

Trying times

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Festival of tides

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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2025

## Hope and despair



Palestinians crowd a makeshift market ahead of the holy month of Ramadan in Gaza city on Wednesday. On Thursday, Hamas returned the bodies of four Israeli hostages as part of the first phase of the ceasefire deal. Earlier, Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar said that talks would begin this week on the second phase of the ceasefire. MAJDI FATHI / NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

## China a major player in auto business

By now, people are aware of the significant progress the Chinese automotive industry has made over the last decade or so. In 2024, China became the world's largest automotive market, with over 31.4 million units sold, accounting for 34.7 percent of global sales. It is also the largest export base, with 6.41 million units exported in 2024. China has been at the forefront of the new energy vehicle revolution, leveraging electrification and digital technology to lead the world in intelligent, connected electric vehicles. By the end of 2024, EVs accounted for over 40 percent of its new vehicle sales, and this trend continues to grow. Chinese automakers have expanded rapidly, competing with each other and international brands. Today, a plethora of Chinese brands have become prominent not only in the Chinese market but also overseas. BYD, once known as a maker of cheap cars, has become a dominant EV company within only 15 or 20 years. Others such as Geely, Li Auto, XPeng and Nio are also coming up strongly. Tesla, which built its Shanghai gigafactory in 2019, remains active in China. However, most foreign brands have struggled. Once dominant in China's auto market, they have failed to keep pace in the intelligent, connected EV era. Some claim that the Chinese government favors local players, making it harder for foreign original equipment manufacturers, or OEMs. Some even say foreign play-

### WORLD WATCH

By Edward Tse

ers can't get a "Chinese passport", implying that somehow foreign players are disadvantaged because of some man-made reasons. But is it? Before the intelligent, connected EV revolution, foreign OEMs competed in China much like the way they did elsewhere. This is notwithstanding that in China they needed to compete through their joint ventures with local partners, but in most cases, the joint venture vehicles were branded under international brands. While many were focusing on competition in the old game, they had not paid enough attention to what was going on outside their sphere of comfort. In 2014, I met with the most senior figure of a major foreign OEM in China. While he was interested in knowing more about the Chinese government's subsidy on EVs, he had little idea about the upcoming impact of digital technology and by implication, software, on vehicles. And even with EVs, it was pretty clear to me that he wasn't totally convinced of its future potential in China. Foreign OEMs can now run their operations on a wholly-owned basis. However, many have chosen to form new partnerships with Chinese players who would bring spe-

cific capabilities to bear. In July 2023, Volkswagen invested \$700 million for a 4.99 percent stake in XPeng to codevelop two Volkswagen-branded midsize EVs based on XPeng's G9 platform, targeting a 2026 launch in China. Similarly, in 2021, General Motors invested \$300 million in Momena, a Chinese autonomous driving technology company. The partnership aims to accelerate the creation of intelligent mobility solutions tailored to the Chinese market. These new partnerships highlight foreign OEMs' growing reliance on Chinese players for EV technology and supply chain capabilities. Beyond the local market, these partnerships are becoming increasingly international in scope. As battery tech, software, sensors and artificial intelligence become central to the industry, traditional OEMs and suppliers face a steep learning curve. Some foreign OEMs have exited or downsized in China. But some have also chosen to return after a short absence. Renault Group left China's passenger car market in 2020 but re-entered in 2023 via imports. In 2024, it established a development center for EVs in Shanghai. By January, Renault had formed partnerships with local players Geely, Dongfeng Motor, CATL, Minth Group and WeRide to codevelop battery tech, hybrid vehicles, lightweight materials and autonomous driving.

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## Key sectors to further attract foreign capital

Action plan and new industry catalog to expand market access, boost innovation-driven growth

By ZHONG NAN  
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China encourages foreign businesses to expand investment in sectors including advanced manufacturing, modern services, high-tech industries and energy conservation, further advancing its economic openness and innovation-driven growth, government officials said on Thursday.

Speaking at a news conference in Beijing, they said that China will soon introduce the 2025 edition of its industry catalog encouraging foreign investment. The new catalog will further expand market access for foreign investors in key industrial sectors.

Their remarks came after the State Council, China's Cabinet, issued an action plan on Wednesday aimed at stabilizing foreign investment this year.

As part of the plan, China will lift restrictions on domestic loans for foreign-invested businesses, allowing them to use domestic financing for equity investments. It will also support pilot regions in implementing opening-up policies related to

areas such as telecommunications, biotechnology and foreign-owned hospitals.

Hua Zhong, head of the department of foreign capital and overseas investment at the National Development and Reform Commission, said the new catalog will reflect China's economic growth trends and industrial advancements.

"We will collaborate with other government branches to align with high-standard international economic and trade rules in key areas, including intellectual property protection, industrial subsidies, labor rights and government procurement, ensuring compatibility in regulations, management and standards," Hua said.

Wang Xiaohong, a researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing, said the new catalog is expected to further attract capital into emerging industries, reinforcing China's position as a global hub for high-tech and green development.

Yao Jun, director of the department of planning at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said the government will actively support entrepreneurs and investors from all

countries in innovating and starting businesses in China, encouraging foreign companies to establish research and development centers and collaborate with domestic enterprises.

China will promote foreign participation in digital development, green transition and smart manufacturing, and facilitate localization of advanced technologies, Yao added.

Foreign-invested businesses in China play a significant role in the economy, contributing one-seventh of tax revenue, about one-third of foreign trade and half of electromechanical and high-tech product exports, as well as creating nearly 7 percent of employment opportunities, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce.

To date, foreign investment in China spans 20 industrial categories and 115 major sectors. In the manufacturing sector alone, foreign capital is present in 31 major categories and 548 subcategories.

To further enhance national treatment for foreign-invested enterprises, Ling Ji, vice-minister of commerce and deputy China international trade representative, said China is revising its Government Procurement Law and exploring specific standards for "domestic production" by foreign companies in this area.

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## RETAIL REPTILES SHED NEGATIVE IMAGE IN YEAR OF THE SNAKE

Cold-blooded creatures grow in popularity as pets while understanding improves

By YANG FEIYUE  
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### In-depth

Whenever Fu Jiajun returns home from college, the first place she rushes to is her balcony, where she's greeted by her growing family of reptile companions. A large white lizard lies lazily in a white container, while nearby a digitally controlled cabinet houses a range of creatures. Snakes, lizards and turtles all coexist in a temperature-controlled environment. "I just love to spend time observing them," said Fu, a college junior, who

was born and raised in Shanghai. Playing with her reptile friends was a daily routine during the recent Spring Festival holiday. Fu's fascination with exotic pets began when she stumbled upon an ad for a leopard gecko in an online pet enthusiasts' group during her freshman year in 2022.

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## PAGE TWO



Insects such as an orchid mantis (below left), rodents such as degus (left) and lizards (a blue iguana, at right) are among popular pet choices.

LIU CHEN / CHINA DAILY

ZHAO YANTING / FOR CHINA DAILY; CHEN YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



## Pets: Exploring fascination with exotic creatures

From page 1

"It looked cute, and the price was right — just 200 yuan (\$27.40). I couldn't resist, so I brought it to my apartment and then introduced it to our college's pet club," she recalled with a smile.

Fu quickly realized how soothing it was to unwind by simply watching her new pet or holding it in her hands. "It's quiet and needs very little maintenance. All I have to do is make sure it has enough food and water, and the right temperature," she explained.

What started with one gecko soon grew into a menagerie of exotic creatures, thanks to pet shops, markets and online channels. "It's easy to get hooked," Fu said.

The biggest expenses are the enclosures and heating equipment, which cost around 700 yuan, she said. "The feed costs about 20 yuan a month," she said, adding that it's an affordable hobby.

Fu also has a cat and a dog, but she finds that the reptiles fulfill a different need.

"They're not noisy like traditional pets. I don't have to clean up after them every day. Unlike dogs or cats, these reptiles require very little space and are calm and easygoing, making them perfect companions for a busy lifestyle," she said.

She feels a deep sense of accomplishment watching her reptiles eat, shed their skin and grow under her care.

### Breeds apart

Urbanization and small living spaces, along with the availability of exotic animals through imports and breeding, have sparked a growing interest in raising unique and rare animals in China, experts said.

The number of people keeping exotic pets continued to rise in 2024, according to a recent paper on the country's pet industry released by the pet industry data platform petdata.cn.

The report predicted that by 2026 the market for exotic pets in China will reach 7.68 billion yuan, with a compound annual growth rate of 19.8 percent for reptiles.

Turtles, snakes and geckos are the most commonly kept reptiles, with snakes accounting for 51.6 percent of the total. With the arrival of the Year of the Snake, many exotic pet owners have turned their attention to the reptiles, with choices ranging from elegant black kingsnakes to colorful and compact corn snakes.

At the Chaojiniaojia "Super Bird Bureau", a pet shop that sells and offers interactions with birds and reptiles in Shanghai, many parents brought their children to see the creatures at close quarters during the recent holiday.

The shop prepared about five snake species to display daily during the vacation period, and sold about 10 snakes every day, said Lu Jin, an employee.

Lu has noticed that parents are becoming more open-minded about their children keeping exotic pets. More children are also developing a keen interest in these animals and are braver than their parents when it comes to handling them, Lu added.

Zhao Hengjie, deputy secretary-general of the pet culture committee of the China Culture Administration Association, said strong demand for pet snakes is closely associated with the Year of the Snake, coupled with the ease and low cost of caring for them, which make them well-suited for a fast-paced city lifestyle.

Bi Yungang is an experienced snake seller in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. He said he sold more than 100 snakes in January. "Snake sales have been steadily growing, and the sales in 2024 were three times those of 2023," he said, adding that new reptiles for sale and price reductions on old ones had attracted previously hesitant buyers.

Bi, 28, said he has been fascinated by insects and reptiles since primary school,



A lizard accompanies its owner to a pet exhibition in Lanzhou, Gansu province, on Oct 20. JIGME TENZIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Left: A boy plays with a corn snake at the Space Lizardman Reptile Club in Beijing in October. LIU CHEN / CHINA DAILY



Right top: A child takes care of his pet Brazilian sliders in Beijing. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY



Right above: A cat observes a gecko at a resident's home in Beijing. TAO CHONGLAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

when one of his biggest passions was watching animal documentaries.

After settling in Guangzhou at the end of 2019, Bi came across a reptile pet store, which started his journey in keeping various reptiles.

What began with one or two reptiles soon grew to hundreds. Eventually, he started breeding them and entered the reptile pet sales business, and in 2023 he set up his own brand, JTG Reptile Little House.

After years of acquiring knowledge, and breeding and selling different reptiles, he ultimately decided to focus on pet snakes. "Just as many people fear snakes, many others are deeply fascinated by them. It is precisely because of the myths surrounding them and the innate fear humans have that once people truly understand their gentle and endearing nature, the stark contrast becomes irresistible," Bi said of their growing popularity.

### Urban menagerie

Zhao Yanting, a Shanghai native in her 30s, opens her two-story apartment to students every week to share her passion for exotic pets.

She has over 50 lizards along with an extensive collection of more than 100 other species including bird-eating spiders, scorpions and centipedes.

To manage this growing menagerie, she has recruited young enthusiasts who regularly assist with feeding, breeding and packing the pets for shipment.

She fell into the world of exotic pets shortly after graduating in 2012, when a friend gifted her a bird-eating spider.

"I was never afraid of it. Instead, I found watching it go about its business — building its habitat, adapting to its environment — surprisingly fascinating. Creating the right conditions for it became a great source of distraction and fulfillment," she recalled.

As time passed, she realized that caring for the spider gave her a deeper connection with nature, inspiring her to expand her collection and increase her knowledge of reptile habits as well.

"Their care routine is relatively simple — feeding and maintenance are needed only once or twice a week. The biggest advantage

of keeping exotic pets is their convenience and low upkeep costs," Zhao explained.

"As long as their environment is properly maintained, minimal intervention is needed."

In 2017, she married a man who specializes in breeding bird-eating spiders. Zhao then began breeding and selling pet reptiles through Taobao, a major online marketplace.

She believes that successfully breeding a reptile in captivity is the highest reward for a pet owner. "If it can reproduce in front of you, it means it has fully adapted to its environment — you've done everything right," she said.

Her online shop handles around 3,000 orders annually. "Most of my customers are students, and I can tell they truly love animals," she said, adding that she has witnessed a growing interest in exotic pets.

As pet ownership rises in China, Zhao believes more people will come to appreciate the unique charm of reptiles and arachnids. "Those who love cats and dogs are

very likely to love exotic pet — once they get to know them better," she said.

Zhao has also created several documentaries about reptiles to challenge common misconceptions. Her efforts have earned her a strong following, with more than 100,000 subscribers across social media platforms like Bilibili and Xiaohongshu.

Bi has also witnessed firsthand the rapid growth of the reptile pet industry.

Over time, he has built a close-knit network with breeders, agents and sellers. Together, they actively promote one another's products and coordinate supply to meet market demand. "Overall, the reptile pet industry is experiencing strong, positive growth, with demand consistently outpacing supply," Bi said.

He added that while keeping reptiles was once considered an unconventional hobby, society's perceptions have shifted. More people now recognize the special charm and companionship that reptiles can offer.

### Juvenile attractions

The consumer demographic is also evolving, with an increasing number of younger reptile pet owners. Students and college graduates are driving this trend, Bi said.

"Today's younger generation values personal experiences, and reptiles provide a fascinating connection to nature. They satisfy human curiosity for the wild while also offering emotional support," he said.

Bi has also noticed a growing number of investors turning their passion for reptiles into a side business.

He hopes for greater public understanding of his industry, believing that increased awareness can foster a deeper appreciation for both flora and fauna, ultimately contributing to wildlife conservation.

However, experts cautioned that consumers should find out whether the trade of a particular exotic pet is permitted, and avoid impulse purchases. This will help ensure that pets are not later abandoned.

Relevant authorities should strengthen management of where the animals are sourced, enhance quarantine supervision and law enforcement, and publicly disclose and regularly update the list of prohibited exotic pet species, they said.

In addition, an owner should be fully aware of the correct methods of caring for an exotic pet before taking it home.

Sun Quanhui, a senior scientific adviser with World Animal Protection, said once a decision is made to keep a pet, the owner must treat the animal well and respect its life. They should also be fully prepared to take on the responsibility of pet ownership, and never carelessly abandon a pet, as ecological problems might arise, such as species invasion.

Under Fu's influence, her parents — especially her mother, who once recoiled at the thought of reptiles — have gradually warmed to the cold-blooded creatures.

"Now, she's even started keeping her own pet geckos!" Fu said with a laugh.

"It's all about changing misconceptions. Many people fear exotic animals simply because they've never had the chance to interact with them," she said.

Fu has noticed a growing community of young people who are as fascinated as she is by these creatures. "I've made friends I can share knowledge and exchange tips with, and even visit pet markets with to discover new species," she added.

Fu plans to expand her "reptile circle" once she's financially independent.

"I've already got my eye on a blue-tongued skink. They cost around 3,000 to 4,000 yuan, are bigger, and have a more stable temperament. I imagine they'd be a fantastic addition to my collection," she said.

## TOP NEWS

## Europe urged to improve ties with China

Nation is willing to work with Europeans to deepen mutually beneficial cooperations

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
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European countries should wake up and improve their relations with China, in order to tap huge win-win opportunities, instead of blindly following the United States' foreign policy as in the past years, according to leading international scholars and former diplomats.

Jeffrey Sachs, a renowned economist and a professor at Columbia University, said the China-Europe relationship is extremely important and can be hugely beneficial to both sides.

"Europe needs to wake up, and not have only a US foreign policy but have Europe's own foreign policy," he told China Daily in Brussels on Wednesday.

"I am hoping that the arrival of the (Donald) Trump administration would give Europe the realization: We need an independent, respectful foreign policy, and that would mean good relations with China — trade, investment, partnership of (Global Gateway and) the Belt and Road Initiative.

"All of these will be a huge win-win," said Sachs, who has served as a special adviser to several United Nations secretaries-general.

Sachs' words echoed Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who said at the Munich Security Conference on Feb 14 that "China is willing to synergize high-quality Belt and Road cooperation with the European Union's Global Gateway strategy, so as to empower each other and empower the entire world."

"China has always seen Europe as an important pole in the multipolar world. The two sides are partners, not rivals," Wang said.

Noting that this year marks the 50th anniversary of China-EU diplomatic relations, Wang said that China is willing to work with Europe to deepen strategic communication and mutually beneficial cooperation, and steer the world to a bright future of peace, security, prosperity and progress.

Kishore Mahbubani, a distinguished fellow at the National University of Singapore's Asia Research Institute, also criticized Europe for mimicking the US' hostile policy toward China.

"What geopolitical pressures have caused the downturn in EU-China relations? The Europeans foolishly believed that a slavish loyalty to American geopolitical priorities would lead to rich geopolitical dividends for them. Instead, they have been kicked in the face," he wrote in Foreign Policy magazine on Feb 18, referring to the drastically deteriorating relations between the US and the EU in the past weeks over the Ukraine crisis and potential trade wars.

Mahbubani, who once served as Singapore's permanent representative to the UN and president of the UN Security Council, said that China can help the EU deal with its real

... the Europeans are shooting themselves in the foot by criticizing and opposing China's investment in Africa. Just this one act demonstrates how naive long-term European strategic thinking has become."

**Kishore Mahbubani**, former Singapore's permanent representative to the UN and president of the UN Security Council

long-term geopolitical nightmare given the demographic explosions in Africa.

He argued that a surge of African migrants into Europe would produce Trump-type leaders in Europe.

Mahbubani said that Europeans should welcome any foreign investment in Africa that creates jobs and keeps Africans at home.

"Instead, the Europeans are shooting themselves in the foot by criticizing and opposing China's investment in Africa. Just this one act demonstrates how naive long-term European strategic thinking has become," he wrote. "Brussels is sacrificing its own strategic interests to serve American interests in the hope that geopolitical subservience would lead to rewards."

Ding Chun, director of the Centre for European Studies at Fudan University, said that given Trump's unilateralism and the withdrawal of the US from international organizations and treaties, the EU and China have more common ground on upholding multilateralism and World Trade Organization rules and fighting climate change.

"The EU and China could ease their tensions in trade and investment," Ding said. But he added that a fundamental change for the EU by abandoning its de-risking strategy might not happen.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's message on China at the annual EU Ambassadors Conference in Brussels on Feb 4 was much less hostile than before.

"This will be an intense year in our relationship with China, as we mark half a century of diplomatic relations," she said.

"I think we can find agreements that could even expand our trade and investment ties," she added.



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## Water world



An aerial photo shows residential buildings surrounded by floodwaters on Wednesday after heavy rains overnight in Karak, Malaysia's Pahang state. MOHD RASFAN / AFP



## Special visitor

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach signs tickets on Thursday during his visit to the Beijing Olympic Museum in the Chinese capital. Bach hailed China's contribution to the Olympic Movement, citing the rich legacy of the two Games in the city. WEI YAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Protests over Fukushima discharge go on as locals ask for transparency

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo  
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The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency wrapped up a three-day visit to Japan on Thursday, during which he inspected the stricken Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, even as ordinary Japanese citizens continued to voice their protests against the release of nuclear-contaminated water from the plant into the ocean.

Members of Japanese civic groups have urged the Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, to be fully transparent in disclosing information about the discharge. They also called on the Japanese government to evaluate the long-term impact of the discharge and emphasized the importance of global cooperation in data collection, pushing for the involvement of third-party organizations and international scientists in monitoring the process.

During his visit, IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi inspected an interim storage site in Fukushima Prefecture, where soil contaminated by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster is being held. Around 13 million cubic metres of soil — enough to fill 10 stadiums — was scraped from the region to remove harmful radiation. Around 300,000 cubic metres of ash from incinerated organic material is also being stored.

Experts from the IAEA and countries including China and South Korea also collected seawater and fish samples from Fukushima on Wednesday.

Speaking at a news conference at the Japanese National Press

Club in Tokyo on Thursday, Grossi expressed appreciation for the participation of Chinese experts in monitoring the ocean discharge.

