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CHINA DAILY

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Germany's conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz, accompanied by his wife Charlotte Merz, speaks to the media on Sunday in Berlin, Germany, after provisional results handed him victory in the country's national elections. FABRIZIO BENSCH / REUTERS

Germany's Merz calls for unity in Europe after election win

By JULIAN SHEA and ZHENG WANYIN in London

Relations between Europe and the United States are on course for a major reset following the conclusion of the national elections in Germany. Provisional results declared on Sunday indicated that Friedrich Merz, leader of the country's conservative opposition, will be the next chancellor, with his center-right Union parties — an alliance of the Christian Democratic Union and the Christian Social Union — winning 208 seats in the 630-seat German Bundestag, or national parliament. Merz, who said he hopes to have a coalition government in place by Easter, pledged "independence" from the US and underscored that his "absolute priority" would be "to create unity in Europe."

In a televised discussion on Sunday night, Merz said, "It is clear that this (the US) government does not care much about the fate of Europe." He added that strengthening Europe as quickly as possible is a priority, "so that we can achieve real independence from the US, step by step." Merz has one realistic option to form a government — a coalition with outgoing German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's center-left Social Dem-

China is glad to see Germany and the European Union play an important role in global affairs. ... and is ready to work with Germany and the EU to continue contributing to world peace and prosperity."

Lin Jian, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman

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ocratic Party. The Union parties and their center-left rival have a combined 328 seats in parliament.

Merz has already ruled out a coalition with the Alternative for Germany, or AfD, which is now the country's second-largest party with 152 seats.

While the CDU/CSU won 28.6 percent of the vote share, the AfD

received 20.8 percent and the SPD 16.4 percent.

European leaders and politicians were quick to congratulate Merz on his win, with French President Emmanuel Macron saying he looked forward to jointly working with the new German chancellor for a "strong and sovereign Europe."

"In this period of uncertainty, we are united to face the great challenges of the world and of our continent," Macron posted on X.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte congratulated Merz on his victory. "Looking forward to working with you in this crucial moment for our shared security," Rutte wrote on X. "It's vital that Europe step up on defense spending and your leadership will be key."

Lin Jian, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said that China stands ready to work with the new German federal government to consolidate and grow the China-Germany comprehensive strategic partnership.

"China is glad to see Germany and the European Union play an important role in global affairs. It supports the integration of Europe and the strategic independence of the EU, and is ready to work with Germany and the EU to continue contributing to world peace and prosperity," Lin added.

US President Donald Trump's comment on the German election results neither mentioned Merz nor his party by name. Calling the CDU/CSU "the Conservative Party in Germany", Trump wrote on his social media, "Much like the USA, the people of Germany got tired of the no common sense agenda ... that has prevailed for so many years."

AFD leader Alice Weidel hailed her party's best-ever electoral performance, and said she had received personal congratulations from Trump ally Elon Musk. "We're the power in Germany that is internationally recognized," she added.

Wolfgang Roehr, former German consul general in Shanghai and currently advisory professor at Tongji University, told China Daily that even in a country used to coalition governments, building one may be a big challenge for Merz.

Radhika Desai, a professor in the department of political studies at the University of Manitoba in Canada, said the elections reflected the "multilevel crisis" facing Germany.

Zhang Yunbi in Beijing contributed to this story.

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China, Russia reaffirm their close relations

Xi reiterates Beijing's position on Ukraine crisis; Moscow's positive efforts welcomed

By CAO DESHENG caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin have reiterated the long-term and strategic nature of bilateral ties, pledging that China-Russia relations will not be disrupted by external factors or any third party.

The two presidents made the statement on Monday during a telephone conversation, their second interaction within a month following a video meeting on Jan 21.

Putin provided an update on the latest interactions between Russia and the United States, as well as Russia's principled stance on the Ukraine crisis. He emphasized Moscow's commitment to addressing the root causes of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and achieving a sustainable and lasting peace.

Xi reaffirmed China's position on resolving the Ukraine crisis, saying that the Group of Friends for Peace on the Ukraine crisis, which was established in September by China and Brazil along with some other countries of the Global South, has been fostering an atmosphere and conditions for the political settlement of the crisis.

China is glad to see Russia and relevant parties make positive efforts to defuse the Ukraine crisis, he said.

Monday marked the third anniversary of the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

High-level delegations from Russia and the US held talks on the Ukraine crisis in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Feb 18. Both sides agreed to appoint special representatives to continue the talks between the two countries.

Speaking at a regular news conference on Monday, Foreign Min-

istry spokesman Lin Jian said, "Since the full escalation of the Ukraine crisis, China has stayed in communication with relevant parties and been committed to building consensus for ending the conflict and paving the way for peace talks."

