishan in Shandong province, one of China's most famous mountains, introduced the use of wearable robotic exoskeletons.

The innovative device, which is designed to assist with hiking, gained attention for the way it makes the arduous ascent more accessible and enjoyable, especially for elderly and mobility-impaired visitors.

"It really works. Once I put it on, my legs didn't hurt anymore. It felt like someone was pulling me uphill," says Li Chengde, a 68-year-old tourist from the provincial capital of Jinan, after trying on the device.

Developed by the Taishan Cultural

Tourism Group and the Shenzhen-based high-tech company Kenqing Technology, the 1.8 kilogram exoskeleton wraps around the wearer's waist and thighs. Powered by artificial intelligence, it senses their pace and movement to provide synchronized assistance to reduce fatigue and joint strain.

Ten units were launched on Jan 29 for trial operation. The device, which costs between 60 (\$8.37) to 80 yuan to rent, was used by some 200 visitors to the scenic area during the holiday. Half of them were elderly.

Wang Houzhe, deputy Party chief of the Taishan group, says the robotic exoskeletons were intro-

duced so that elderly visitors could experience the mountain's beauty firsthand.

"Some elderly tourists want to enjoy the scenery, but sitting in a cable car limits their view. With the help of these exoskeletons, they can truly experience the joy of hiking," he says.

Their introduction has sparked broader discussions about the potential applications of robotic exoskeleton devices in elderly care, which is of particular interest in China as the country faces the challenges of an aging society.

The latest data shows that by the end of 2024, there were 310 million people aged 60 and above, 22 per-

cent of the country's total population. It is predicted that this percentage will rise to 30 percent by 2035, when the elderly population will exceed 400 million.

With an eye on this vast market, Kenqing Technology, which focuses on the research and development, as well as the production and sale, of robotic exoskeletons, has released a lightweight system designed for elderly users that integrates advanced sensors and motion control systems to assist with walking, running, and climbing, according to Yu Yunbo, general manager of the company.

Yu adds that the company aims to release a new model this year made of lighter materials, with smarter

algorithms and enhanced adaptability to the physical needs of elderly users.

According to estimates, the smart elderly care market was worth 6.8 trillion yuan in 2024.

The government has issued policies encouraging the development of smart elderly care.

A national guideline issued in early 2024 to advance the silver economy, proposed the creation of a new model of intelligent health and elderly care, the promotion of intelligent nursing and domestic service robots, and the development of the assistive rehabilitation device industry.

Last month, another national guide-

line on deepening the reform and development of elderly care services proposed acceleration of the development and use of elderly care technology and information technology.

Bi Yalei, secretary-general of the Shenzhen Robotics Association, says that policy-supported market encouragement is necessary to promote the large-scale use of elderly-care robots and make their prices more affordable — an assessment with which Yu agrees.

"The large-scale use of these technologies will drive down costs, making them more affordable for families," Yu says.

XINHUA

# LIFE

A century ago, pioneering educators in China persevered through thick and thin to carry forward the torch of knowledge, from seeking educational reform during the New Culture Movement to moving across provinces to preserve educational resources during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

The institution that was later renamed Beijing Normal University, dedicated to teacher training, became the foreground of debates on educational reform, with the participation of renowned educators and philosophers committed to the principle of "saving the nation through education".

Recently, their legacy took center stage in Beijing Normal University's original musical *Today and Me*, which premiered on Jan 16 and ran until Jan 18 at the Lao She Theater in Beijing, recounting the early days of the school's establishment and paying tribute to those driving the development of modern teacher training.

"I remember one time the university's Party secretary Cheng Jianping proposed that since I had worked on many productions, I should create a piece for our university to show our students what kind of university BNU is," says Xiao Xiangrong, the musical's chief director and dean of the university's School of Arts and Communication.

"Beijing Normal University is a school with a deep history. This production is based on the starting point of exploring the significance of education for China and the significance of teacher training for education."