"I'm very satisfied and also grateful for the Chinese understanding and the participation of their experts," said Grossi. "I hope that we continue in this collaborative way," he added.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jakun said on Thursday that China sent its experts during Grossi's visit.

"This is a concrete step for Japan to fulfill its commitment on the issue of discharge of nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima power plant," Guo said, adding that the international monitoring of the discharge and China's independent sample monitoring will continue in the future.

Grossi acknowledged that China and other nations have continued to express concern over the monitoring system for the ocean discharge and have shown desire to play a more active role. In response, and in consultation with Japan, he proposed expanding opportunities within the IAEA's established framework. This would allow experts from China and other interested countries — particularly those which hosts laboratories that regularly collaborate with the IAEA — to participate, collect their own samples, send them to their home countries, and conduct independent evaluations.

Despite these efforts, skepticism remains regarding the reliability of the monitoring process and the transparency of information disclosed within the IAEA's system.

Takae Miyaguchi, a 73-year-old Tokyo resident, called on TEPCO

to ensure full transparency in disclosing information. She also urged the Japanese government to thoroughly assess the long-term impacts of the release.

"Various stakeholders and independent institutions should be involved in monitoring the discharge of contaminated water," she said.

Ukeru Magosaki, director of the East Asian Community Institute, emphasized the importance of gathering comprehensive and objective data on the release of radioactive water. He urged the Japanese government to actively support global collaboration in data collection. He also underscored the necessity of involving independent third parties and international scientists in the process.

Kenichi Oshima, chairperson of the Citizens' Commission on Nuclear Energy, advocated for an independent organization to oversee the monitoring process. He also proposed the creation of a framework that allows local residents in Japan to participate in the oversight.

Ruiko Mutoh, a representative of the Complainants for Criminal Prosecution of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster, emphasized that the release proceeded despite strong opposition from many citizens. She highlighted that concerns were voiced not only by China and South Korea but also by Pacific island nations and residents on the West Coast of the United States.

She said the released water contains not only tritium but also various radioactive substances from the nuclear accident, expressing doubt that its safety can be fully confirmed at this stage.

## Investment: Corporations evolve their plans to stay competitive

From page 1

Despite rising geopolitical tensions and the growing trend of unilateralism and protectionism, Ling emphasized that China's vast market, highly efficient industrial and supply chains, and continuously evolving innovation ecosystem provide a strong foundation and fertile ground for multinational companies to invest and expand in the country.

Noting that the United States' tariff hikes disrupt normal China-US economic and trade cooperation and fail to address its own challenges, Zhu Bing, director of the Commerce Ministry's department of foreign investment administration, said that such measures not only harm foreign-invested enterprises in China, including US companies, but also erode multinational corporations' investment confidence and decision-making abilities.

"While some foreign, labor-intensive businesses are adjusting their global footprint and reallocating production capacity based on their strategic priorities and comparative advantages, many multinational corporations are evolving their investment strategies to stay competitive in China," Zhu said.

## 220 billion yuan

foreign investment was actually used in the manufacturing sector in 2024, according to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology

Several foreign companies have expanded production lines for high-tech products, including high-end displays and new energy batteries, signaling a shift toward advanced manufacturing. Others have increased investment in their research and development centers in China, further upgrading their innovation capabilities.

For example, Panasonic Holdings Corp of Japan will start construction of a factory in Shanghai in July to produce semiconductor packaging materials, with an investment of 120 million yuan (\$16.5 million).

"China's well-developed supply chain, supportive policies, abundant R&D talent, continuously advancing innovation ecosystem and vast market potential make it an attractive destination for multinational companies," said Tetsuro Homma, executive vice-president of Panasonic.

Data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology shows that China saw actual use of foreign investment in the manufacturing sector exceed 220 billion yuan in 2024, after it removed all market access restrictions for foreign investors in the sector last year.

## Tech: Automakers should adjust strategy

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Similarly, Stellantis initially scaled back its China operations in 2021 but re-entered in 2023, investing 1.5 billion euros (\$1.57 billion) for about a 21 percent stake in Leapmotor, a local EV player. It also formed a joint venture to expand Leapmotor's EVs internationally, with Stellantis holding a 51 percent stake.

Some foreign OEMs will continue to build new capabilities to compete in the new game. While some attempts were made to develop new capabilities independently, some will also supplement what they can't fill by themselves by forming new relationships with partners, often Chinese, who can bring the needed capabilities.

Some are making new investments to remain competitive. BMW established its largest research and development network in China outside Germany with R&D centers in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang in Liaoning province, and Nanjing in Jiangsu

province. Volkswagen launched a dedicated facility in Hefei, Anhui province, focusing on research, innovation and procurement of intelligent connected EVs. In February, Toyota announced a wholly-owned Shanghai subsidiary for Lexus EV R&D and production, set to begin operations in 2027.

Can foreign OEMs succeed? It depends on their ability to acquire new capabilities in the new environment both in China and beyond. While that's challenging, it is not impossible.

As China becomes an automotive innovation epicenter, foreign players increasingly realize they cannot afford to leave. Without access to China's technological advancements, they risk falling behind in competition in their home market and internationally.

Ford CEO Jim Farley admits he needs to get the company "fully fit" to compete with Chinese automakers. That means staying in China in order to stay smart and informed. In February, he endorsed Li Auto's range-extender technology, revealing

Ford's plans to develop range-extended SUVs and pickups.

For many foreign automakers, their China strategy will continue to center on "how to do business in China" because of the importance of the Chinese market. But that's not necessarily the case for every foreign OEM.

However, China's influence is becoming widespread in terms of geography, technology, supply chain and business model. So for all global auto players, their China strategy will be about "how to do business with China".

So is China an existential threat to foreign automakers? If you think it is, it could be. However, if you think it can be a source of knowledge and capabilities, then it is not. Often, one's destiny is decided by one's mind.

The author is founder and CEO of Gao Feng Advisory Company, a strategy and management consulting firm with roots in China. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

# Guidelines to tackle crimes involving kids

Top prosecutors to work together to curb illegal behavior, protect juveniles

By CUI JIA  
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China's top prosecutors will collaborate with relevant departments this year to develop guidelines for handling the approval and prosecution of cases involving serious violent crimes committed by minors, officials from the Supreme People's Procuratorate said.

Deputy Procurator-General Gong Ming said at a news conference on Thursday that the SPP and other departments will also research and formulate guidelines this year on strengthening tiered intervention and correction for criminal and wrongful behavior exhibited by minors. China has long upheld the principle of "education first, punishment second" in handling juvenile offenses.

Juvenile crime came under intense scrutiny last year after two teenage boys were convicted of killing their classmate for money in Handan, Hebei province. One of the boys was sentenced to life in prison, and the other to 12 years. The offenders and the victim were all 13 when the crime occurred in March. Meanwhile, procuratorial authorities intensified efforts last year to crack down on adults who coerce, lure or instigate minors to engage in criminal activities, said Xian Jie, head of the SPP's office for minors' affairs.

The SPP has also ensured that those who commit serious crimes against minors — including violent assault, rape, sexual assault, abduction and trafficking — will be severely punished in accordance with the law, Xian said.

Procuratorial authorities approved the arrest of suspects in more than 43,000 cases involving crimes against minors and prosecuted over 55,000 such cases in 2024, Gong said.

From January to November 2024,

prosecutors sent specialists to intervene in investigations of more than 21,000 major and complex cases involving minors. They also supervised the filing of cases involving crimes against minors for nearly 1,900 individuals and rectified missed arrests for almost 900, Xian said.

Additionally, 400 protests were lodged against court rulings in cases where adults committed crimes against minors in the first 11 months of 2024, she said.

Procuratorial authorities have also actively engaged in public interest litigation to protect minors and safeguard their rights.

"The procuratorial organs take a problem-oriented approach, focusing on issues such as food safety around school campuses, minors' personal information security and internet cafes admitting minors — concerns strongly reflected by the public," Xian said.

Prosecutors have also emphasized protecting the rights of juvenile offenders and ensuring they are not discriminated against when seeking education and employment.

In one case disclosed at the news conference, a man surnamed Yu, who was sentenced to two years in prison with a three-year reprieve in 2012 for robbery at age 16, struggled to find a job because his criminal record was improperly disclosed to employers. Under Chinese law, juvenile criminal records should not be accessible to the public.

On June 17, 2024, Yu applied to the procuratorial authority of Chang'an district in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, to review his case. After an investigation, prosecutors found that local public security departments had failed to seal his criminal record. Authorities then ordered the departments to correct the mistake. Yu received a certificate of no criminal record on July 5 and later found employment.

## Target protein could slow progression of Parkinson's

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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Researchers at Shanghai Huashan Hospital have identified a novel therapeutic target that could lead to the world's first treatment to slow the progression of Parkinson's disease.

The discovery, published on Friday in the journal *Science*, centers on a protein called FAM171A2, which the researchers found plays a crucial role in the spread of pathological alpha-synuclein, a key protein involved in Parkinson's disease.

The team, led by Yu Jintai, conducted five years of clinical and basic research, including genome-wide association analysis of large-scale populations. They determined that FAM171A2 acts as an "intelligent recognition gate" on neuronal cell membranes, selectively binding to and inducing misfolding of pathological alpha-synuclein, ultimately leading to neuronal death.

Building on this discovery, the researchers used artificial intelligence to screen over 7,000 compounds and identified a molecule called Bemcentinib that effectively inhibits the binding of FAM171A2 to alpha-synuclein.

"Our study findings provide hope to block the spread of pathological alpha-synuclein and thus delay the progression of the disease by inhibiting the target FAM171A2 from the preclinical to clinical stage of the disease," Yu said.

Parkinson's disease, the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's, affects millions worldwide. Current treatments focus on managing symptoms, such as tremors and muscle rigidity, but do not address the underlying disease progression.

The global prevalence of Parkinson's disease is projected to increase from around 7 million in 2015 to 13 million by 2040, with China accounting for approximately half the total number of patients worldwide.

Experts reviewing the study called the discovery a significant advancement, offering a promising therapeutic approach to block the spread of the pathology and post-poned disease progression.

"This novel approach may complement existing treatments, such as using medications to replenish dopamine levels, and therefore improve motor ability in the clinical stage of the disease, and use deep brain stimulation later, paving the way for a more comprehensive treatment paradigm for Parkinson's disease," Yu said.

The research team has applied for an international patent for treating Parkinson's disease by targeting FAM171A2. They plan to focus on preclinical development of small molecule drugs, antibodies and gene therapy approaches over the next few years.

"Our first step is to expand the search for a possibly more efficient medicine to over 30,000 small molecule compounds. In the long run, we aim to advance such findings into clinical trials and applications," Yu said.

Researchers said that before this study, there were no functional experimental studies on the target protein.

"So further understanding of the physiological and pathological functions of this protein in the nervous system may also offer new therapeutic targets for other alpha-synuclein diseases, as well as neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia," Yu said.

## Parade for prosperity



Huge crowds fill the street to participate in an annual folk activity in Shantou, Guangdong province, on Wednesday, praying for a bountiful harvest and prosperity while promoting the spirit of unity, adventure and courage. During the celebration, some villagers were selected to hold incense and guard the deity statue in a special palanquin, parading it to a designated location while others engaged in a chaotic tussle of grabbing and pulling, vying to drag the deity off the palanquin.

CHEN CHUHONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Shanghai makes strides in offering quality early childhood education

By ZHENG ZHENG in Shanghai  
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Shanghai has made progress in expanding access to public and inclusive preschool education while raising quality standards, according to the recently released 2024 Blue Book on High-quality Kindergarten Development in Shanghai.

The report, unveiled on Tuesday, highlights significant advancements in the city's early education landscape. By the end of 2024, public kindergartens in Shanghai accounted for 84.3 percent of total enrollment, a 4 percentage point increase from the previous year. Coverage of inclusive kindergartens also improved, reaching 94.1 percent, up by 1 percentage point.

Indicators of educational quality showed positive trends, with professionally trained teachers making up 99.3 percent of the workforce. Additionally, 98.3 percent of kindergarten classes met standard size requirements, reflecting a commitment to optimal learning environments.

To further improve early childhood education, Shanghai added 5,155 new public nursery class positions and 9,034 community child care slots last year, achieving nearly full coverage of community-based nursery services across the city. The city's child-development-first approach was also evident in the completion of 494 space renovation projects aimed at enhancing outdoor activity areas in kindergartens.

Shanghai has also established 105 kindergarten groups and 39 school districts, allowing for the flexible deployment of more than 2,100 educational personnel to ensure a more balanced distribution of resources.

"These statistics reflect Shanghai's focus on improving the quality of early education while strengthening infrastructure," said Xu Shiqiang, director of the General Education Department of the Shanghai Academy of Educational Sciences, in an interview with Shanghai Education TV Station.

In addition to ensuring favora-

“These statistics reflect Shanghai's focus on improving the quality of early education while strengthening infrastructure.”

Xu Shiqiang, director of the General Education Department of the Shanghai Academy of Educational Sciences

ble admission conditions, the city aims to enhance the quality of child care and education, Xu said.

While Shanghai's initiatives have led to a 15 percent increase in outdoor activity time for children in kindergartens, a recent study indicates that further improvements are needed in the promotion of physical activity levels outside school hours. Despite preschoolers averaging 99 minutes of outdoor activity during school hours, after-school physical activity falls below recommended levels, with only a portion meeting national standards.

On average, Shanghai's preschoolers engaged in 51.5 minutes of after-school physical activity on weekdays and 121.2 minutes on weekends. These figures fall short of World Health Organization guidelines, which recommend at

least 180 minutes of daily physical activity for preschool children, including 60 minutes of moderate to high-intensity exercise. Chinese national guidelines similarly suggest 180 minutes of cumulative daily physical activity, with at least 60 minutes at moderate or higher intensity and 120 minutes of outdoor activity.

Physical activity includes leisure activities, sports and various forms of exercise, explained Jiang Fan, publisher of the study and deputy Party secretary at Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

"Our data shows considerable room for improvement," Jiang said.

In response to these findings, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission plans to implement digital tracking systems to monitor outdoor activities in kindergartens, emphasizing the importance of physical activity alongside regular health checkups.

Parents such as Zhang, whose child attends a kindergarten with good outdoor facilities and strong safety measures, praised the city's efforts in promoting physical well-being among children through structured outdoor activities and monitoring systems.

"In my kid's kindergarten, two hours of outdoor activities are guaranteed daily during school hours," Zhang said.

For overweight and physically weak children, real-time monitoring bracelets allow teachers to track vital signs, she added.



Children engage in outdoor activities at a kindergarten in Shanghai's Putuo district on Dec 24. TAO LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Insomnia, depression treatment a click away

By LU WANQING in Hong Kong  
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A digital-based therapy using a mobile application with recording and analytic functions can relieve symptoms of insomnia and depression among people age 15 to 25, according to a team of scientists from the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong.

Researchers from the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Medicine and Peking University Sixth Hospital hope the innovative app-based therapy will appeal to young people who are at high risk for depression but less receptive to traditional treatments.

The insight comes amid growing concerns over mental health issues among young people. According to the World Health Organization's Global Burden of Disease 2021, 3.5 percent of people age 15 to 19 experience depression. Mental health research by CUHK in 2023 found that 3.9 to 5.2 percent of young Hong Kong residents suffered from depression.

At a news conference on Thursday, scientists involved in the project revealed the results of clinical research on a "digitalized intervention application" offering cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia. Traditional CBT-I treatment involves six to eight face-to-face sessions with a trained provider who examines, identifies and re-frames thoughts, feelings and behaviors related to poor sleep.

The joint research, conducted by CUHK and PKU, recruited 708 people from 15 to 25 years old from the mainland and Hong Kong, all of whom had insomnia with symptoms of subclinical depression. Half of them received a six-week digital CBT-I treatment via a phone app, while the other half received general health education.

The digital CBT-I program used in the study presented participants with courses and matched practices over six weekly stages, aligning with conventional CBT-I treatment. It covered areas such as sleep restriction, stimulus control, cognitive restructuring and relapse prevention, said Chen Si-jing, a postdoctoral fellow at CUHK's Faculty of Medicine and first author of the research.

The insomnia remission rate for those who received digital-based therapy was 60 percent, according to a one-year follow-up. The rate of depression incidence was about 10 percent, significantly lower than the 18 percent in the control group, the researchers said.

Eighty-four percent of those in the e-CBT-I treatment group completed all the sessions, showing strong motivation among young people to address insomnia — a problem that can significantly increase the risk of depression, Chen added.

The promising results have been published in international medical journals, aiming to pave the way for developing digital self-help treatments that are more readily embraced by the digital native generation, a term referring to people born after 1979.

"These findings highlight the importance of developing digital mental health therapeutics to meet significant clinical demand," said Wing Yun-kwok, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at CUHK Faculty of Medicine.

CBT-I has long been recognized as an effective therapy for adults, and the research unveils its potential for younger people, said Lu Lin, academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and president of Peking University Sixth Hospital. But Liu added that there are barriers that need to be removed.

"For instance, a community-based study indicates that the help-seeking rate of young insomnia patients on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong is as low as 10 percent," Lu said. "CBT-I is typically conducted by medical professionals throughout, making it a time-consuming and costly process that limits its accessibility for youths."

Wing expressed optimism about further exploration of innovative treatments for insomnia and depression, aiming to advance personalized prevention and early intervention for young people.

## WORLD

## Pianist Li Jian dazzles in Carnegie Hall return

By BELINDA ROBINSON  
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Li Jian returned to Carnegie Hall for an incredible evening of music in which he played Mozart, Debussy and Schubert.

The acclaimed Chinese American pianist and conductor also was honored for his contributions to classical music and global cultural exchange.

The concert in New York City on Tuesday, titled a "Night of Cultural Splendor," was held in Zankel Hall and was sponsored by the Gong Family Foundation and the US-China Cultural Foundation.

Elizabeth B. Wang, co-founder and president of the US-China Cultural Foundation thanked sponsors ahead of the concert.

Cosponsor Tim Gong, chairman of the Gong Family Foundation, described Li as his "dear friend" and an artist "whose dedication and passion for music have inspired audiences worldwide."

In recognition of his artistry, Li was honored with the US-China Cultural Foundation's Global Cultural Excellence Award, presented by Gong, Wang and Jun Wei, director of the foundation.

On behalf of New York City, John Catsimatidis, businessman and chairman of the Red Apple Group, shared a letter of congratulations from Mayor Eric Adams, who wrote that Li had "enriched the classical music sector for decades."

The mayor added that "the universal language of music crosses cultures and borders, uniting people of all backgrounds, including members of our thriving Asian American community."

"I'm especially touched that Mayor Eric Adams made this very generous, friendly gesture and gave me this recognition," Li told China Daily. "It's going to stay with me for the rest of my life."

Li performed Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Rondo in A Minor, K. 511*; Claude Debussy's *Images, Books I and II* and Franz Schubert's *Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 959*.

Li paid homage to his upbringing in China and his family for being a guiding light.

"My parents are both musicians; my father just passed away just a few months ago. They always asked me to tell the truth, try to be open to myself and to other people to be friendly and to help others, so that's stayed with me," he said.

"In the music, I try to tell them what I think is important, what is the dramatic part. So, you do a lot of things. It's not a show. For me, I have to be totally convinced myself that it's something that's worthwhile. Then I try to project it to the public. So that has a lot to do with my upbringing," he said.

Li may have taken to the stage solo, but his talent soon filled the hall as though there was an entire

orchestra. His beautiful, delicate rendition sent a hush through the audience.

Lukas Dekanovsky, an audience member from the Czech Republic who is in New York City for an internship at the United Nations, said he was enthralled by the performance.

"I loved how profound he was," Dekanovsky told China Daily. "I feel like he had a connection with the essence. It doesn't really sound like notes. It sounds like a feeling, although it is music. For me, seeing how softly he plays the piano and uses the music is incredible. I don't think I've ever witnessed that before."

Masterful with every light stroke of the keys, Li had a way of making each note simmer on the black and gold Steinway & Sons piano.

"Music is an international language. I know everyone says that, but it truly is," Li said. "I think I like Mozart the most because it's uplifting."

Born into a musical family in Shanghai — his mother is violinist Yu Lina — Li's musical journey started at age 5. At 16, he would go on to win the grand prize at the Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud International Piano Competition in Paris.

His career flourished at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied under the legendary Mieczyslaw Horszowski.

Andrew Hall, an audience member who lives in Cold Spring, New York, and is originally from London, told China Daily: "It is kind of mesmerizing to watch his hands work, you wonder 'How does his hands work with his brain?' Not to throw around a stereotype, but it was almost like he was doing tai chi with the piano."

"He grew up in China, then went to Paris. It's a beautiful synthesis of growing up in one world and then situating himself in the European culture, then the United States," Hall said. "He has a foot in each of those cultures."

Li has shared the stage with some of the world's most renowned orchestras, including the Berlin Radio Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestra National de France, the Nice Symphony, and the Atlanta Symphony.

His groundbreaking 1987 US tour included a performance of Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G Major* at Carnegie Hall that was widely praised. He also has held pivotal roles such as artistic director of the Musicians Emergency Fund of New York and vice-president of the Piano Society of the Chinese Musicians Association.

Carlos Penalba, an audience member from New Jersey, watched Li perform from the second row. "It was beautiful," he told China Daily. "Being so close to the show, my first time ever, it was amazing to watch his hands move. That was so intriguing to watch the passion come out of his fingers."



Li Jian (second from left) is honored with the US-China Cultural Foundation's Excellence Award by event co-sponsor Tim Gong (center), Elizabeth B. Wang (second from right) and Jun Wei (right), director of the US-China Cultural Foundation. JILLIAN NELSON / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Academics from higher education institutions protest against research funding cuts from multiple federal agencies in New York on Wednesday. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

## US scientists protest against funding cuts

Govt move could impact public health and innovation, academic groups say

By MINGMEI LI in New York  
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Academic groups from US higher education institutions are staging protests against research funding cuts at numerous federal agencies, ordered by the Trump administration.

The funding freeze has sparked concern among researchers, educators and scientists, who say such cuts could have "long-term consequences for innovation and public health."

Hundreds of research fellows from leading institutions, including Weill Cornell Medicine, Columbia University, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, The Rockefeller University, New York University, and The City University of New York, gathered in Washington Square Park in New York to protest funding cuts and suspended funding in numerous research areas.

Braving freezing temperatures and strong winds, the protesters held signs and chanted slogans.

A wave of executive orders signed by President Donald Trump — focusing on education, climate change, healthcare and diversity — has led to a sweeping freeze on federal spending.

In collaboration with the new administration, the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, led by Elon Musk, has intensified efforts to reduce government

spending by tightening expenditure oversight.

The funding changes have led scientists, educators and research fellows to reassess their work.

Thomas Hill, director of New York University's peace research and education program, told China Daily that his four-year peace-building initiative in Colombia, Libya and Moldova was abruptly shut down last week.

"We've been funded by the US Department of State to work in programs. Now, that bureau that was funding us essentially no longer exists. So there's no funding available," he said. "There was an executive order, and everybody was let go. There are no people working there now."

"It's unfortunate that everything has become so politicized and the country so polarized," Hill said. "I hope this crisis wakes people up and helps them see that we can't continue if all public services are cut — not just academia, but healthcare and education. The entire public sector is under attack."

## Bid to slash debt

The Trump administration is attempting to reduce a \$36 trillion national debt and a \$2 trillion federal deficit.

Funding has also been paused at the National Institutes of Health, or NIH.

The NIH announced on Feb 14

that it would reduce grants allocated to research institutions by capping "indirect funding" for research projects at 15 percent. That measure will substantially cut federal spending on indirect costs essential for the operation of universities and research institutes, including expenses for new equipment, maintenance, utilities and support staff.

Protesters said such administrative items are still necessary to maintain the lab.

"We strongly believe in continued funding for education and research — especially health and science research. It's terrible to see funding drained from these vital areas of learning and knowledge," Dana Calvin, a doctoral student at Hunter College in New York, told China Daily.

She said the current funding cut has not directly impacted her yet, but she is deeply committed to research. She finds it frustrating to see her colleagues — or anyone in academia — face these challenges.

"Research projects need to be funded, and cutting that funding is a real detriment to everyone in our country," she said.

"Most of the funding comes from the NIH, and I can only hope that critical research doesn't get cut," Sebastian Aymat, a general surgeon who recently graduated from medical school, told China Daily.

"I think it's just horrible, and no one elected the richest man in the world to start doing whatever he wants with the US government and our services, and I think it's just crazy."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## NASA moon plans take a hit as key officials leave

WASHINGTON — NASA is losing four key senior officials close to its flagship moon program, according to people familiar with the changes, adding more uncertainty over the agency's space exploration trajectory as US President Donald Trump and his associate Elon Musk promote missions to Mars.

Jim Free, NASA's associate administrator who has been a central voice defending the agency's Artemis moon program, will retire on Saturday, the agency said in a statement on Wednesday.

In Huntsville, Alabama, three key officials at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center — one of the agency's 10 field centers and the epicenter of its Artemis moon program — had their retirements announced internally on Tuesday, according to a person familiar with the announcement.

The leadership shake-up adds more uncertainty over NASA's direction in space as Musk, the CEO of SpaceX who has long envisioned crewed missions to Mars, oversees a sweeping review of NASA records as a "special employee" of the Trump administration seeking cuts to staff and programs.

Musk's SpaceX has \$15 billion worth of contracts with NASA, including a contract to land humans on the moon with its Starship rocket.

## Program criticized

Some agency officials expected Free's eventual departure as many Trump advisers criticize elements of NASA's moon program, such as its Space Launch System, an over-budget but operational moon rocket.

The Trump administration earlier sidelined Free and put Janet Petro, who was the director of NASA's Kennedy Space Center, in the acting role — a move seen by many officials in the agency as an attempt to prevent Free from potentially shielding the moon program from future changes.

Musk and Trump in recent months have touted potential missions to Mars as a possible alternative to the moon, the much closer celestial body that Trump in his first presidential term had set as NASA's core space exploration target, with long-term moon bases functioning as a proving ground for far-off Mars missions.

But with Musk's roughly quarter-billion-dollar support for Trump and his influential new role in the White House, talk of prioritizing new, more difficult missions to the Red Planet has threatened to upend the agency.

Petro has said hundreds of NASA employees have accepted buyout offers from the government. The shake-ups and looming strategic shift heap more uncertainty on the agency's almost 18,000 employees who have been whipsawed this month between shifting expectations of indiscriminate layoffs.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## S. Korea's Yoon attends 1st criminal trial hearing

SEOUL — Ousted South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol became the country's first sitting head of state to stand trial in a criminal case as hearings opened on Thursday regarding his bid to impose martial law.

Traveling around Seoul in a prison transport vehicle, Yoon appeared in two different courts on Thursday, contesting his arrest on rebellion charges in one and fighting an effort to remove him from office in the other. Both cases — one on criminal charges, one on impeachment — are related to his imposition of martial law.

Last month, prosecutors indicted Yoon after accusing him of leading an insurrection with his short-lived imposition of martial law on Dec 3.

Security was heightened at the Seoul Central District Court as the motorcade transporting Yoon arrived for a preliminary hearing that involved discussions of witnesses, proposed evidence and other preparations for his criminal trial.

Prosecutors called for swift proceedings considering the gravity of

the case, but Yoon's lawyers said they needed more time to review records.

Yoon had "no intention to paralyze the country," one of his lawyers told the court, adding that his martial law declaration aimed to tell the public of the "legislative dictatorship of the huge opposition party."

If convicted, Yoon could face years in prison for his martial law decree, which shocked the country and sought to ban political and parliamentary activity and control the media.

The move unleashed political upheaval in Asia's fourth-largest economy, with the prime minister also impeached and suspended from power, while top military officials were indicted for their role in the matter.

The court also heard a bid by Yoon's lawyers to cancel his detention, saying the matter had been investigated in an illegal manner, and that there was no risk of Yoon trying to destroy evidence.

It was unclear when the court would rule on the detention, but a



South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol (left) attends the hearing of his impeachment trial at the Constitutional Court in Seoul, South Korea, on Thursday. SONG KYUNG-SEOK VIA REUTERS

judge set the next hearing of the criminal case for March 24.

After the criminal case, Yoon also attended on Thursday afternoon a parallel impeachment trial by the Constitutional Court that has entered its final phase.

The court's acting chief justice Moon Hyung-bae said on Thursday that the next hearing will be held on Tuesday, during which Yoon and the parliament, which is presenting the case against him, will give final remarks.

On Thursday, witnesses testifying to the court included Prime

Minister Han Duck-soo, who has also been impeached and awaits the court's decision on his fate.

The Constitutional Court is reviewing parliament's impeachment of Yoon on Dec 14 and will decide whether to remove him from office permanently or reinstate him.

Analysts have said a March ruling is likely.

If Yoon is removed, a new presidential election must be held within 60 days.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## WORLD

# Trump intensifies war of words with Zelensky

Rift threatens to complicate peace talks as Kyiv rejects proposed minerals deal

KYIV — Relations between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President Donald Trump deteriorated rapidly on Wednesday as Zelensky said Trump was living in a “disinformation space,” and Trump called Zelensky “a dictator without elections” in comments that were sure to complicate efforts to end the conflict.

Zelensky also said he would like Trump’s team “to be more truthful” as he offered his first response to a series of striking claims that Trump made a day earlier, including suggesting that Kyiv was to blame for the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which enters its fourth year next week.

The comments were a staggering back-and-forth between leaders of two countries that have been staunch allies in recent years under Trump’s predecessor, Joe Biden.

The Trump administration has started charting a new course, reaching out to Russia and pushing for a peace deal. Senior officials from both countries held talks on Tuesday to discuss improving ties, negotiating an end to the conflict

and potentially preparing a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin after years of frosty relations.

Trump lashed out at Zelensky in a social media post that apparently referred to the fact that Ukraine has delayed elections because of the conflict and the subsequent imposition of martial law by the Ukrainian Constitution.

Trump also called Zelensky “a modestly successful comedian” who “talked the United States of America into spending \$350 Billion Dollars, to go into a War that couldn’t be won, that never had to start, but a War that he, without the US and ‘TRUMP,’ will never be able to settle.”

The president went on to advise Zelensky to “move fast or he is not going to have a Country left.”

The outburst followed Zelensky’s comments on Tuesday that Trump “lives in this disinformation space” fostered by Moscow when he asserted that Ukraine “should never have started” the conflict.

Separately, Zelensky has suggested giving US companies the right to

extract valuable minerals in Ukraine in return for US security guarantees.

He rejected a US proposal last week that would have seen Washington receiving 50 percent of Ukraine’s critical minerals, including lithium, a key component in electric car batteries.

Zelensky told reporters on Wednesday that the deal was too focused on US interests, saying, “I can’t sell our country.”

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One on Wednesday, Trump said Ukraine had “more or less” agreed to the proposal and complained that US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent was treated “rather rudely” while visiting Kyiv.

The president said he would seek to resurrect the minerals deal.

## Possible meeting

Meanwhile, Putin said he would like to meet with Trump.

Russia started its special military operation on Feb 24, 2022, accusing the US and its allies of ignoring Russia’s demand to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and to offer Moscow security guarantees.

“I would like to have a meeting, but it needs to be prepared so that it brings results,” Putin said on Wednesday in televised remarks.

He added that he would be “pleased” to meet Trump but noted that Trump has acknowledged that a Ukrainian settlement could take longer than he initially hoped.

The Russian leader hailed Tuesday’s talks between senior Russian and US officials in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, as “very positive.”

“The goal and subject” of the talks “was the restoration of Russia-US relations,” Putin said.

“Without increasing the level of trust between Russia and the United States, it is impossible to resolve many issues, including the Ukrainian crisis. The goal of this meeting was precisely to increase trust between Russia and the United States.”



A bridge destroyed to prevent Russian troops from advancing is seen in Irpin, Ukraine, on Tuesday. THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP IMAGES

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Merz leads polls as Germany set to vote

By JONATHAN POWELL in London  
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Germany heads to the polls on Sunday for a high-stakes election that could see the conservative Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union alliance return to power under Friedrich Merz, ending Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s tenure leading the Social Democratic Party.

The vote comes amid mounting economic challenges and growing support for the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, which polls show could become the country’s second-strongest party.

Latest surveys put Merz’s conservative bloc at 29 percent, positioning the 69-year-old former investment lawyer to lead Europe’s largest economy, while Scholz’s center-left SPD trails in third place at 16 percent, behind the AfD’s 21 percent, Agence France-Presse reported.

The snap election, triggered by the collapse of Scholz’s three-party coalition in November, takes place as Germany battles rising immigration concerns and uncertainty over

its role in supporting Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, amid signals of a potential US-Russia settlement that could bypass European allies.

Beyond Merz and Scholz, the contest features two additional major contenders: Vice-Chancellor and Economy Minister Robert Habeck of the Greens and the AfD’s Alice Weidel, whose party has sparked controversy for its anti-immigration stance.

## Maintaining a ‘firewall’

Despite having doubled its support since the 2021 election, the AfD remains politically isolated as a result of Germany’s postwar stigma against far-right politics, with all mainstream parties maintaining a “firewall” against cooperation.

The party, under surveillance by domestic intelligence services, has nonetheless gained momentum through controversial endorsements from the allies of United States President Donald Trump.

High-profile backing from figures such as US billionaire Elon Musk, who appeared at the AfD’s campaign

launch, and US Vice-President JD Vance’s suggestive speech at the Munich Security Conference earlier this month, have lent the AfD unprecedented international visibility, the Financial Times commented.

Endre Borbath, a political science professor at Heidelberg University in Germany, warns that recent attempts to breach the “firewall” have contributed to the AfD’s “normalization” within German politics.

“I think it might also reflect some kind of deliberate strategy in the sense of testing out the kind of societal climate, testing out the discursive climate, and seeing what would happen, should there be some kind of coordination with the AfD, or should the AfD be taken as a normal political party,” he told Al Jazeera.

While Merz said he aims to form a government by mid-April if he wins, Germany’s complex coalition-building process could stretch longer as no party is projected to win an absolute majority in the Bundestag, The Associated Press reported.

## EU vows to respond swiftly to US tariffs

WASHINGTON — The European Union will respond “firmly and swiftly” to protect its interests if Washington imposes tariffs on the bloc’s goods, its trade chief said on Wednesday, rejecting US President Donald Trump’s claim that US-EU trade ties are unfair.

“It is the very definition of a win-win partnership, and there is nothing unfair about it,” said Maros Sefcovic, European commissioner for trade and economic security, as Europe gears for heightened tariff tensions with the United States.

However, he signaled the EU’s willingness for dealmaking — such as the possibility of reducing or eliminating tariffs on autos and other products.

“If we are going to talk about lowering the tariffs, even eliminating the tariffs, let’s say for industrial pro-

ducts, this would be something which we are ready to discuss,” he told an audience at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington.

“We are ready to go for it,” he said, ahead of talks with his US counterparts, including Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and Trade Representative nominee Jamieson Greer.

Sefcovic said the EU sees “no justification for sudden, unilateral tariff increases” by the US, adding that businesses rely on economic stability and predictability.

If the US imposed tariffs on EU products, this would create unnecessary barriers to exports, businesses and workers on both sides of the Atlantic, he said. “To protect European interests, we will have no choice but to respond firmly and swiftly.”

The commissioner stressed that

the bloc will do its best to avoid such an outcome, adding that both parties have to be responsible while dealing with each other.

Sefcovic’s trip comes after Trump has threatened to implement sweeping “reciprocal tariffs.”

Germany’s car lobby warned on Wednesday that such tariffs would hike costs for US car buyers, after Trump signaled he could raise levies on imports of cars, semiconductors and pharmaceuticals.

Mexico’s President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Wednesday she does not fear Trump’s steep tariffs, as she has “the support of the people.”

She allayed concerns over Trump’s measures, noting there is continuing dialogue between the two sides.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Repatriating artifacts



Museum workers prepare artifacts for display at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Netherlands, on Wednesday, as part of the handover of 113 Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. These antiques, crafted in the Kingdom of Benin, were looted by British forces in 1897. FREEK VAN DEN BERGH / EPA-EFE

## Briefly

### CHINA

#### New Zealand deputy PM to pay three-day visit

New Zealand’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters will pay a three-day visit to China starting Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said. The visit is the first important high-level exchange between China and New Zealand this year and also the first of its kind by Peters since taking office in 2023, Guo told a news briefing on Thursday. Foreign Minister Wang Yi will have in-depth exchanges with Peters on bilateral issues and international and regional issues of mutual concern, he added.

### UNITED STATES

#### 2 dead as small planes collide in Arizona

A midair collision involving two small planes in Arizona killed two

people on Wednesday, authorities said. Federal air safety investigators said each plane had two people onboard when they collided at Marana Regional Airport on the outskirts of Tucson. Police confirmed that the two people killed were onboard one aircraft. The collision followed four major aviation disasters that have occurred in North America in the past month. The most recent involved a Delta jet that flipped on its roof while landing in Toronto and the deadly crash of a commuter plane in Alaska.

### CZECH REPUBLIC

#### Teenager detained after 2 killed in knife attack

A 16-year-old boy killed two people with a knife at a shopping center in the Czech city of Hradec Kralove on Thursday, police said, adding they had detained the teenager, a Czech citizen, soon after the incident.

“Both of those attacked suffered injuries that were so serious that they could not be saved despite all efforts of the rescuers,” police said on X, adding they were investigating the motive for the attack.

### SERBIA

#### Vucic highlights surge in Chinese tourists

Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vucic opened the 46th International Tourism Fair in Belgrade on Wednesday, underscoring Serbia’s growing tourism potential and strengthening ties with international partners, particularly China. “The Balkans are a tourism gem, and our cooperation is crucial for attracting more travelers from around the world,” Vucic said. “Our biggest success has been in attracting Asian tourists, particularly Chinese visitors.”

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES—XINHUA

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PUBLIC INTEREST AD: 073

# GLOBAL LENS



People attend the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Kebbi State, Nigeria, on Feb 15. PHOTOS BY TOYIN ADEDOKUN / AFP

## Show of skills

Festival celebrates centuries-old water sport and rich Nigerian heritage

**O**n the islands of the Niger River in northern Nigeria, there once lived the Gungawa people. They made their homes among the water, living in harmony with its flow.

Today, the Gungawa people's boat regatta festival, held annually in Yauri, Kebbi State, Nigeria, stands as a symbol of the vibrant aquatic culture of the riverine communities along the longest waterway in western Africa, the Niger River.

Yauri, one of Kebbi State's four emirates — a traditional administrative region with deep historical roots — was once an ancient kingdom in Hausa land. Known for its thrilling water sports events, Yauri has become a key cultural destination.

Canoeing, the primary mode of transportation on the Niger River, is a skill passed down through generations among the Gungawa. Virtually everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, can navigate the river by canoe.

The word regatta, or *rigata*, originates from the Gungawa language, meaning "Marine War". The festival dates back more than 200 years, originating as a commemoration of the Gungawa warriors' annual hunts for dangerous hippopotamuses that damaged farmlands.

Armed with weapons, the warriors would embark on the Niger River in canoes of vary-

ing sizes to confront the animals. These hunts required expertise in canoeing and naval combat.

The practice was banned in the 19th century, and the festival now celebrates the region's rich heritage with vibrant cultural events, including traditional dances, music, wrestling, acrobatics, and magic shows.

The canoe races are a major highlight of the festival, with separate teams for males and females. Teams of canoeists race from half a kilometer upstream toward the shore, where officials stand ready to track and identify the winners.

While the Gungawa people take center stage, the festival also celebrates Nigeria's cultural diversity. For instance, the Igbo community is given a dedicated space to showcase its traditions, highlighting the country's rich cultural tapestry.

As the festival crescendos, the bride's boat, known as *Jirgin Amarya* in the local tongue, arrives amid a chorus of singing and dancing, heralded by her entourage. This grand finale epitomizes the essence of the boat regatta festival — a jubilant tribute to history, culture, and community, echoing through the waters of the Niger River.