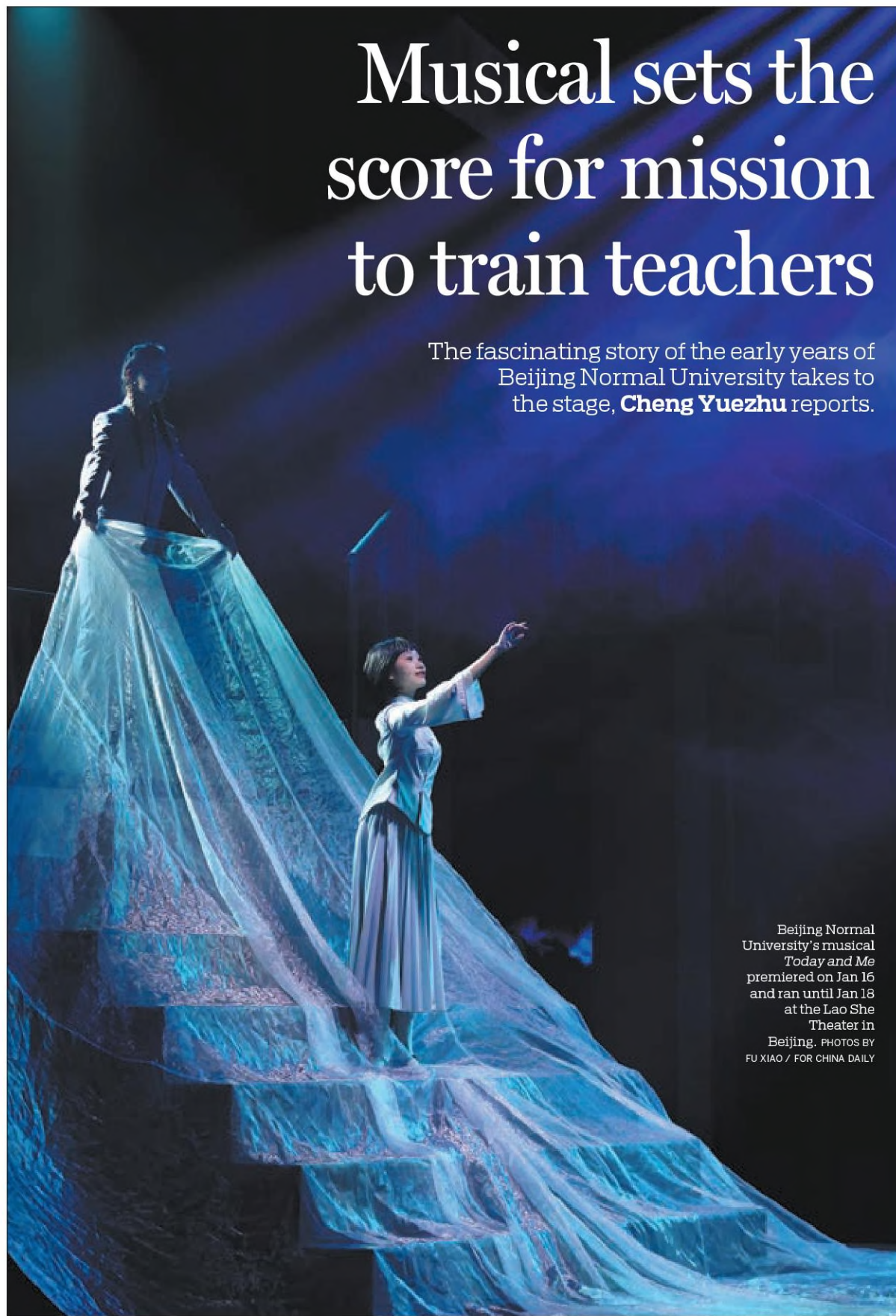
The university dates back to 1902, when its predecessor, the Education Department of the Imperial University of Peking, was established to train teachers and specialists.

Teacher training at one time faced significant challenges, with debates on whether it is necessary to set up higher normal schools specifically for the purpose. Philosopher and politician Liang Qichao and educator Fan Yuanlian staunchly defended their existence, leading to the school's elevation to China's first normal university in 1923. Fan served as its first president.

"Fan emphasized that it relied on teacher training to improve the nation's overall literacy and people's character," Xiao says.

"With this production, we trace the roots of modern China's teacher education. We want our students to recognize the significance of teacher training and the obligation of educators to step forward to fulfill the nation's educational demands."

The musical's scriptwriter Tang Ling says that this production is one of the most challenging projects she has worked on in recent years, in order to faithfully capture



## Musical sets the score for mission to train teachers

The fascinating story of the early years of Beijing Normal University takes to the stage, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

Beijing Normal University's musical *Today and Me* premiered on Jan 16 and ran until Jan 18 at the Lao She Theater in Beijing. PHOTOS BY FU XIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

the history and do justice to the historical figures.