CHINA DAILY



Participants pick up paddles as they prepare for the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 15.



People cheer in the water as they attend the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 15.



Participants push their pirogue as they prepare for the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 15.



A man displays a crocodile as part of the agriculture exhibition during celebrations ahead of the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 14.



From top: A man crosses from a pirogue to another during the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 15. Participants steer their pirogues during the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 15.



Participants perform traditional dances during the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 14.



Participants steer their pirogue during the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 15.



Participants use round gourds to navigate during the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 15.



Men participate in a sewing contest during celebrations ahead of the annual boat regatta in Yauri, Nigeria, on Feb 14.

## BUSINESS

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Employees check equipment at a petrochemical plant in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province.  
SI WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Petrochemical sector to boost profits in 2025, experts say

By ZHENG XIN  
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's petrochemical industry is expecting to bolster profits this year, marking a key turning point after a period of challenges, said industry experts.

The petrochemical sector's revenue rose to 16.28 trillion yuan (\$2.24 trillion) last year, up 2.1 percent year-on-year amid an intricate landscape, laying the groundwork for robust prospects in 2025, said Fu Xiangsheng, vice-president of the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Association, during a news conference in Beijing on Thursday.

China's petrochemical industry bottomed out and stabilized last year, and is on track for recovery, driven by a rebound in global oil prices, rising domestic demand and strong government support, he said.

The association said China's petrochemical sector has contributed substantially in the past few years to both domestic energy security as well as food security, with increased output of refined oil products, fertilizers and pesticides.

Although the trade situation is still challenging, with numerous obstacles, trade frictions, and uncertainties, demand potential for China's petrochemical products in international markets remains significant, Fu said.

High energy prices in Europe, for example, have created numerous opportunities for Chinese petrochemical products to expand into global markets, he said.

The chemical industry worldwide faces structural shortages in high-end products represented by new chemical materials and high-end fine chemicals.

Chinese oil refiners and petro-

chemical companies, including State-owned oil giant China Petroleum and Chemical Corp, or Sinopec, as well as China National Petroleum Corp and China National Offshore Oil Corp, are already making strides in the global market with technological advances and advantages in supply chains, eyeing greater market share from growing demand for energy transition technologies.

The companies are stepping up innovation efforts, focusing on high-end chemical products and specialty materials, a shift that is not only helping these firms differentiate themselves in global markets but also driving profit margins higher, positioning Chinese companies in greater-value segments of the global petrochemical market.

Analysts said Chinese petrochemical firms' pivot to high-end chemicals will be one of the primary reasons for their improved profit prospects in 2025.

"By focusing on advanced materials and specialty chemicals, Chinese companies are capturing demand in sectors with higher margins," said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

"The shift is both a response to the growing global preference for sustainable and high-performance products and a way to ensure better returns amid increased competition," he said.

"While international competition is intensifying as other petrochemical-producing nations ramp up their sustainability efforts and technological innovations, China's comprehensive industrial system, vast market size and ongoing investments in innovation and infrastructure provide a strong

competitive advantage."

China's petrochemical industry has been increasingly investing in green technologies and circular economy practices, with companies making strides in producing green chemicals and low-carbon alternatives to traditional petrochemical products, in line with the nation's broader environmental goals and the international push toward reducing carbon emissions, said Fu of the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Association.

He emphasized that one of the significant advantages for China's petrochemical industry is its massive domestic market, which provides a strong foundation for growth.

"China is not only the world's largest consumer of petrochemical products but also a critical hub for global supply chains. The large market volume, coupled with the country's comprehensive industrial system, is a key factor supporting the industry's resilience," he said.

Moreover, the Belt and Road Initiative has also opened up new opportunities for Chinese petrochemical firms to expand into emerging markets. By establishing joint ventures and forming strategic partnerships in regions such as Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America, Chinese companies are securing new revenue streams, he added.

"The country's vast domestic market, robust industrial infrastructure and integrated supply chain further strengthen its competitive position in the global petrochemical market. As China adapts to the global energy transition, its petrochemical industry is expected to emerge as a more sustainable, innovative and globally integrated powerhouse."

maintained steady growth in both output and sales in January, industry data showed. Last month, the passenger car output logged a year-on-year increase of 3.3 percent to stand at 2.15 million units, while its sales ticked up 0.8 percent to 2.13 million units, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

# Roaring start to year on 3 fronts encouraging

AI success, blockbuster animated film point to potential bull market ahead

By ZHOU LANXU  
and LIU ZHIHUA

The rise of DeepSeek and *Ne Zha 2* signifies that China's innovation ecosystem is gaining a stronger foundation, paving the way for the emergence of more groundbreaking innovations that "we might not even be able to imagine now," said a distinguished economist and financial expert.

This wave of innovation is expected to bolster domestic demand, help the Chinese economy maintain a GDP growth rate of around 5 percent this year, and possibly underpin a sustained rally of Chinese equities, Tian Xuan, associate dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

Tian said three phenomenal events unfolded at the start of the year — the rise of artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek in East China's Zhejiang province; the box office success of animated film *Ne Zha 2*, whose production team is based in Southwest China's Sichuan province; and the remarkable sales achieved by supermarket chain Pangdanglai in Henan province, central China.

Tian, also chair of the National Institute of Financial Research, Tsinghua University, said that these achievements represent China's latest progress in technology innovation, cultural and creative innovation, and business model innovation.

"The simultaneous blossoming of innovation in different regions indicates that China has developed into a cultivated fertile ground for innovation. With the government continuously launching institutional arrangements to optimize the technological innovation ecosystem, it is entirely possible for some groundbreaking technological innovations



Tian Xuan

and services to emerge in 2025 or beyond, things we might not even be able to imagine now," Tian said.

Such growing momentum will help China counter the risk of shrinking external demand amid US tariff uncertainties, providing more products and services that meet people's needs and thus vitalizing consumer spending, Tian said, taking the record box office of *Ne Zha 2* as an example.

The innovation boom has also bolstered investor confidence in China's stock market, drawing increased allocation from foreign investors, Tian said.

"The valuation of Chinese financial assets, including in the secondary market, is currently at a low point. I believe the re-rating of the valuation of Chinese equities is still in its early stages."

Expecting to see widespread AI adoption in China, Goldman Sachs has raised its 12-month CSI 300 Index target from 4,600 points to 4,700 points, implying a potential 19 percent price increase from now and pointing to the possibility for the Chinese AI story to attract \$200 billion of net stock buying.

To further strengthen China's innovation capability, Tian proposed the establishment of a regressive tax system to foster long-term capital investment, whereby taxation rates would decrease as the investment duration lengthens.

"This would encourage investment institutions in the primary market to extend investment horizons, thereby promoting patient capital," said Tian, who is also a dep-

uty to the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature.

Tian made the remarks ahead of this year's two sessions, the meetings of the NPC and the country's top political advisory body, during which key economic targets and policy agenda for 2025 will be unveiled.

Tian said this year's economic growth target will likely remain at "around 5 percent," the same as last year, reflecting the continuity and consistency of policies and aligning with the country's aspirations that its per capita GDP will reach the level of a moderately developed economy by 2035.

"It would be a goal that we need to strive for and reach with extra effort, which can effectively inspire all people across the country to work hard together," Tian said, expecting this year's budgeted deficit-to-GDP ratio to increase to 4 percent or higher.

Tian also expects the government will ramp up support for the property market to bolster economic and financial stability, including encouraging long-term, low-interest loans for real estate companies, optimizing their debt structures and increasing backing for real estate projects via the white list system.

In extreme cases, direct government support may be provided to distressed real estate companies, Tian said, adding that Beijing may lift home purchase limits, except in core areas, in the near future to boost homebuying transactions.

With the proper implementation of policies, Tian said he is "cautiously optimistic" that China's real estate market will stabilize this year in various fronts such as construction, sales and home prices, before experiencing a rally by 2026-27.

Dong Yilang contributed to this story.

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## Reciprocal tariffs will undermine trade

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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Once the United States imposes its proposed "reciprocal tariffs," it will inevitably seriously undermine the multilateral trading system and affect the global supply chain, the Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday.

The ministry's comments follow US President Donald Trump's signing of a memorandum instructing relevant departments to determine "reciprocal tariffs" for each foreign trading partner on Feb 13.

China has urged the United States to not use tariffs as a tool for threatening people everywhere.

There is no way out, or a winner, in the tariff dispute. The United States should correct its wrong practices and work with other countries to find a solution to the problem through equal consultation, the commerce ministry said.

"International trade, based on

each country's own resource endowments and comparative advantages, has effectively promoted global economic growth and improved the well-being of people," He Yadong, a spokesman for the ministry, said during a news conference in Beijing.

"The US believes that it has suffered losses in international trade and wants to increase tariffs on all trading partners. The move is set to cause great uncertainty to normal international economic and trade activities, and many countries have expressed their opposition," He said.

This approach violates the rules of the World Trade Organization, and ignores the balance of interests negotiated in the multilateral trading system over the past 80 years, and the fact that the United States has long benefited significantly from international trade. It is typical unilateralism and protectionism, He added.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Chi-

nese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said higher tariffs on Chinese goods will likely result in higher costs of importing products from China, and this cost may be further amplified along the supply chain. Ultimately, US consumers could face price inflation on certain products.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Commerce said China hopes to expand green industry cooperation with Europe, including cooperation on electric vehicles. This was in reference to the European Commission's move to levy long-term countervailing duties on imports of battery electric vehicles from China.

"China and Europe are important economic and trade partners, with complementary advantages and mutual benefits in economic and trade cooperation," He said.

China appealed to the WTO in November against the EU's final ruling on countervailing measures targeting Chinese BEVs.

### Briefly

#### Loan prime rates remain unchanged

China's one-year loan prime rate, a market-based benchmark lending rate, was 3.1 percent on Thursday, unchanged from the previous month. The over-five-year LPR, on which many lenders base their mortgage rates, also remained unchanged from the previous reading of 3.6 percent, according to the

National Interbank Funding Center. Analysts believe that keeping the LPR unchanged this month helps stabilize the yuan exchange rate and mitigate interest rate risks, but looking ahead, there is still room for further LPR cuts.

#### Passenger car industry sees stable growth

China's passenger car industry

## AI tech 'cannot predict winning lottery numbers'

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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While artificial intelligence has shown immense potential for applications in various fields, it cannot predict winning lottery numbers, according to a statement issued by sports lottery administrative authorities.

The statement was issued recently by China Sports Lottery, along with the sports lottery administrative center in Guangdong province, in response to some netizens' online posts claiming to have won the lottery using numbers recommended by AI technology service providers.

Each lottery draw is an independent random event, with the winning numbers being generated complete-

ly at random and unable to be predicted by any technological means, the statement said.

Following the popularity of DeepSeek, a booming Chinese AI startup, various types of lottery number prediction services that supposedly make use of AI technology have emerged on Chinese social platforms.

In one example, a netizen purchased lottery tickets based on auspicious numbers provided by AI service providers for 19 days in late 2024, with cumulative losses increasing each time, according to an online post on Xiaohongshu, or RedNote, a Chinese lifestyle platform.

Any individual claiming to increase the chances of winning through AI technology is engaging in fraudulent behavior, according to the statement.

Posts about winning the lottery through AI technology were mostly created by AI software providers, serving as a marketing advertisement to attract users to download the software, the statement said.

Some software platforms often offer a free trial period to entice netizens with initial success — randomly generating numbers and if someone wins, they try to persuade users to invest more in advanced predictions, according to the statement.

AI technologies have performed excellently in fields like healthcare and mathematics, as these domains have discernible patterns that AI can extract from vast amounts of data and make deductions. However, lottery draws are entirely random events with no discernible patterns,

making them unpredictable and devoid of any regularity, according to the statement.

The official lottery drawing process is based on the use of physical drawing machines, where the motion of each ball is influenced by airflow, minor vibrations and other factors, making it completely unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Moreover, AI cannot derive any meaningful patterns from past lottery data, with the winning numbers from the previous draw having no impact on the next draw, the Guangdong sports lottery center said.

Therefore, even with powerful tools like DeepSeek, predicting the next winning numbers is impossible. The center called on lottery ticket buyers to remain rational and not



A lottery sales center seen in Wuhan, Hubei province.  
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

buyers in so-called AI prediction tools. Offline authorized sports lottery

stores are the only official channels for purchasing sports lottery tickets, according to the center.

## BUSINESS

# All-solid-state battery tech charges ahead

Small-scale installations anticipated by 2027, mass production by 2030

By CHENG YU  
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Chinese battery players are joining forces, including leveraging artificial intelligence technologies, to accelerate the development of all-solid-state batteries, and targeting small-scale installations by 2027 and mass production by 2030, said industry insiders.

The latest goal comes as almost all leading industry players in the field of all-solid-state batteries — including battery manufacturers, automakers and scholars — participated in the second China All-Solid-State Battery Innovation and Development Summit Forum recently.

Ouyang Minggao, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the country's current route for all-solid-state batteries is to develop sulfide-based batteries, which, paired with high-nickel ternary positive and silicon-carbon negative materials, aim to achieve performance targets of 400 watt-hours per kilogram in energy density and life cycles of over 1,000.

"These advances are expected to facilitate the country's small-batch installation of all-solid-state batteries by 2027, with large-scale mass production projected by 2030," said Ouyang, who is also a professor at Tsinghua University.

To keep pace with the development of all-solid-state batteries, Ouyang said that in addition to building common supply chains for industry-wide base materials, it is essential to integrate large language models and AI for science-based endeavors.

He said his team has already collaborated with more than 30 related companies to conduct the development and optimization of large-scale models in the vertical field of all-solid-state batteries.

By leveraging AI large models for solid-state batteries, the system is now able to provide a variety of intelligent experts and intelligent design tools, which will enable intelligent matching of material systems, design parameters, smart optimization and process recommendations.

"The research and development efficiency of batteries can be greatly improved and the development costs can be reduced by 70-80 percent," he added.

All-solid-state batteries offer higher theoretical energy density and safety, and entail lower costs than lithium-ion batteries that currently dominate the electric vehicle sector. Hence, many countries consider them a potentially game-changing technology.

In a further sign of Chinese players' progress in the sector, Sun Huaqun, chief technology officer of BYD Lithium Battery Co Ltd, the battery firm for China's largest EV maker BYD, said at the conference

"The research and development efficiency of batteries can be greatly improved (by AI) and the development costs can be reduced by 70-80 percent."

Ouyang Minggao, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences

that the company plans to begin small-scale production of sulfide-based all-solid-state batteries by 2027, and these batteries are expected to be incorporated into its mainstream EV models by 2030.

This timeline places BYD in direct competition with global automakers investing heavily in such batteries, such as Japan's Toyota, which has been ramping up efforts in this field to take a lead.

Wang Deping, chief scientist of FAW Group, one of China's largest State-owned automakers, said that the company aims to achieve small-scale application of solid-state batteries by 2027.

Wang said China FAW has been dedicated to the development of all-solid-state batteries since 2014, aligning its research with the needs of the automaking sector.

Industry experts said that China adopts a dual-track approach to the development of EV batteries. It will keep improving liquid lithium-ion batteries to "maintain advantages globally," while intensifying R&D of all-solid-state batteries, to "prevent disruptions" by other countries, they said.

Miao Wei, former minister of industry and information technology, said at the conference that economies like the United States, Europe, Japan and South Korea are prioritizing the research and commercialization of all-solid-state batteries, aiming to leapfrog China's current power battery industry, while Chinese companies are ramping up their investments to safeguard their competitive edge.

"While technical challenges remain, cost is another key factor in the widespread adoption of solid-state batteries," Miao said.

He said material costs for a typical solid-state battery exceed 2 yuan (\$0.28) per watt-hour, compared to 0.5 yuan per watt-hour for liquid lithium-ion batteries.

"This makes it far more expensive to produce solid-state battery packs. Thus, for the foreseeable future, liquid and solid-state batteries are likely to coexist in the market," Miao added.



Workers assemble *Ne Zha* movie-themed models in Dongguan, Guangdong province, on Monday. CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## *Ne Zha 2* sparks surge in orders for toy factories

GUANGZHOU — In the bustling production workshop of a cultural products company in South China's Guangdong province, miniature figurines of *Ne Zha*, *Ao Bing* and *Tai Yi* — all from the Chinese animated blockbuster film *Ne Zha 2* — are rolling off the assembly line at full speed.

As demand skyrockets, Sun Wenke, president of WoFactory, finds his phone ringing incessantly. In addition to updates on mold production, inquiries from distributors and collaboration requests from eager brands are flooding in.

The driving force behind this frenzy is the phenomenal success of the film, which has shattered multiple box office records around the globe. The film's popularity has triggered a buying spree for themed figurines, keychains and badges.

Many products have sold out both online and offline, with resale prices soaring several fold. Fans have jokingly remarked that after scrambling to secure cinema tickets, they now find themselves fighting for collectibles.

Many of these sold-out products are made in Dongguan, Guangdong known as China's "capital of designer toys". Established toy manufacturers

such as Sun's WoFactory are turning the film's characters into highly sought-after real-world collectibles through innovative designs and craftsmanship.

Founded in 2017, WoFactory is a cultural and creative company specializing in design, research and production, having supported over 2,000 designer brands.

"Our initial order before the film's release was 10,000 sets. Just days ago, an additional order was placed, multiplying demand by several hundred times, with total orders exceeding 100 million yuan (\$13.95 million)," Sun said.

The unprecedented surge in orders has left companies both excited and feeling the pressure.

"We have accelerated mold production to shorten the manufacturing cycle. Typically, it takes 35 to 60 days to produce a mold and another 45 to 90 days to complete a product, but now we can deliver the products to consumers in just over 20 days," Sun said.

To cope with the overwhelming demand, WoFactory has leveraged Dongguan's industrial ecosystem. After securing the massive order, the company partnered with dozens of local toy manufacturers to maximize production capacity and fulfill orders efficiently.

Meanwhile, at Guangdong Henglitai Craft Products Co Ltd, production lines are running 24/7 to meet demand.

"We are working round the clock to manufacture *Ne Zha* merchandise," said Cheng Shuiqiao, the company's engineering manager.

Henglitai's first batch of 300,000 *Ne Zha*-themed acrylic posters, transparent cards, badges, and filmstrips — nicknamed "life must-haves" by fans — sold out instantly before Chinese New Year. The company has since received orders 10 times that size.

Dongguan has in recent years become a global hub for designer toys, producing a quarter of the world's anime-related merchandise and 85 percent of China's designer toy products.

The city's well-established industrial chain and supply network have given companies a competitive edge. In Shipai Town, where WoFactory is based, a fully integrated ecosystem covers everything from design and mold manufacturing to assembly and logistics in a 5-kilometer radius — all accessible within a 15-minute drive.

"We are building an AI-powered prototyping center to integrate AI into toy manufacturing,"

said Liu Xueyi, deputy director of the economic development bureau of Shipai. "This will boost production efficiency by 20 percent and cut the average manufacturing time by 20 days."

Beyond manufacturing, brand partners have also been blown away by the meticulous attention to detail shown in various products.

"For *Ne Zha*-themed merchandise, we introduced subtle design touches such as adding a glitter effect to color cards to replicate the film's fiery visuals, and applying iridescent film to acrylic keychains to create shifting colors depending on the angle," said Cheng.

The rise of China's designer toy industry is also a reflection of growing cultural confidence.

"Two years ago, only 40 percent of our products were based on Chinese intellectual properties (IPs), while the majority came from foreign franchises. Now, that trend has seen a complete reversal — Chinese IPs dominate our production line," Cheng said. "It's a sign of our cultural soft power strengthening on the global stage."

XINHUA

### FROM THE GRASSROOTS

## Expanding foie gras market in China and beyond

By LIU YUKUN and ZHU LIXIN  
in Lu'an, Anhui

Within the bustling kitchen of a top-tier Japanese eatery in Shanghai, entrepreneur Zhu Renjun unraveled a frost-kissed foam box. Inside, the foie gras glistened with a luscious creamy sheen, prompting a sigh of relief from the head chef — it's the right ingredient.

Little did this "goose magnate" from Anhui province anticipate that the contents of this box would change the upscale dining landscape in East China for the next two decades.

Back in 2003, in Huoqiu county of East China's Anhui province, Zhu, fresh into the world of Landes goose farming, confronted a stark reality: despite his ability to craft top-notch foie gras, breaking into the market proved elusive.

"Out of a thousand restaurants, even sparking interest from just one was a triumph at that time. Not a lot of people ate foie gras. Back then, even the security guards in five-star hotel kitchens cast dubious glances at my foam-laden cargo," Zhu said.

For Zhu, the years spanning from 2003 to 2008 were a crucible of adversity. To boost productivity, he poured his entire savings into raising geese, peddling goose meat and promoting foie gras.

"It was a money pit. Acquiring goslings, tending to the farm, investing in equipment — yet struggling to promote the foie gras to be accepted by many restaurants. I resorted to selling goose



Foie gras products are displayed at a facility in Huoqiu county, Anhui province. XINHUA

meat to break even, crisscrossing the nation to pitch to eateries. We even bunked under bridges to cut costs," said Zhu.

It was this unyielding spirit that propelled Zhu through a "do-or-die breakthrough" in his fifth year of entrepreneurial toil. From Shanghai to Guangzhou, he traversed the expanse of East China with his homemade ice transport chest. Leveraging endorsements from culinary associations, he successfully cracked the door open to Japanese cuisine establishments.

Today, his enterprise, Anhui Renjun Poultry Farming Co Ltd, boasts annual sales of 110 tons of foie gras and a flock of 120,000 geese, consolidating its status as a premier player in Landes goose husbandry in China.

Hailing from France, Landes geese yield opulent and pricey foie gras. However, with their domestic

introduction, the foie gras market saw a price plunge of around 40 percent, courtesy of trailblazers like Zhu.

In Huoqiu, Anhui, a hub for foie gras production, over 140 Landes goose farming outfits flourish. The yearly output of Landes geese surpasses 5 million, yielding over 5,000 metric tons of foie gras and more than 22,500 tons of goose meat and ancillary products, boasting an annual value of up to 2 billion yuan (\$275.5 million).

A profound metamorphosis is brewing within the industry. With Huoqiu clinching the title of "China's foie gras town", the county has stitched together a seamless chain from goose breeding to the intricate processing of foie gras sauce to other related industries.

Today, Zhu's enterprise has ventured into uncharted territory. "The European Union mandates a

three-kilometer farm-residential distance, a make-or-break situation for us," he said. Acknowledging that Huoqiu's foie gras output constitutes a third of the national total, with 90 percent of enterprises yet to meet export criteria, he collaborates with the government to advance the overseas expansion of local foie gras companies.

"While we charge ahead in the global market, we remain steadfast in fortifying our domestic foothold. Alongside ensuring foie gras quality, we've innovated with pre-cooked offerings, now trying to enter major supermarkets. Meanwhile, an array of deep-processed foie gras products — from cherry-infused to creamy and red wine-infused variations — packaged for instant consumption at prices ranging from tens to hundreds of yuan, cater to diverse consumer demands," Zhu said.

"We aspire to further broaden our domestic sales channels. Beyond restaurants and major retailers, we're venturing into online livestreaming and e-commerce platforms and expecting more sales growth this year," he added. "Challenges are fleeting. Navigating solutions is akin to leveling up and battling foes in games. This process is not just about witnessing my business flourish but also about personal growth that generates a source of pride and purpose. With persistence, one can weather any winter."

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An employee addresses queries on all-solid-state batteries during a high-tech expo in Beijing in October. Embracing AI, Chinese battery makers are ramping up efforts to step up the mass production and installation of such batteries. ZHANG HAIYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cnDeep structural adjustments  
foreseen in liquor industryCountry's alcohol market, including imported spirits, reached nearly  
2 trillion yuan in 2024, with 9.4 million registered enterprises

After years of expansion, China's liquor industry is shifting from rapid growth to a more rational and balanced market, as brands adapt to changing consumer preferences and market saturation. Cost-efficiency and international expansion have emerged as key drivers of future growth, according to industry reports and experts.

The China Alcoholic Drinks Association reported that the country's liquor market, including imported spirits, reached a nearly 2 trillion yuan (\$275.24 billion) scale, with 9.4 million registered enterprises in 2024.

The report, titled Development of the Liquor Industry in China 2024, highlighted the deflation of the long-standing market bubble, giving way to a more rational and sustainable business environment that prioritizes quality over volume.

As the market matures, brands are highlighting cost-effectiveness, international expansion and targeting younger consumers, said the report.

Due to challenges such as high inventory levels, price fluctuations and changing consumer behavior, industry leaders are adjusting their strategies.

According to a Mintel report, liquor and beer continue to dominate the alcoholic beverage market, accounting for over 90 percent of total sales in recent years.

"Liquor brands have been continuously innovating in digital marketing to adapt to market shifts and consumer behavior changes," said Marta Zhang, senior analyst, China insights at Mintel.

CADA forecasted that 2025 will be a turning point for the industry and encouraged players in the sector to launch initiatives to balance supply and demand, leverage digital tools and explore international opportunities, according to the report.

Leading liquor companies such as Kweichow Moutai Group, Shunxin Agriculture, Swellfun and Huangtai Liquor have demonstrated resilience, reporting stable or improving financial results.

As the market leader, Kweichow Moutai continues to post robust financial results. The company is projected to have achieved 173.8 billion yuan in revenue for 2024, marking a 15.44 percent year-on-year increase.

Its net profit is expected to have reached 85.7 billion yuan, up 14.67 percent, reinforcing strong demand for high-end liquor among premium consumers.

Swellfun, a subsidiary of Diageo, has avoided excess inventory by shifting from a traditional stocking model to a controlled supply strategy. This has helped stabilize its pricing and maintain its premium brand value. Swellfun is expected to post 5.22 billion yuan in revenue for 2024, a 5 percent year-on-year increase, with net profit rising 6 percent to 1.341 billion yuan.

Shunxin Agriculture, parent company of Niulanshan Erguotou, is expected to report a net profit of 1.9 billion to 2.6 billion yuan for 2024, a major turnaround from its



**Above:** A customer checks out liquor products at a market in Chongqing in January.

YANG MIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

**Right:** Employees work on a liquor production line in Suqian, Jiangsu province, in November.

Ji CHUNPENG / XINHUA

“Liquor brands have been continuously innovating in digital marketing to adapt to market shifts and consumer behavior changes.”

Marta Zhang, senior analyst, China insights at Mintel

**15.44**  
percent

y-o-y increase in Kweichow Moutai's revenue for 2024



By WANG ZHUOQIONG

A rebound in demand from the Chinese mainland has driven a strong recovery in Australian wine exports, with total export value surging 34 percent year-on-year to 2.55 billion Australian dollars (\$1.62 billion) in 2024, according to Wine Australia.

The Chinese mainland played a pivotal role in this rebound after the country lifted tariffs on Australian bottled wine at the end of March 2024, according to a report from Wine Australia, the country's grape and wine sector's statutory body for research, innovation, marketing and regulation.

In the following nine months, 83 million liters of Australian wine — valued at AU\$902 million — were shipped to the market, making it the primary driver of growth. Exports to China accounted for 35.61 percent of total exports by value.

The average export price to the Chinese mainland market last year reached AU\$10.79 per liter, pushing the overall value of packaged wine exports to a record AU\$9.35 per liter, which is up 24 percent year-on-year.

Peter Bailey, manager of market insights at Wine Australia, said: "While there has been month-to-

month volatility in the value of shipments to the Chinese mainland in the period since tariffs were removed, the performance is nonetheless very positive."

The market rebound has also reshaped the composition of Australian wine exports. Red wine now accounts for 93 percent of Australian wine shipments to China, increasing its share of total exports from 54 percent to 60 percent in volume in 2024. Meanwhile, white wine lost market share, declining from 46 percent to 40 percent due to weaker demand in Australia's key white wine export destinations.

As a result, Australia's top red wine varieties — Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot — all saw increased export volumes, while leading white varieties — Chardonnay, Pinot Gris/Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc — declined.

The report said global alcohol consumption is facing numerous headwinds. In many established wine markets, consumption is declining due to health and wellness concerns and the rising cost of living. This has contributed to a global oversupply of wine and increased competition in already strained supply chains.

China's thirst drives  
strong recovery in  
Australian wine exports

A view of the Australian wine exhibition area at the 7th China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Australian wine exports to the rest of the world declined by 13 percent in value to AU\$1.64 billion and 7 percent in volume to 565 million liters in 2024.

The Chinese market was a key driver of growth for Treasury Wine Estates, a leading wine producer in Australia. The company delivered strong financial results for the first half of fiscal 2025.

Net profit after tax rose 32.5 percent to AU\$220.9 million, while earnings before interest, tax, and self-generating and regenerating assets surged 35.1 percent to AU\$391.4 million. The strong performance was fueled by its luxury portfolio, particularly Penfolds, as well as the contribution from DAOU.

Demand for Penfolds has been robust, with depletion performance in the December quarter marking a return to pre-tariff levels last seen in the interim report. The Penfolds Bin and Icon portfolio, in particular, recorded double-digit growth across all distribution channels. The e-commerce sales of the two brands soared 72 percent over the same period.

Penfolds reported a 33.9 percent increase in EBITs to AU\$250.2 million, with its EBITs margin expanding 3.2 percentage points to 44.9 percent. Growth was driven by

2.96 billion yuan loss in the previous year. The recovery is attributed to steady growth in its liquor business and an improved pork division.

Similarly, Huangtai Liquor forecasts a net profit of 250 million yuan to 330 million yuan for 2024, up 266 percent to 319 percent, reinforcing the importance of strong brand management and strategic adaptation in a competitive market.

While top players maintain stability, mid-tier and smaller liquor brands are under pressure from intensified competition, inventory challenges and changing consumption habits.

Shede Spirits anticipates a net profit of 320 million yuan to 420 million yuan, marking a 76.29–81.93 percent decline year-on-year, but forecasts a recovery in 2025.

Qinghai Huzhu TianYouDe Highland Barley Spirit expects a 50–60 percent drop in net profit. Jiugui Liquor is projected to see a 97.26–98.17 percent decline, with profits between 10 million yuan and 15 million yuan.

Cai Xuefei, a liquor industry expert, forecasted the year 2025 will be a pivotal year for deep structural adjustments. He said that rational development has become an industry consensus, with factors, such as government stimulus policies, price corrections and inventory reductions, expected to position the sector for recovery in the coming years.

Industry experts said that liquor brands must adapt to evolving consumer preferences. Younger generations are increasingly exploring lower alcohol content, innovative packaging and new drinking experiences.

At the same time, e-commerce and digital marketing are playing a more prominent role in shaping consumer behavior, making an enhanced online presence crucial for brands.

The Mintel report has found that domestic liquor is considered the most culturally rich category of alcoholic beverages. Consumers with higher incomes generally have a stronger recognition of their cultural heritage.

"Brands should enhance interaction to strengthen the cultural attributes of domestic liquor," according to Mintel.

Meanwhile, international expansion remains a key growth avenue for many liquor brands in China.

Data from the China Chamber of Commerce of Import and Export of Foodstuffs, Native Produce & Animal By-products show that China's total alcohol export value reached \$1.9 billion in 2024, up 6 percent year-on-year. Total export volume hit 750 million liters, up 5.1 percent year-on-year.

Liquor accounted for 51 percent of total alcohol export value, reaching \$970 million — a 20.4 percent increase.

Export volume for liquor rose 6.3 percent to 16.42 million liters, with an average price of \$59 per liter, up 13.3 percent.

Analyst Cai Xuefei said that 2024 marked the inaugural year of Chinese liquor's "going global", urging brands to explore international markets for long-term growth.

strong demand in Asia, particularly in China, where the resumption of Australian shipments has been well received by consumers, according to the interim 2025 report.

Brand health metrics for Penfolds in China continue to improve, with rising awareness and consumption, reflecting the effectiveness of TWE's targeted investments and distribution strategy, said the company.

While overall alcoholic beverage market conditions in China remain mixed, the wine category showed positive momentum in the first half of fiscal 2025, particularly in the December quarter, said the company. The company has seen the value of its wine category grow 6 percent during the period, driven by Penfolds. E-commerce, which now accounts for about 20 percent of Penfolds' retail sales in China, was a bright spot.

TWE remains confident in the long-term growth potential of Penfolds in the Chinese market.

TWE Chief Executive Officer Tim Ford said: "We are extremely pleased to have successfully re-established the Penfolds Australian country-of-origin portfolio in China, with positive consumer and customer sentiment evident in key performance signals."

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Good faith not tariffs basis for positive outcomes from talks

As China's Ambassador to the World Trade Organization Li Chenggang pointed out in a meeting of the World Trade Organization General Council in Geneva on Tuesday, the United States' imposition of unilateral and arbitrary tariffs on China and other trading partners has caused global "tariff shocks".

Although it has been just one month since the Donald Trump administration took office, the shock waves it has caused with its weaponizing of tariffs have created the impression it has been in power for longer. Such actions blatantly violate WTO rules, heighten economic uncertainty, disrupt global trade, and could even undermine the multilateral trading system.

Yet there seems to be a misconception on the part of some countries that the US is granting clemency to some economies by favoring them with a lower tariff rate.

But a tariff is a tariff. Although a 10 percent tariff hike is lower than a 25 percent hike, they are both of the same unjust nature. They are both being used by the US administration as economic coercion, and both harm the global industry and supply chains.

The Trump administration is not showing leniency or favoritism with differential tariffs, but acting in accordance with its own calculations of the potential blowback from the tariffs on the US weighed against the perceived benefits.

That explains why China has promptly taken countermeasures against the US tariffs while other parties have only paid lip service to their vowed retaliation against the US' unfair tariffs in the hope that by doing so they will receive some concessions at the negotiation table.

Soon after Trump slapped 10 percent duties on all Chinese imports, China responded with 15 percent duties on US coal and liquefied natural gas products, and a 10 percent tariff on crude oil, agricultural machinery and large-engine cars imported from the US, along with tightened export controls on some rare metals used as key components in the defense and clean energy industries, and the inclusion of two US companies on its unreliable entity list.

Beijing believes tariff disputes are only a part of the Sino-US relations and its countermeasures take into full consideration the necessity of preventing the trade dispute from hurting overall bilateral ties.

That is why Beijing has never stopped seeking a solution to the trade dispute through the World Trade Organization dispute settlement mechanism and direct dialogue with the US side.

In the latest move to show its willingness to strengthen exchanges with the US in that regard, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao sent a letter to the newly appointed US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick on Wednesday, congratulating him on assuming the position as the 41st US secretary of commerce, and raising concerns over the US decision to impose the additional tariffs on Chinese imports.

As Wang said, strengthening the bilateral economic and trade cooperation between the two largest economies in the world is of great importance to the development of both countries and to global economic growth.

Over the past years, the trade departments of both countries have played a key role in promoting and advancing bilateral economic and trade cooperation, and Wang said that his department remains willing to work with the US side to strengthen dialogue and manage differences.

That Wang held talks with a visiting Japanese business delegation on Tuesday is a further sign of another consequence of the US administration's slap-happy tariffing, as countries, including US allies and partners, are trying to boost their economic and trade relations with China.

The US side should realize there are no winners in a tariff war, and the US, as the starter of it, is antagonizing the rest of the world, raising the operation cost of the global economy, and shaking the foundation of the postwar order it established in its favor. Not to mention the chain reactions the tariffs are having on the US economy and industry.

When asked at a regular news conference on Thursday about China's response to Trump recently saying the US and China might reach new trade deals and he hoped the top Chinese leader can visit the US, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson reiterated that China's stance on trade and bilateral ties remains consistent. That stance provides broad space for the two sides to handle their trade dispute properly and to keep ties on the right track for healthy development.

## China supports all efforts dedicated to peace

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has so far caused the loss of tens of thousands of lives and destroyed billions of dollars worth of property. Not to mention the mental trauma that people on both sides are suffering as the crisis drags on. It is a consensus of the international community that this human catastrophe must be brought to an end as soon as possible.

Since the start of the crisis, China has been calling for a political settlement and pushing for peace talks. It has continuously called on parties to the conflict to engage in dialogue, so as to gradually de-escalate the situation before ultimately reaching a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire. Its position on the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War II remains consistent. It maintains that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected, the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter should be observed, the legitimate security concerns of all countries given due regard, and all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of the crisis should be supported.

It therefore welcomes all efforts dedicated to peace, including the recent agreement reached by the United States and Russia to set up a high-level team to support peace talks. The meeting between senior US and Russian delegations in Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday, at which that agreement was reached, marks a major step forward in efforts aimed at ending the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which will enter its fourth year next week.

The talks in Riyadh were built on a previous phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, during which the two leaders agreed to work together toward a negotiated end to the crisis. This has enabled the two sides "to begin working on a path to ending the conflict in Ukraine as soon as possible in a way that is enduring, sustainable, and acceptable to all sides".

The evolving situation has proved that the 12-point proposal China put forward to promote a political settlement of the conflict in February 2023 is objective, fair and pragmatic. So it is natural that China welcomes the tentative rapprochement between the US and Russia, as it aligns with its own peace endeavors.

But there are growing concerns among European leaders and Ukrainian officials that they could be sidelined by the new US administration in any discussions about future peace in Ukraine as the US seems in a rush to get a deal done. It is to be hoped that the US is not just trading places; seeking an end to the crisis it has engineered in Europe so that it can concentrate on causing trouble in the Asia-Pacific.

In response to a question in a regular news conference about whether China is concerned that a peaceful resolution to the Ukraine issue will free up US military resources to further focus on the "Indo-Pacific" region, and whether China is concerned that might herald a more forceful rebalancing to Asia by the US, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun stressed that the Asia-Pacific region is a high ground for the development of all countries and it should not become a chessboard for geopolitical confrontation.

If the world has learned anything from the past nearly four years of conflict, it should be that war benefits no one.

China has taken note of the concerns of European leaders. It believes a peace process without the participation of all relevant parties and stakeholders will not be sustainable. "As the conflict has been unfolding on European soil, it is imperative for Europe to work for peace," as Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN, said on Monday.

China hopes all parties can play a constructive role in accumulating the conditions to address the root causes of the crisis in Ukraine, and they will work together to establish a balanced, effective, and sustainable security framework for long-term peace and stability in Europe.

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Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Internationalization of capital market gathers pace with plan

The action plan for stabilizing foreign investment in 2025, unveiled by the Ministry of Commerce and the National Development and Reform Commission on Wednesday, could play a major role in optimizing the business environment and attracting foreign direct investment.

According to the plan, China will formulate policies to allow foreign-funded enterprises to use profits earned in China for reinvestment. It will also allow foreign investors to use domestic loans for equity investment, making it convenient for multinational corporations to establish headquarters-type institutions in China.

Encouraging foreign capital to enter the domestic capital market will help stabilize international capi-

tal flows. Several economists have pointed out that China's listed enterprises, such as those in high-end manufacturing, new energy, and e-commerce, are globally attractive. The new regulations will accelerate the process of foreign capital "discovering" them, and promote the internationalization of shareholder structures of these companies.

Equity investment is characterized by long-term holding and strategic cooperation. With their interests linked to Chinese enterprises, these foreign investors will pay more attention to the development of Chinese enterprises.

At a deeper level, long-term shareholding by foreign capital will promote the improvement of listed company

governance by introducing international management experience, technological standards, and market resources, thereby driving the internationalization of the capital market.

In January, China's actual use of foreign investment amounted to 97.59 billion yuan (\$13.43 billion), a month-on-month increase of 27.5 percent. During the same period, actual investments in China by the United Kingdom, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands and Japan increased markedly.

Those foreign investors coming to China more than a decade ago were lured by its market size. What attracts them more now should be the innovation potential.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## SMEs hold the key to high-quality development

Small and medium-sized enterprises might seem insignificant individually, but they are a major pillar of China's economy. Together they form a grand force to promote economic growth, drive innovation and stabilize employment.