"Through the process of researching and writing this piece, I came to a deep understanding of the sense of mission and responsibility that drove those educators to put in tremendous efforts and seek paths for the country's development despite the difficult conditions," Tang says.

Instead of zooming in on one or two prestigious teachers or students from the university's early days, the team decided to present the production as an ensemble drama, a method that can help reflect the arduous collective journey and the zeitgeist of the era.

Apart from influential educators such as Liang and Fan, the production presented a scene where female students, such as Liu Hezhen and Shi Pingmei, cut their hair short to advocate for women's independence and gender equality.

"We hope to present this ensemble of characters and their stories, which are both turbulent and inspiring. For us, attending schools and receiving education seem natural and taken for granted, and we rarely stop to consider the difficulties faced by teacher training schools in the early days," Tang says.

"It led me to think about how many things we see as ordinary were in fact hard-won. It was only made possible because a generation of pioneers bore the hardship and paved the way for the future."

The musical's entire process, including planning, producing and casting, called for the participation of students and faculty from the university, providing the students with a platform to work with professionals and exercise their creative potential.

According to Zhu Jie, the musical's composer and an associate professor at the university, while the musical incorporates a variety of vocal forms, including solos, duets and choruses, 19 out of 26 original songs are choral pieces.

In an effort to merge the past with the present, the production's prologue and epilogue show a contemporary Beijing Normal University student singing, highlighting the development and heritage of China's education spanning a century.

The monologues, dialogues and debates among characters portray the vibrant exchange of ideas during the early educational reforms. Multimedia technology is adopted to create smooth transitions between historical and modern narratives.

The production is set to become a recurring show at the beginning of every academic year, for the university's freshmen to learn about its history and inspire in them a passion for education. It will also tour to other Chinese universities.

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The musical recounts the university's early days and pays tribute to China's educators who highlighted the importance of teacher training.



## Inner peace appears elusive but others may be able to help

Each and every one of us is a mess. Underneath our masks projecting composure through fashion, wise aphorisms and creativity, it is likely that at any given moment, our souls are screaming. It makes sense that we would, given our minuscule position in the game of survival. It's scary enough that we need calories, a hearth with a working fire and warm hugs to make it to tomorrow. Adding to the equation



Haydn James Fogel  
Second Thoughts

is that these tools are commodified and your neighbor, Dan, seems to have more spending power than you do, and, well, screaming begins to have appeal. Dan is the easiest target of any scream. After all, he's right across the street, lets his dog poop on your lawn and listens to weird music. But if you were to enter his mind, you might find him thinking, "My life is of little worth to anyone. Were I to vanish from the face of the Earth today, it would be no great loss". These words actually belong to Pyotr Tchaikovsky, who once wrote them in a letter to his nephew,

probably around the time he had just finished writing the immortal ballet *Swan Lake*. We all suffer. And we all search for relief from our suffering. One wonders how much Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius was tired of the senate's childish bickering when he wrote, "You have power over your mind — not outside events", in *Meditations*, wherein he offered instructions against suffering using the values of Stoicism. Centuries earlier and across the world, Lao Tzu is believed to have compiled ancient wisdom into the body of work, the *Tao Te Ching*. In it, he wrote, "The wise man is one

who knows what he does not know." Perhaps that day, he was wondering why a flood had been sent to drown children two towns over. Or maybe he was confused as to why his wife moved the kitchen table 5 centimeters to the left, resulting in him smashing his big toe. Whatever the motivations, both writers sought to find serenity within the chaos of existence. They are like the rest of us, attempting to remain calm as we grasp at kernels of sustenance so that we might rest easy tonight. Unfortunately, we aren't going to sleep well because Dan is blasting

his weird music again. Why, Dan? Can't you see we're trying to get some shut-eye? How are we supposed to get any peace with that incessant bleating? Our first impulse might be to bring a bat over to Dan's place to smash his stereo into a billion pieces. Or perhaps we'll buy a few extra speakers and crank our own sound system even louder; see how he likes it. But then we have a third thought. We remember that Dan's wife just left him and took the kids. Dan has all the food he needs; he has a mountain of firewood to keep warm. But he doesn't have the hugs

anymore, does he? If we listen carefully, we might notice that Dan's music has a beat that is the same as ours. That's enough to dance to, isn't it? The *Tao Te Ching* says, "If you want to get rid of something, you must first allow it to flourish." So, let's go next door and dance with Dan all through the night, and when the sun rises, let's cook what little sausage we have over his fire and share it with him. Who knows, maybe now Dan will keep his dog off our lawn.

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