That is why 17 departments, including the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, have jointly issued a notice deploying policy measures to support SMEs.

Cooperation by the departments, which cover economic regulation, policy formulation and financial support, will surely create an efficient and targeted policy system to ensure that SMEs can enjoy the dividends of State policies without hindrance. For example, the further detailed implementation of preferential tax policies

will reduce the tax burden on SMEs and the targeted financial subsidies will directly inject funding vitality into SMEs, alleviating the pressure on operating costs. In terms of technological innovation, vigorous efforts will be made to promote in-depth cooperation and docking between universities, research institutions and SMEs, so that cutting-edge technologies can quickly transform into enterprise productivity and help SMEs enhance their core competitiveness.

All this marks a specific action by relevant State departments to implement Xi Jinping thought on the economy. In a symposium between the country's leadership and some representatives of private business owners in Beijing on Monday, the top Chinese leader put forward a series of policy measures directly addressing the concerns of private enterprises and the

problems they face.

In China, the private economy not only contributes more than 50 percent of the tax revenue and more than 60 percent of GDP, it also accounts for more than 70 percent of the technological innovation and more than 90 percent of new jobs. More than 90 percent of private enterprises are SMEs. Therefore, whether China's economy can steer well depends, to a large extent, on the private economy. And whether the private economy can steer well depends, to a large extent, on SMEs.

As the country makes continuous efforts to improve the business environment and provide sustained and better policy guarantees for private enterprises, the private sector, especially SMEs, will usher in a broader space for development.

—WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## DeepSeek a breakthrough but bottlenecks remain

DeepSeek released its general large model DeepSeek-R1 last month, which attracted global attention with its low cost and high performance. The model's training costs were 10 percent of the industry benchmark using far less computing power resources than those of its international peers. This offers a new solution for breaking through the Western-dominated AI development model of relying on high inputs to make breakthrough.

At the same time, DeepSeek has adopted a completely open source strategy, disclosing algorithms, model weights and training details, so that global developers can learn from, improve and deploy models. The open source ecosystem helps to attract more developers and users to participate, promotes technology iteration, and is expected to change the winner-takes-all competition landscape. Despite these breakthroughs, it should also be noted that China's original AI innovation still has a long way to go.

China's data infrastructure system construction is still in its infancy, the data acquisition and exchange mecha-

nism is not yet sound, industry data and public data are difficult to obtain and access, and the data available for large models is limited. At the same time, data annotation is the basis for the supply of high-quality data. Due to the shortage of professional annotation talents, the quality of data annotation in China still needs to be improved, especially in areas such as medical care and autonomous driving where development needs are urgent and the professional requirements are high.

From a global perspective, the influence of Chinese domestic large models such as DeepSeek in the global technology ecosystem is still in its infancy. From a domestic perspective, the entire industry chain of China's AI development from basic research to technological innovation to scenario application has not yet been fully opened. The flow of factors such as technology, capital, data and talents that support the iterative development of large models is still blocked.

To this end, AI basic research and technological innovation should be continuously strengthened. The country should accelerate the construction

of national strategic scientific and technological forces in the field of AI, promote the cross-integration of AI with basic disciplines such as mathematics, physics and brain science, and improve basic AI research. It should encourage open source AI technology, focus on open source projects, and promote open source contributors, service providers, users, operators and other entities to jointly promote AI technology innovation.

The authorities should provide more support to help cultivate and strengthen AI start-ups and provide scientific references for governments and financial institutions to accurately identify potential and high-value AI start-ups.

The country needs to give full play to its advantages in massive data and rich application scenarios, organize the advantages of scientific research institutions, leading technology companies, etc, focus on key vertical segments such as intelligent manufacturing and autonomous driving, and coordinate the layout of the large model industry application innovation engineering centers.

—ECONOMIC DAILY

## COMMENT

Xu Xiaofang

## Private sector key to high-quality growth

President Xi Jinping delivered the keynote speech at a symposium of private business leaders in Beijing on Monday, highlighting the huge potential for the development of the private sector. He said this is the right time for private enterprises and entrepreneurs to showcase their talents and drive high-quality development.

The chiefs of some of China's largest private companies, including Huawei CEO Ren Zhengfei, BYD Chairman Wang Chuanfu, New Hope Group Chairman Liu Yonghao, Will Semiconductor Chairman Yu Renrong, Unitree Robotics CEO Wang Xingxing and Xiaomi CEO Lei Jun, spoke on how to develop the private economy by overcoming challenges.

The symposium demonstrated the government's commitment to support and reinforce the role of the private sector. The private enterprises' meeting held in 2018 had highlighted two key points: the government's unwavering commitment to develop both the public and private sectors, and ensure the private sector remains an integral part of the national economy.

Monday's meeting, reiterating the government's commitment, also made sure private enterprises advance Chinese modernization, while affirming the government's pledge to further improve the business environment for private enterprises. The discussions boosted the confidence of entrepreneurs, while injecting new momentum into the private sector, demonstrating that "high-quality development" is an integral part of Chinese modernization's blueprint.

Private enterprises have played a pivotal role in the success of reform and opening-up. Private enterprises, accounting for more than 90 percent of all enterprises in China, contribute substantially to the country's GDP, employment and technological advancement. And favorable government policies can help the private sector thrive and innovate.

Monday's meeting also highlighted several critical areas for future development — including breakthrough areas of "hard technologies" such as 5G, semiconductors, artificial intelligence and electric vehicles — to help achieve the government's goal of building a modern, high-quality economy.

The discussions at the meeting pivoted to the issue of the autonomy of China's industry and supply chains, sharpening China's global competitive edge, and promoting technological innovation to develop new forms of production, emphasizing the importance of encouraging private enterprises to pursue self-reliance and become more resilient in strategic industries in order to foster innovation-driven businesses.

The meeting underscored the government's commitment to ensure the private sector gets equal access to production factors such as land, capital and labor, so as to help it thrive in a business environment that is fairer and more equitable.

The meeting also called for the robust implementation of policies to help the growth of private enterprises, while stressing the need to ensure the efficient implementation of government support policies, essential for fostering the development of the private sector.

Another major theme that emerged at the meeting was the emphasis on law and institutional guarantees, necessary for optimizing the business environment, and the need to guarantee legal protection for private businesses, particularly in areas related to IPR and fair market access. In this regard, strengthening the rule of law will help address problems such as unfair competition, and violation of property rights.

Moreover, the business leaders said financial support, through both increased access to credit and innovative financing mechanisms, was key to reducing the short-term difficulties faced by private companies.

The meeting also discussed the issue of delayed payments to private companies, which has often hindered their growth. The importance of ensuring pri-

vate businesses receive payments on time was highlighted as a major priority for boosting the health of the private sector.

Moreover, the meeting underscored the need to take measures to protect private businesses' legal rights and build a level playing field, while stressing the importance of using good business practices such as fair inspection, and doing away with arbitrary fees and fines.

The need to create an effective government-business relationship was also discussed at the meeting, under which local governments would have to devise tailored, localized policies that reflect the unique conditions of their regions while adhering to national policies. By identifying and addressing the challenges and opportunities unique to different regions, and by using tailored solutions to the problems plaguing the private sector, the government can help private enterprises to thrive.

Later, many entrepreneurs said the meeting boosted their confidence and will help them expand their businesses, while acknowledging that the policies

laid out would support and encourage private companies to make greater strides in both domestic and global markets. The meeting, they said, had strengthened their resolve to pursue high-quality development, and contribute more to China's economic transformation.

In the short term, the meeting will benefit private enterprises by boosting market confidence and strengthening the legal framework that underpins China's economic model. In the long run, it will serve as a catalyst, helping China transition from being a "manufacturing giant" to an innovation pioneer in intelligent manufacturing, driving economic restructuring, increasing resilience, and boosting competitiveness. In short, the meeting reinforced the importance of nurturing the private sector and ensuring its continued growth so it can contribute more to the nation's future.

The author is a professor at the Business School, Beijing Technology and Business University. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Chen Weihua

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## Even a Chinese journalist knows the road map to peace in Ukraine

In the past three years, I have written at least 10 columns arguing that a ceasefire and dialogue is the only way to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and that the conflict cannot be resolved on the battlefield.

I have asked European Commission officials probably a dozen times why they don't use diplomacy to help end the conflict instead of supplying arms to Ukraine. I even asked Josep Borrell when he was the EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy why he was only exercising his duty on security policy but not diplomacy. The answers I got were almost identical: Russia is not ready or sincere about dialogue, and if Russian troops withdraw from Ukraine today, the conflict will end by itself.

European Union officials have also dismissed the argument that NATO's eastward expansion was at least partly responsible for triggering the conflict.

Surprisingly, I got exactly the same answers on Tuesday from EU spokespersons even though senior Russian and US officials were holding a meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to discuss how to end the three-year-long Russia-Ukraine conflict. The EU officials pretended to be oblivious of the fact that US President Donald Trump has said NATO's expansion was a key trigger to the conflict.

## Given the new reality, EU leaders are no longer talking about fighting to the last Ukrainian citizen.

This happened a day after some EU leaders hastily gathered in Paris for an emergency meeting following US special envoy Keith Kellogg's announcement that European leaders won't have a seat at the negotiation table and US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth saying that US troops won't be deployed in Ukraine for peacekeeping while troops from NATO's European member states there won't be covered by Article 5 of NATO, meaning an attack on any NATO member's troops won't be considered an attack on the transatlantic military alliance.

Given the new reality, EU leaders are no longer talking about fighting to the last Ukrainian citizen.

For the past three years, China, Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Africa and many other countries have been calling for an immediate ceasefire and dialogue to end the conflict, a conflict which has not only claimed tens of thousands of lives and caused damage to Ukraine and Russia, but also affected many other economies.

Looking back, China's position document on a political settlement issued on the first anniversary of the conflict, on Feb 24, 2023, was well balanced and called for, among other things, respecting the sovereignty of all countries, abandoning the Cold War mentality, ceasing hostilities, resuming peace talks and stopping unilateral sanctions.

Despite China's special envoy for Eurasia affairs Li Hui conducting shuttle diplomacy in a bid to help resolve the Ukraine crisis, US and EU leaders poured cold water on the painstaking efforts of China and several other countries by equating such efforts to appeasement.

History will prove that if they had heeded the advice of China and several other countries to persuade Russia and Ukraine to declare a ceasefire earlier, many lives would have been saved. An early ceasefire would have allowed the EU and its members to focus more on increasing their economic competitiveness, technology prowess and landmark European Green Deal instead of boosting their defense industry and embracing the war economy.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will lead her full college of commissioners on a visit to Ukraine next week to mark the third anniversary of the conflict. It is still uncertain if she will talk of supplying weapons and military equipment to Ukraine or helping maintain post-conflict peace and expedite reconstruction.

EU Commissioner for Economy and Productivity Valdis Dombrovskis' words on Tuesday that the EU has no intention of lifting sanctions against Russia, and the approval by EU ambassadors of the 16th series of sanctions against Russia on Wednesday, banning Russian aluminum imports and imposing new export bans on Moscow, suggest the EU is still struggling to adapt to the new reality.

It is abundantly clear that all the attention now must be on a ceasefire and dialogue, instead of prolonging and escalating the conflict. Even a Chinese journalist knows that.

Jia Jinsheng

## Yarlung Zangbo project conducive to basin governance

Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra-Jamuna River, flowing through China, India and Bangladesh, is one of the rivers with the most abundant water volume in the world. Warm and humid air flow, blocked by the Himalaya Mountains, turns into abundant rainfall in the Brahmaputra-Jamuna River section. More than half of the water volume flowing from China to downstream countries discharges into the Brahmaputra River, all the way through the Danba Qu River and the Xibaxia Qu River. Moreover, the project itself does not consume water. The hydropower development on the downstream of the Yarlung Zangbo River bears no negative impact to total water volume of the basin, as it generates power by taking advantage of gravity. After completion, the project will make the annual distribution of river run-off more even, which will be beneficial for the development of the water resources and disaster prevention of downstream countries.

During recent years, amid accelerating climate change, extreme weather events have been occurring more frequently globally, with higher intensity and wider impact. The middle and downstream sections of the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra-Jamuna River are home to hundreds of millions of people. Better developing and conserving the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra-Jamuna River, and enhancing the basin governance are key to adapting to climate change, eliminat-

ing poverty, improving livelihoods, stepping up economic growth, and preventing floods and droughts along the river.

The practices conform to the international conventions of trans-border river development and conservation, and serve the common interests of riparian countries. Hydropower development in the downstream of the Yarlung Zangbo River is a pragmatic action out of the actual needs of adapting to climate change, honoring the carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, promoting green-oriented energy transition, and social and economic development. It is also in line with the rights of survival and development of people in upstream areas.

China, as one of leading countries in dam and hydropower technologies, has developed the world's most advanced and complete industry chain, and robust and sound technical standards system. China has always upheld a responsible attitude in hydropower development, adhering to the principles of scientific planning, comprehensive discussions, cautious decision-making and orderly development. It gives top priority to ecological conservation, pursues harmony between humanity and nature, balances high-quality development and security, fully considers the needs of hydropower development and ecological conservation, and fully accommodates possible impacts on downstream areas and the reasonable concerns of related countries.

Hydropower development of the downstream Yarlung Zangbo River is based on decades of comprehensive research and rigorous scientific arguments. It fully takes the geological environment into consideration and strictly abides by the law on ecological conservation on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The development plan has avoided the high-risk geological disaster areas and major geological disaster chain in the basin, with project safety and ecological protection measures clarified. Therefore, the project will have no negative impact on downstream areas.

On the contrary, it will be conducive to the governance of the river basin and mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation among riparian countries. Along with project development, China is also establishing and improving the meteorological, hydrological, geological disaster monitoring systems for the basin, making disaster early warning and forecasting even more precise and real-time oriented, thus strengthening disaster prevention and reduction capabilities of the downstream areas. After completion, the project will benefit the relevant riparian countries by regulating excessive water during wet seasons and replenishing water sources during dry months.

The Chinese government has always attached great importance to trans-border river cooperation, and has established practical and effective trans-border river cooperation mechanisms. Fruitful exchanges and cooperation have

been carried out in flood and drought disaster prevention, hydrological information sharing, joint scientific research and trans-border river project construction, contributing to regional development and stability.

For decades, through various cooperation mechanisms, China has been sharing flood season hydrological information with neighboring countries, briefing floods, droughts and other emergency event information, jointly building and operating trans-border river projects to high standards. The country has carried out international cooperation in emergency management and disaster relief, worked with downstream countries to minimize the risks and losses of floods and droughts. These efforts have safeguarded people's lives and property, and have been highly appreciated and recognized by related countries and international institutions.

In the construction and operation of the hydropower development on the downstream of the Yarlung Zangbo River, China will keep in close contact with downstream countries in disaster prevention and reduction, and keep the benefit of riparian people in mind.

The author is vice-president and secretary-general of Chinese National Committee on Large Dams, and honorary president of the International Commission on Large Dams. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

## GLOBAL VIEWS



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

MUHAMMAD HABIB ABIYAN DZAKWAN

## Beyond bilateral

Indonesia joining BRICS will further strengthen not only cooperation with China but also that with the rest of the Global South

Brazil, as this year's BRICS chair, announced in January that Indonesia had been accepted as the member of the group. This marks a remarkably swift process. It is therefore worth revisiting the implications of Indonesia's BRICS



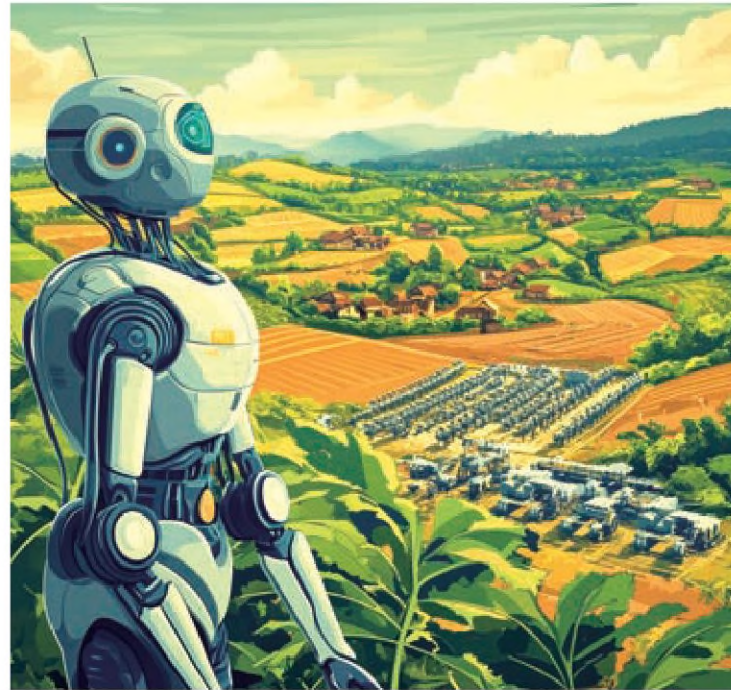
membership for Indonesia-China relations.

For the record, Indonesia-China ties had already reached an unprecedented

peak before Indonesia joined BRICS. Since 2013, when President Xi Jinping proposed building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in Jakarta and China have maintained a comprehensive strategic partnership status with Indonesia, the country is becoming a supportive partner in China's global initiatives and proposals, including its community with a shared future for humanity. Now, with Indonesia's BRICS membership, there are three positive spillover impacts worth discussing.

First, the two countries will have more opportunities to communicate and exchange ideas through BRICS meetings, given their status as long-standing beneficiaries of an open and multilateral world. If we imagine these interactions as a "noodle bowl", the more Indonesia and China engage, the richer their cooperation becomes amid an increasingly unstable international environment. In November 2024, Indonesia and China agreed to hold the first meeting of the 2+2 Dialogue Mechanism for Foreign Ministers and Defense Ministers in 2025. While their ministers have met via various platforms such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, G20, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, BRICS — with an annual summit and many other meetings — offers Indonesia additional avenues for building rapport between these two countries.

Second, the two countries will



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

likely become more familiar with each other's development practices in emerging fields. Indonesia welcomes China-led capacity-building initiatives through BRICS platforms such as the China-BRICS Artificial Intelligence Development and Cooperation Center, the BRICS Deep-Sea Resource International Research Center, and the China Center for Cooperation on Development of Special Economic Zones in BRICS Countries. Increased exposure to these initiatives may

enhance Indonesian familiarity with Chinese approaches. While not all Chinese practices will be fully compatible with Indonesia's interests and needs, greater knowledge of them can help Indonesia provide constructive feedback and synergize with them for the common good. Interoperability between Chinese and Indonesian standards could become something feasible if Indonesia later considers joining the BRICS Excellence Center for Smart Customs or the BRICS

Digital Ecosystem Cooperation Network.

Third, the two countries will likely broaden the horizon of their partnership. Indonesia-China cooperative activities are many, but most are concentrated within the greater Asia-Pacific region. With Indonesia joining BRICS — and with the Prabowo Subianto administration prioritizing engagement beyond the region — both countries could explore new public goods initiatives for other parts of

the world, particularly Africa. China already has the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, while Indonesia has the Indonesia-Africa Forum. These platforms could be leveraged to introduce best practices from the Asia-Pacific region, such as the ASEAN+3 Emergency Rice Reserve or the Chiang Mai Initiative for formal currency swap agreements. Nevertheless, expanding engagements beyond Asia must not come at the expense of the long-standing commitment to ASEAN and its related mechanisms. Instead, Indonesia and China should brief ASEAN members and ASEAN+3 partners on the progress of global public goods provision within BRICS, ensuring synergy with their programs where possible. Ultimately, BRICS must remain inclusive and non-confrontational.

Fourth, Indonesia and China will have the opportunity to consolidate their supply chains. Not all materials or industries need to be monopolized by both of the countries; rather, BRICS membership allows for diversification by integrating partners such as Brazil or South Africa into supply chains and industrial parks. A broader, more integrated supply chain increases resilience against geopolitical disruptions. For instance, Indonesia, Brazil and China — with their combined industrial capacities — could translate the outcomes of the BRICS Agricultural Research Platform into climate-resilient food products using Brazilian soybeans, Indonesian coffee or Chinese rice. This may contribute to the overall food security among the BRICS members.

The positive spillovers of Indonesia's BRICS membership must not

stop at the bilateral level, it must also boost the South-South cooperation. Redefining the Bandung Principles to address pressing issues faced by Global South countries must be a primary focus as the world commemorates the 70th anniversary of the Asian-African Conference this year. For example, Indonesia and China could work together to translate the Bandung Principles into norms related to deep-sea research or AI. Enhancing complementarity among emerging providers within BRICS will help avoid redundancy, ensuring that each member focuses on its comparative advantage in assisting fellow Global South nations. Aligning BRICS mechanisms with international standards that offer universal benefits, such as good governance, open economies, climate change mitigation and human rights protection, will be crucial. Ensuring that BRICS remains empathetic toward the needs of Global South countries, rather than applying a blanket cooperation approach or power-based ownership structures, is also essential.

To conclude, Indonesia's BRICS membership opens a new chapter in its diplomatic and economic engagements, particularly with China. If leveraged strategically, it can enhance not only bilateral relations but also broader South-South cooperation. It is in everyone's interest that BRICS does not replace existing platforms that benefit the Global South, including the North-South triangular partnerships. Instead, it should focus on carving out a niche in areas where traditional Northern partners may be unwilling or unable to engage due to structural differences or competing priorities.

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HANY BESADA

## Viable surrogate

The expansion of BRICS has strengthened the grouping's economic and geopolitical leverage, offering an alternative to Western-led institutions

The recent expansion of the BRICS grouping — originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — to include new members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and most recently Indonesia, marks a decisive shift in global governance.



Often referred to as the "BRICS Plus" model, this enlarged bloc reflects the growing ambition of emerging economies

to establish an alternative to Western-dominated international institutions. By reshaping trade, investment and diplomatic alignments, the "BRICS Plus" bloc is challenging the traditional dominance of the Global North and offering a new vision of multilateralism.

At the heart of this transformation lies China, which has played an important role in driving the BRICS agenda toward an expanded and more influential platform. Through economic partnerships, infrastructure projects and strategic partnerships, Beijing is positioning itself as a leader in redefining global governance to better accommodate the interests of the Global South. The implications of this shift are profound, signaling a gradual but significant redistribution of geopolitical power.

The inclusion of major energy producers such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran has significantly enhanced the global influence of the "BRICS Plus" model. Together with Russia, these nations now form a powerful bloc with substantial influence over global energy markets. Given that oil and gas remain central to international

trade and economic stability, the influence of the "BRICS Plus" bloc in setting energy prices and supply chains could challenge traditional Western institutions such as the International Energy Agency and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Moreover, the presence of Egypt and Ethiopia strengthens the "BRICS Plus" model's geopolitical weight in Africa, a continent that has long been a battleground for influence among major powers. By incorporating African economies into its fold, the "BRICS Plus" model provides an alternative to Western financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which have historically imposed structural adjustment policies that many developing nations view as restrictive and unfavorable.

The New Development Bank — BRICS answer to the World Bank — has already started offering financing alternatives to Global South countries, reducing their dependence on Western-controlled financial mechanisms. With the expansion of the grouping, the NDB could further increase its capital and lending capacity, giving developing nations more room to maneuver when it comes to funding large infrastructure and development projects.

One of the most significant aspects of the "BRICS Plus" model is its commitment to reducing reliance on the US dollar in global trade. The expansion of BRICS to include some of the world's largest oil-exporting nations provides a foundation for non-dollar energy trade, a move that could gradually undermine the petrodollar system. Already, China and Russia have promoted bilateral trade in yuan and rubles, and India has increased

its rupee-based trade with some BRICS members.

Saudi Arabia's potential acceptance of yuan payments for oil, alongside the UAE's increasing trade in local currencies, signals a gradual shift away from dollar dependence. If the "BRICS Plus" model successfully implements a multi-currency trade settlement system, it could accelerate the move toward a multipolar financial system where regional currencies and digital payment platforms play a more significant role.

This has broad implications for global trade and finance, as countries outside the Western financial orbit may increasingly look to the "BRICS Plus" bloc as an alternative. If this trend continues, it could reduce the effectiveness of US sanctions, which rely heavily on the global dominance of the dollar and the SWIFT payment system.

China, as the largest economy within the "BRICS Plus" bloc, has played a pivotal role in expanding the bloc and shaping its vision. China's Belt and Road Initiative has already established deep economic ties with several "BRICS Plus" members, financing large-scale infrastructure projects across Africa, Latin America and Asia. The integration of new "BRICS Plus" members allows China to foster deeper trade and investment networks.

China's approach to global governance, as seen through its Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative, promotes a more decentralized and multipolar international system. Unlike Western models that emphasize market liberalization and political conditionality, China advocates for "win-win cooperation", prioritizing economic development without interference

in domestic governance.

Moreover, China's State-led development model offers an alternative to Western neoliberal policies. This appeals to many "BRICS Plus" nations, particularly those seeking to industrialize while retaining control over their national economic strategies.

As China continues to lead the "BRICS Plus" bloc toward greater financial and trade autonomy, it is also reinforcing its own global leadership. By promoting local currency trade, alternative payment systems, and infrastructure connectivity, Global South countries may position "BRICS Plus" as a viable alternative to the Western-led financial order.

While the "BRICS Plus" model presents a compelling vision for a new global order, several challenges remain. The bloc consists of nations with diverse political systems, economic priorities and strategic interests, which could make coordination difficult. For instance, India and China have ongoing border tensions, and Russia's geopolitical tensions with the West have added complexities to the diplomatic alignment of "BRICS Plus" members.

Additionally, integrating new members requires institutional adjustments, as the bloc must develop governance frameworks to ensure smooth decision-making and equitable economic cooperation. Balancing the interests of energy-rich nations such as Saudi Arabia with industrial powerhouses such as China and India will require careful negotiation.

Another key challenge is whether the "BRICS Plus" model can effectively implement its de-dollarization strategies. The global financial system is still deeply entrenched in dollar-based transactions, and mov-



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

ing away from it requires robust financial infrastructure, trust among member states, and time.

Finally, while the "BRICS Plus" model has been effective in challenging Western dominance, it must also prove its ability to deliver tangible economic benefits to its members. The success of "BRICS Plus" hinges on whether it can create a more inclusive, sustainable, and functional global economic system that addresses the development needs of its diverse members.

By incorporating major energy producers and emerging markets, the "BRICS Plus" grouping has strengthened its economic and geopolitical leverage, offering an alternative to Western-led institutions.

China's leadership in shaping the "BRICS Plus" model reflects its broader ambitions to redefine multilateralism, promote the South-South cooperation, and create new financial and trade structures that reduce reliance on Western economic systems. While challenges remain, the expansion of the "BRICS Plus" model represents a

bold step toward greater economic sovereignty for developing nations and a more balanced global governance framework.

As the "BRICS Plus" model continues to evolve, its success will depend on whether it can foster deeper cooperation, overcome internal differences, and establish mechanisms for sustainable growth. If it succeeds, it could reshape international relations for decades to come, positioning the Global South as a formidable force in shaping the future of global governance.

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## CULTURAL HERITAGE



Once widespread in the mountains of what is now southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian provinces, wooden arch bridges were listed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Santiao Bridge, Wenxing Bridge and Xidong Bridge (from left) are historical wooden arch bridges in Taishun county, Wenzhou, Zhejiang province. PHOTOS BY ZHONG XIAOBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Bridging past and present

Once endangered across the country, region increases the number of newly built wooden arch structures, outstripping the old, **Wang Ru** reports.

When heritage activists met Dong Zhiji in 2003, whose name they'd found on a bridge built decades earlier, he was 78 years old. By then, building bridges was a distant memory, something he'd done in a previous life. But the conservators were relieved, as they'd finally found someone who still had the skills to build the endangered structures.

Wooden arch bridges were once widespread in the mountains of what is now southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian provinces, but since the 1960s, they have gradually been replaced by concrete and steel, leading the craftspeople who made them to turn to other professions. By the turn of the millennium, when they regained their cachet, those able to build the bridges seemed to have vanished.

That's why finding Dong was an amazing feat. Although he last built a bridge about 60 years ago, he still remembered the techniques, and in 2004, he had the chance to practice those skills on the Tongle Bridge, and train several apprentices in the process.

Zhong Xiaobo, director of the Wenzhou Covered Bridge Culture Society, helped build the Tongle Bridge. He has devoted over two decades to protecting wooden arch bridges, and says Dong's knowledge on wooden arch bridges has made the revival of the then-endangered craft possible.

On Dec 15, the traditional design and practices for building Chinese wooden arch bridges, listed in 2009 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, was transferred to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, marking its remarkable revival.

Zhong was overwhelmed by the news. "This is a reward for our efforts in protecting the bridges and passing on skills. It was a long, arduous journey, from no craftsman to one, from one to many. Finally we see the first rays of dawn."

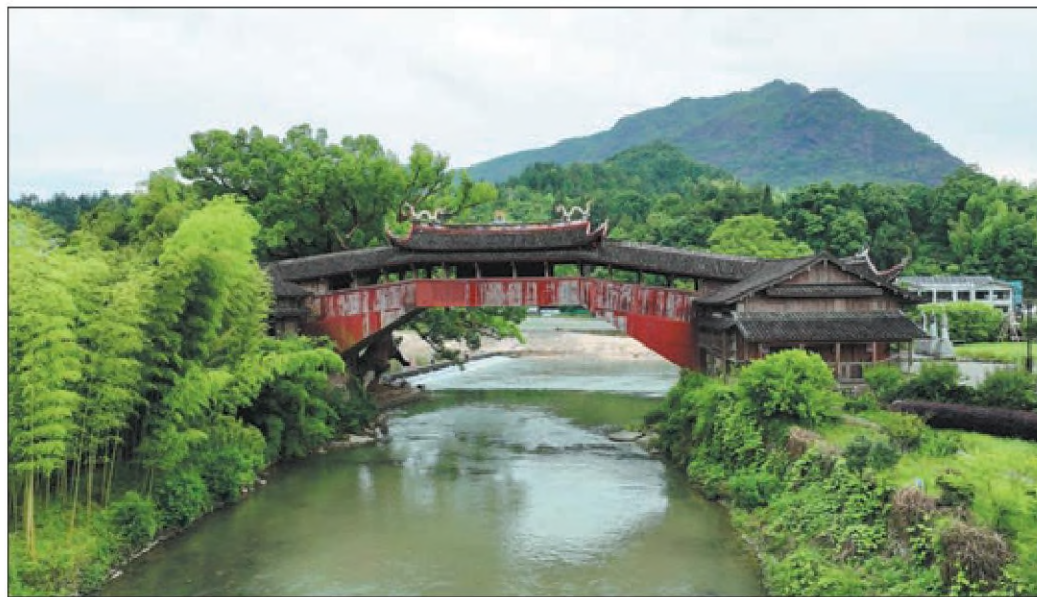
## Protective efforts

Born in Taishun county in Wenzhou, Zhejiang, in 1977, Zhong never thought of wooden arch bridges as special — they were something he saw every day as an adolescent.

It was only as he pursued a bachelor's degree in Chinese language at Chengdu's Southwest Minzu University in Sichuan province in 2000 that he discovered their value. He was shocked to find that something he'd taken for granted was actually precious heritage, prey to fire, flood and insects, and that the skills to make them were in danger of becoming lost.

Since then, he has devoted his time to encouraging efforts to protect them.

Zhong says that there are few wooden arch bridges in China, and most are found in the seven mountainous counties in



Top: The Beijian Bridge in Taishun county. ZHONG XIAOBO / FOR CHINA DAILY Above left: Zhong Xiaobo, director of the Wenzhou Covered Bridge Culture Society, speaks at a seminar in the county in 2023. Above right: Zhong (right) and Zeng Jiakuai, a provincial level inheritor of wooden arch bridge building techniques. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian. They use short, interlocking logs to create long arches without nails or rivets, a design that efficiently spreads the load, often without the help of pillars. Originally, the skills to make them would be passed down within families, or through apprenticeship.

Besides carrying traffic, they were social hubs where people gathered to chat, relax, or make religious offerings.

In 2000, Zhong launched a website about the bridges, drawing the attention of fans. A few years later, he held photo exhibitions in universities in Zhejiang and Shanghai to promote them further.

In 2003, he heard of plans for a hydroelectric power station upstream of the Santiao Bridge, which would cut the flow under the

Tang Dynasty (618-907) bridge. Worried that the lack of water would render the bridge useless, causing it to fall into obscurity, he issued a call to action on his website.

With public efforts, the power station builders made a concession on the flow to allow the bridge to continue to fulfill its ancient duty.

"Decades later, this is still vivid in my heart. Saving the bridge gave us experience and confidence, and raised awareness of the need to preserve them," he says.

## Cultivation of inheritors

Soon after, he set up the Wenzhou Covered Bridge Culture Society and organized seminars. He also encouraged scholars to check on them every year. Thanks to his hard work, wooden arch bridges went

from being nestled in deep mountains to becoming known to the world.

"Over the past two decades, Zhong has devoted a significant part of his spare time to protecting the bridges. ... His stories reveal that these structures are not merely about transportation but are vessels of culture and testimonies of history. They are invaluable treasures; and the duty of preserving them and promoting their cultural significance should be embraced by every individual," says Wang Jianghui, a student at the Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics who participated in one of Zhong's activities last year.

As a result of the publicity, Zhong says awareness of protecting the bridges has improved greatly. "In the past, they were left without protection and often had to

give way to development. But now we have teams of volunteers and devices to monitor threats and take measures to eradicate them."

He has also seen the growing number of bridge makers, who help ensure their continued existence.

Since Dong and a few other elderly craftspeople were found, the local government has adopted measures, like subsidies for constructing bridges using traditional skills, to encourage the use and spread of the craft.

"Now, the number of new wooden arch bridges in some parts of southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian exceeds the old, a positive trend in development. Given that just two decades ago they were endangered, we can confidently say that the situation has undergone a welcome transformation," Zhong says.

According to official documentation about the craft on the UNESCO website, when it was inscribed on the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding list in 2009, there were only four people with mastery of the core techniques, all over 75. Now there are more than 40 representative inheritors, aged 56 on average.

For Zhong, the most remarkable testimony to such efforts was the restoration of three old bridges in Taishun, which are protected at the national level, after super typhoon Meranti almost washed them away in 2016.

In less than a year, 90 percent of their wooden components had been retrieved, and the three bridges had been restored by inheritors, many of whom were Dong's students.

"The restoration was accomplished in a short time, validating efforts in preserving and passing down the traditional craft," says Zhong.

He and his counterparts have also helped bring the bridges onto the global stage.

In 2013, he participated in a seminar about the protection of covered bridges in the United States, and exchanged experiences with his US counterparts.

"Although different in style, the US also boasts a large number of covered bridges and their experience in protecting them can be inspiring for us," he says.

Zhong and his colleagues have built traditional Chinese bridges abroad and have sent models as gifts, introducing their design and the knowledge embodied in their making.

"Wooden arch bridges have a special meaning for someone like me who has grown up by their side. Who doesn't take pride in the beauty of where they are from? It's really meaningful to do something for the treasures of my hometown," he says.

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## Luojiaba Site Museum showcases Ba culture in all its glory

By HUANG ZHILING and PENG CHAO in Dazhou, Sichuan huangzhiling@chinadaily.com.cn

Though not easy to access, the Luojiaba Site Museum in Xuanhan, a county under the administration of Dazhou in the easternmost part of Sichuan province, ushers in visitors from different parts of the country during the Spring Festival holiday.

Luojiaba is located in the mountainous Puguang town in Xuanhan whose natural scenery is breathtaking. In March 1996, the then State Administration of Cultural Heritage approved the excavation of ancient tombs there.

From 1999 to 2023, the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology carried out

eight excavations, cleaned up more than 250 tombs belonging to the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770-256 BC) and unearthed more than 3,000 cultural relics.

In 2001, the archaeological excavation site known as the Luojiaba Ruins was included in China's fifth batch of key cultural relics protection units.

The site has a total protection area of about 1.2 million square meters. Of this, the core area is about 700,000 sq m.

"It is one of the country's largest and best-preserved Ba sites with the richest cultural connotation," Wang Yi, archaeologist and former head of the Sichuan Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration, says.

As the country's first special museum of Ba culture, the Luojiaba

Site Museum has an exhibition area of about 3,000 sq m, displaying the results of the eight archaeological excavations in the Luojiaba Ruins.

The museum exhibits more than 500 exquisite cultural relics including bronze, jade, pottery and stone tools.

A bronze kettle with hunting patterns and a bronze seal with 11 symbols, such as a star, moon and mountains, are some of the most precious exhibits.

"The Luojiaba Ruins has witnessed the excavation of more than 20 bronze seals with more than 200 symbols," says Chen Weidong, a researcher with the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

Bronze weaponry, such as arrowheads, spears and dagger-axes with

tiger patterns, are very impressive, justifying records that Ba soldiers were very brave, Chen adds.

When King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-256 BC) fought a decisive battle to defeat Di Xin, the last king of the Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC), Ba soldiers were with the former, according to *Huayang Guozhi* (The History of Huayang), a local chronicle completed in 354 AD that records the history, geography and people of Southwest China.

In remote antiquity, tribes of an ethnic group called Ba lived around the Daba Mountains and Wushan Mountains in today's eastern Sichuan, Chongqing municipality and western Hubei province.

They gradually left the mountains, fanning out in different areas

A bronze vessel (left) and another with hunting patterns. PHOTOS BY LIU LANYING / FOR CHINA DAILY



and forming branches of the Ba people. The Ba civilization dates back thousands of years when Baihu, a branch of the Ba people, founded the Ba state and had its capital in Jiangzhou, which is today's Chongqing. In

316 BC, after the state of Qin conquered the Ba state, the community's culture began to ebb.

For Ma Yueyuan, a visitor from Chengdu, Sichuan, the museum provides good insight into the past.

## LIFESHANGHAI

## Park waves wand into a wizardly wonder

Harry Potter will replace popular spot where many residents' fondest memories remain, **Zheng Zheng** reports.

In a significant development that bridges nostalgia with entertainment, China's first Harry Potter Studio Tour will transform the four-decade-old Shanghai Jinjiang Action Park.

The announcement was jointly made by Jin Jiang International Holdings Co Ltd and Warner Bros Discovery Global Experiences on Feb 12, revealing their intention to develop the Warner Bros Studio Tour Shanghai — The Making of Harry Potter, which is awaiting final regulatory approval.

Scheduled to open in 2027, the attraction will cover approximately 53,000 square meters in Shanghai's Minhang district, and will have both indoor and outdoor areas, with visits expected to take half a day to explore the offerings. A landscaped park area will be set in front for visitors and the public, according to the district information office.

From initial discussions in November 2023 to a formalized agreement in January, the project has been fast-tracked, with construction primed to commence in late 2025 following the park's closure on Jan 26 for renovations.

Distinct from Beijing Universal Studios, which features Harry Potter as one component of a larger theme park with rides, the Shanghai facility will focus exclusively on the behind-the-scenes filmmaking that brought British author J.K. Rowling's seven-volume fantasy novel series to life.

Visitors will be able to explore famous sets, view authentic costumes and props, and interact in film scenes in ways that blend traditional storytelling with modern technology.

The attraction will include Chinese cultural elements and feature digital interactive experience facilities, creating a unique experience that differs from its counterparts in London and Tokyo, says the district information office.

The Studio Tour will operate on a reservation-only system, with 90 percent of the experience taking place indoors. Ticket prices will be comparable to similar attractions in the United Kingdom and Japan currently ranging from \$42 to \$59.

"This isn't just another theme park. It is an immersive journey into the craft of movie-making. Visitors will experience the Harry Potter franchise enhanced by cutting-edge technology including AR and VR elements," says Lin Huanjie, director of the Institute for Theme Park Studies in China, underscoring its characteristics.

For many Shanghai residents, the transformation of Jinjiang Action Park evokes mixed emotions, as many have grown up visiting the



park since its opening in 1984. The pioneer of professional amusement facilities in Shanghai peaked in 1995 with over 2.3 million visitors that year, according to records.

Its iconic Ferris wheel, the first gigantic Ferris wheel in China, stands 108 meters tall and boasts 63 cabins, became a dream destination for many residents since its opening in May 2002.

On Jan 25, the park's last operational day before closing for renovations, thousands of residents flocked to the park to relive cherished memories, with long queues

forming for the Ferris wheel, which remained the park's most popular attraction.

"I remember my first visit to Jinjiang Action Park as a primary school student about 40 years ago," recalls Shanghai resident Wang Ming. "I was too excited to sleep the night before. There wasn't even a subway then. The park represented pure joy for an entire generation of children."

Huang Li has lived near the park for over 20 years and shares her memories: "The Ferris wheel in Jinjiang Action Park has been like a beacon guiding me home. Whenever

I'm walking from anywhere in the city, seeing its distant glow always means I am almost home."

While most of the original attractions will be removed, the park's hotel and Ferris wheel will be preserved and renovated, with plans for a new 118-meter wheel designed independently with a Harry Potter theme pending approval.

The development extends beyond entertainment, incorporating infrastructure improvements that include underground parking facilities, landscaped public spaces, and themed dining and accommodation options.



**Clockwise from left:** The iconic Ferris wheel, the first gigantic Ferris wheel in China, stands 108 meters tall and has 63 cabins. A file photo of a young passenger stepping down from a cabin. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY China's first Harry Potter Studio Tour will transform the four-decade-old Jinjiang Action Park. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A bird's eye view of Shanghai Jinjiang Action Park in 2002. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

"This project will help boost regional development," Lin says. "Beyond immediate tourism benefits, significant positive impact is anticipated in the transportation, hospitality, retail, and dining sectors."

Lin anticipates a great number of visitors given Harry Potter's strong domestic and international appeal, which will enhance the city's inbound tourism market. "This will likely attract additional international cultural attractions to Shanghai, reinforcing the city's position as a global entertainment destination."

This development will add to Shanghai's impressive portfolio of attractions, including the Shanghai Disney Resort, Shanghai Haichang Ocean Park, Shanghai Happy Valley, the upcoming Legoland Shanghai Resort, and the Peppa Pig theme park, notes Lin.

"The location and unique offerings, as opposed to traditional rides, are expected to complement rather than compete with existing entertainment venues," he says.

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## Spin-off of classic tale stages nationwide tour

By ZHANG KUN

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*Journey to the West*, China's most famous story of pilgrimage, has a new spin-off theater production on tour nationwide.

*The Annoyance of the Gods*, based on the book of the same title by Ma Boyong, the pen name of Ma Li, premiered in Shanghai before Spring Festival, winning box-office success and critical acclaim. The stage version will debut its national tour with two performances on March 4 to 5 at the Wuxi Grand Theatre in East China's Jiangsu province.

One of the most celebrated Chinese literary classics, *Journey to the West* was written by Wu Cheng'en in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It is loosely based on Buddhist monk Xuanzang (602-664) and his pilgrimage to India. Wu's novel features Xuanzang and his disciples possessing magical talents. The story follows their encounters with demons and the supernatural along the way.

In Ma's 45, widely popular for his fantasy books that often integrate



**Left:** A scene from the theater production *The Annoyance of the Gods*. **Right:** Ma Boyong (left), author of the novel, and Liu Tianchi (middle), director of the theater production at the premiere, in Shanghai on Jan 15. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ancient Chinese culture and literary classics, is best known for his reinterpretation of major historical events focusing on small incidents and unknown characters. *The Annoyance of the Gods* was published in 2023 and is recognized as one of the Ma's most important works.

In Ma's novel, Xuanzang's pilgrimage is designed by the heavenly

court, to promote him to deity ranking. The story's hero is Li Changgeng, who is known in Chinese folklore as a Taoist deity. Li is in charge of the planet Venus, which is known in mythology as Jin Xing, meaning "the gold star."

In the novel, Li is a mid-level deity responsible for planning and executing Xuanzang's adventures. The story portrays the heavenly



court as a corporate-like mechanism filled with office politics, peer pressure, moral dilemmas and other challenges faced by modern office workers.

The theater adaptation is directed by Liu Tianchi, a versatile theater artist who has been an actor, director, performance coach, and associate professor at The Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. "Even

deities and immortals are not free of trouble and contradiction. I hope the audience finds confidence in solving their everyday problems," she says.

Liu assembled a versatile cast and brought together actors of diverse backgrounds, including dancers and Peking Opera performers, to spark new expressions and chemistry that best interpret the

story's color, richness and depth, and to resonate with audiences.

Zu Feng, the actor playing protagonist Li Changgeng, read the digital manuscript of the book before it was published and was immediately attracted to Ma's writing.

"I saw in it the potential for a good theatrical production," Zu told the media before the premiere in Shanghai in January. "Since our childhoods, we have been familiar with the stories in *Journey to the West*; and Ma created a new world behind the classical tale in such a masterful way that readers can relate to the story," he says.

While Zu is a veteran actor in theater, TV and movies, Liu Yang, a stand-up comedian and social media influencer, plays another lead role. This is his first time playing a lead role in a theater production.

After the shows in Wuxi, the production will tour through the end of May to Hangzhou, Wenzhou and Ningbo in Zhejiang province, Beijing, Nanjing and Suzhou in Jiangsu province, Chongqing, Chengdu in Sichuan province, and Zhuhai in Guangdong province.

Editor's note: China Daily is publishing a series illustrating the country's efforts to achieve its carbon peak and carbon neutrality goals.

### CHINA'S LOW-CARBON JOURNEY

# Old turbines remade as robust goods

Ningxia company embraces circular economy to recycle retired resources

By HOU LIQIANG in Beijing and HU DONGMEI in Yinchuan

With a designed life span of roughly 20 to 25 years, many wind turbines in China are on the cusp of being decommissioned and replaced with newer, more powerful and more efficient models. However, the question of what to do with these retired power generators in a green and sustainable way remains a challenge.

In Yinchuan, capital of Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region, a groundbreaking production line is transforming decommissioned wind turbine blades into robust products, tackling the global challenge, promoting the circular economy and driving economic growth.

The facility, employing a physical process that involves crushing turbine blades before compacting them into logistics pallets and building formwork is set to be fully operational by the end of the year, and will be able to recycle 30,000 metric tons of turbine blades annually.

The project, launched by Ningxia Zhonghong New Materials Technology, has attracted 100 million yuan (\$13.6 million) in investment, with 30 percent allocated to the initial phase, said Ma Yuhu, general manager of the company.

Launched last year in alignment with the national strategy to enhance the circular economy and to combat the escalating recycling demands posed by the rapid expansion of wind energy, the project will play a pivotal role in addressing these pressing industry challenges.

"After being decommissioned, turbine blades, crucial components of wind energy equipment, pose a management challenge due to their substantial size and distinctive materials," he said.

Turbine blades, ranging in length from 50 to over 100 meters, are typically made from composite materials such as fiberglass and carbon fiber, which are strong and lightweight. The complex composition of these materials makes it challenging to separate and recycle them effectively.

Ma said that in Europe and the United States, most blades are disposed of via landfill, incineration, or extended storage, resulting in notable negative environmental impacts.

"China is also beginning to grapple with similar issues," he said. China began promoting large-scale wind energy development around the new millennium, so many turbines are coming up to retirement, he added.

According to the Chinese Wind Energy Association, the installed capacity of decommissioned wind turbines nationwide reached about 100,000 kilowatts in 2023, and is projected to increase to 500,000 kilowatts this year.

By 2030, wind turbines capable of generating a total of 44.7 million kilowatts will have reached the

end of their operational life, resulting in 947,900 tons of potential solid waste.

Ma explained that after more than a year of efforts to analyze the composition of materials and conduct extensive experiments, his company determined that decommissioned wind turbine blades could be repurposed as raw materials for various products.

He highlighted that by harnessing the expertise of domestic research institutes specializing in new materials and drawing on its own innovative research, the company developed a patented technology to convert retired wind turbine blades into products such as pallets and building formwork.

Tests show that these products demonstrate strong load-bearing capacity, and excellent waterproofing and weather resistance, transforming retired wind turbine blades from waste into treasure, the general manager said.

"A key challenge we currently face is the insufficient volume of retired blades, which falls short of meeting our production demands, resulting in low output and overall profits that are less than satisfactory," he said.

The company's production line features an advanced dust removal system to minimize environmental impacts, Ma said, adding that no wastewater is generated throughout the entire production process.

"This technological breakthrough has not only addressed challenges in processing retired wind turbine blades, but also paved the way for new economic growth opportunities for businesses," he added.

According to the Ningxia Development and Reform Commission, the installed capacity of wind power in the region is about 15.1 million kilowatts, almost 3 percent of which has been in service for more than 20 years.

Emphasizing the increasing urgency, the demand for recycling wind and solar power generation facilities in Ningxia and across Northwest China will intensify as the service life of these facilities lengthens, it said, responding to questions from China Daily.

This trend is particularly pronounced due to the substantial deployment of renewable energy facilities in the region, it said.

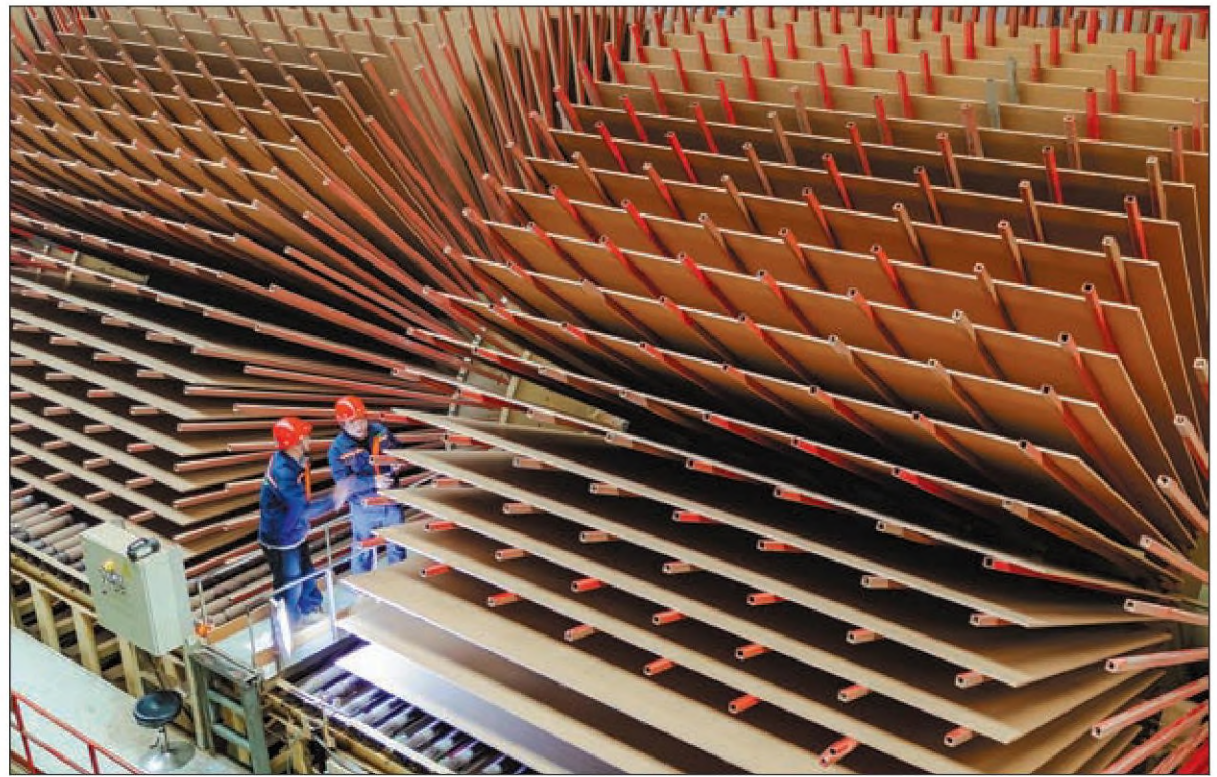
Ma said his company, as planned when it was established, will not only target retired turbine blades in Ningxia, but also its neighboring regions of the Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous regions and Gansu province, all of which are major wind power generators.

"With the upgrading of wind power generation technologies and facilities, a large amount of decommissioned wind turbine blades will be generated in these regions," Ma said.

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Materials from a decommissioned wind turbine are processed for recycling at a factory in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Workers take measurements of boards made from straw at a production line of Wanhua Hexiang Board in Hubei province, on Dec 2. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Straw waste turned into green building materials

By HOU LIQIANG in Beijing and LIU KUN in Wuhan

Crop straw in many rural areas across China used to be commonly used for cooking or feeding livestock. However, with the decline in rural populations and the increasing prevalence of gas stoves and mechanization in rural China, straw has been relegated to waste.

However, in Jingmen, Hubei province, this waste has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from mere refuse into a valuable resource. Not only has it facilitated carbon emission reduction, but it has also played a pivotal role in fostering economic growth.

Straw remnants have been ingeniously repurposed into green materials used in the production of furniture.

At the foot of Shengjing Mountain in Jingmen's Dongbao district lie 32 cottages of various shapes and sizes. The builder of the cottages claims all materials used in their construction are "grown from the earth".

At first glance, all appear as if these cottages are built with standard materials, but on closer inspection

of the floor, for example, the structure resembles a three-layer "sandwich".

"These are eco-friendly straw boards, and they are primarily made from agricultural and forestry residues," said Yang Zhijian, general manager of Wanhua Hexiang Board (Jingmen) Co, the builder of the cottages.

The middle layer is made from tree branches and the outer two are from straw, which work well as natural flame retardants and moisture barriers, he said.

Jin Peng, assistant to the chairman of the company, said that using straw in board manufacturing is cost-effective and contributes to reduced carbon emissions.

On average, the company uses 600,000 to 700,000 metric tons of straw a year, he said. Compared with other types of agricultural and forestry residues, the price per ton of straw is about 40 yuan (\$5.49) cheaper.

Quoting a calculation by the Guangzhou Institute of Energy Conversion of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, he said the company can annually reduce equivalent green-

house gas emissions by 384,700 tons of carbon dioxide.

He said the company, launched in 2016, can now produce 350,000 cubic meters of boards for furniture manufacturing each year.

Wanhua Hexiang is just one of 60 companies that compose a complete industrial chain transforming straw into custom-made furniture in Dongbao's agricultural industrial park.

The annual output value of the park has reached almost 8 billion yuan, according to the local government.

Jin said the local government has played a crucial role in setting up a robust straw collection system to guarantee a steady supply to the industrial park.

With the establishment of four township-level centers and 20 village-level collection points, Jin highlighted that "the Dongbao district government has been diligently working toward creating a comprehensive straw collection and storage system that encompasses all areas within its jurisdiction".

"This initiative has effectively tackled all obstacles related to straw

collection and storage," he said.

With the support of the Dongbao district government, the Chusheng Agricultural Machinery Service Cooperative was established in 2017 in Ziling township. To date, the cooperative has received government subsidies totaling 710,000 yuan, most of which are for the construction of storage facilities and the procurement of machinery, including balers, according to Zhao Tianzhu, the director of the cooperative.

The cooperative serves over 1,000 households collectively owning nearly 270 hectares of farmland. The price of straw was between 400 and 500 yuan per ton last year, Zhao said.

"Previously considered waste, straw was crushed and returned to the field by farmers... It is now recognized for its economic benefits and potential to boost farmers' income," he said, adding the straw collection business generated over 500,000 yuan in income for the cooperative, machinery operators and farmers last year.

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## Coal mining gas carbon credits aim to cut emissions

By HOU LIQIANG houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

The Ministry of Ecology and Environment has unveiled two new carbon crediting methodologies for the China Certified Emission Reduction program, increasing the number of methodologies under the voluntary mechanism that allows participants to earn tradeable carbon credits to six.

The latest methodologies are for projects that utilize low-density coal mine gas and adopt energy-efficient streetlights in highway tunnels, according to a media release from the ministry in early January.

In October 2023, the ministry made public four CCER methodologies for afforestation, solar thermal power, offshore wind power and mangrove vegetation creation.

Under China's carbon trading mechanism, the world's largest, companies are allowed to purchase CCER credits to offset 5 percent of the emissions they need to buy allowances for. According to the ministry, 189 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emission allowances were traded in the country's carbon trading market last year for 18.1 billion yuan (\$2.5 billion).

Jointly compiled by the ministry, the National Energy Administration and the National Mine Safety Administration, the CCER concerning coal mine gas aims to boost its utilization with methane concentration below 8 percent.

As the second most abundant global man-made greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide, methane has more than 80 times the warming power of CO<sub>2</sub> during the first 20 years it reaches the atmosphere.

Liu Wenge, deputy head of the Ministry of Emergency Management's Information Institute, said the utilization of low-density coal mine gas is an effective way to reduce methane emissions and enhance safety production in the coal mining sector. He said it will also increase clean energy supply and promote the realization of the country's climate targets.

China aims to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and realize carbon neutrality before 2060.

Coal mining is a primary anthropogenic source of methane emissions in China, Liu was quoted as saying in a media release from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. The sector contributed methane emissions equivalent to 530 million tons of carbon dioxide in 2018, representing 39.3 percent of the country's total methane emissions and 4.5 percent of its total greenhouse gas emissions.

Currently in China, coal mine gas with concentrations exceeding 8 percent has been well utilized for various purposes. While it can all be used for electricity generation, gas with concentrations surpassing 30 percent can also be utilized for both domestic and industrial applications, including producing compressed natural gas, according to Liu.

The expert emphasized that the utilization rate of coal mine gas in China remains low, primarily due to the inadequate consumption of low-density coal mine gas.

In 2020, 12.8 billion cubic meters of coal mine gas was extracted across the country, with only about 5.7 billion cubic meters, or less than 45 percent, utilized, he said.

Low-density coal mine gas exhibits

“With the implementation of this methodology, there will be a positive incentive for tunnel owners, promoting the wider application of relevant technologies.”

Zhu Liwei, researcher at the Ministry of Transport's Research Institute of Highways

a notably low utilization rate and accounts for a significant portion of the total. This aspect stands as a key factor necessitating the enhancement of coal mine gas utilization in China, Liu said.

The technology for utilizing coal mine gas with methane concentrations below 8 percent is still in the demonstration or industrial trial stage. "Related projects are still in the early stages of industrial development, with high investment costs and poor economic viability," he said, citing an unnamed project at a coal mine in Shanxi province that simultaneously generates both electric power and heat with low-density gas.

With a total investment of 110 million yuan, the heat-power cogeneration project can generate an annual revenue of 20.19 million yuan but its annual operating cost amounts to 10.8 million yuan, he said. This results in a return on investment of only 4.55 percent.

He highlighted the role of the

CCER mechanism in incentivizing the utilization of the low-density coal mine gas, also citing the project as an example.

The project can result in an annual emission reduction of 180,000 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, the price of which stands at 100 yuan per ton. By selling the carbon credits, the return on investment of the project can reach roughly 10 percent.

Zhu Liwei, a researcher at the Ministry of Transport's Research Institute of Highways, praised the introduction of the new carbon crediting methodology for energy-efficient streetlights in highway tunnels, noting that this initiative will help advance the sustainable operation of these tunnels.

His calculation based on publicly available data shows that around 10.67 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity is consumed to support the operation of highway tunnels across the country each year, with lighting accounting for approximately 60 to 80 percent of the consumption.

He mentioned that currently, fewer than 10 percent of tunnels nationwide are equipped with lighting systems that meet the criteria for implementing the CCER methodology, which entails the use of high-efficiency lighting fixtures and intelligent lighting control technologies.

"With the implementation of this methodology, there will be a positive incentive for tunnel owners, promoting the wider application of relevant technologies," he said.

Zhu said the methodology can potentially reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 200,000 tons per year at its current stage. By 2030, the emissions it could help reduce could increase to 800,000 tons.