China will always stand firmly on the side of peace, uphold an objective and fair position and continue to work with the international community to play a constructive role in advancing political settlement of the crisis, Lin said.

On bilateral ties, Xi told Putin that history and reality have shown that China and Russia are good neighbors that cannot be moved away from each other, and true friends who share weal and woe, support each other and pursue common development.

The China-Russia relationship enjoys strong internal driving forces and unique strategic value, and it does not target any third party, nor would it be influenced by any third party, Xi noted.

He emphasized that the development strategies and foreign policies of both countries are long-term.

No matter how the international landscape changes, the relationship between China and Russia will move forward at its own pace, contribute to their respective development and revitalization, and inject stability and positive energy into international relations, he added.

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Festive vibes



Tibetan people hold Buddha statues as they walk near the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, on Monday, before the Tibetan New Year which falls on Friday and celebrations for which continue for 15 days. LI LIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

OLDER STUDENTS ENROLL OVERSEAS SEEKING KNOWLEDGE

Middle-aged, senior Chinese keen to face fresh challenges at foreign universities

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

Wang Xiaoxi, 57, retired in 2023, and after submitting a number of applications, received an offer last year from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens to join a bachelor's degree program.

In-depth

She is now majoring in ancient Greece's archaeology, history and literature, an undergraduate program taught entirely in English,

and undertaking additional courses in Modern Greek, Greek, and Latin.

Wang is one of the growing number of middle-aged and older Chinese choosing to pursue studies overseas in an effort to enrich their lives.

When she retired two years ago, one of her children was in college,

and the other had begun working. "My time is now finally all my own," she said.

One day, she stumbled across an online notice about the Greek university's program, which reminded her of her undergraduate thesis more than 30 years ago.

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DeepSeek a wake-up call for global AI industry

In the ever-intensifying global race for artificial intelligence supremacy, the United States has long been the dominant force. But anyone still operating under the assumption that China is merely playing catch-up needs to wake up. China isn't just competing; it is innovating, and it is doing so in ways that could fundamentally reshape the global AI landscape.

The latest example is DeepSeek, a Chinese AI startup that has achieved something remarkable — high-per-

formance AI with dramatically lower costs and resource consumption.

DeepSeek's breakthrough should be a wake-up call for those who continue to dismiss China's technological rise as derivative or State-subsidized mimicry. What this company has accomplished is more than just a technical feat; it is an alternative blueprint for the future of AI, one that is more efficient, open and sustainable. If the US and the rest of the world fail to acknowledge and engage with this

kind of progress, they risk being left behind.

For many years, much of the AI world has revolved around a simple equation: more money plus more computing power equals better AI. The largest US tech firms such as Google, OpenAI and Meta have thrown billions of dollars into training increasingly powerful models on massive clusters of high-end graphics processing units or GPUs. It is a brute-force approach that has worked, but it also might be unsus-

tainable both economically and environmentally.

Enter DeepSeek. This startup, founded in 2023, has taken a different path. Instead of relying on the usual hardware arms race, DeepSeek optimizes its software and algorithms to reduce computational needs. Earlier this year, the company unveiled DeepSeek-R1, a cutting-edge AI model trained on just 2,048 Nvidia H800 GPUs, a fraction of what companies like OpenAI use. The cost? Only \$5.6

WORLD WATCH

By Denis Simon

million. Compare that to the over \$100 million routinely spent by the leading US companies, and the implications become clear: China is not just building AI capability, rather it is doing it in a smarter way.

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Studies: Lifelong learners defy age barriers

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Titled "Gods, humans and their fates", it did not earn Wang a high mark, as one of her professors commented that the topic was too broad, adding that the subject would require at least another 30 years of life experience to interpret better.

Wang has always remembered the comment. Even as she moved around to teach in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, Shanghai and Singapore over the years, she carried her thesis with her.

"So when I saw the admission information from the foreign university, an idea struck me: If I could pursue the major, could I possibly complete that thesis better than I did back then?" she recalled.

"I shocked myself when I came up with the idea to apply to study abroad. It would be extremely challenging for me, as I'm not good at English, let alone Greek and Latin," she said.

"But on second thought, I figured if I didn't try it, I'd never know," she added. "And, I wanted to study abroad at the beginning of the second half of my life."

To her surprise, her family respected her decision and supported her in fulfilling her old dream. Considering her age and health, Wang's daughter, who is able to work remotely, accompanied her mother to Greece to take care of her for one year.

'Luckier girl'

Du Liping's decision to study abroad was suggested by her daughter Huo Huo. After working for more than three decades at a bank in her hometown of Zhengzhou, Henan province, Du, 53, was about to retire.

"I was worried my mom might feel aimless and uncomfortable after stepping away from her busy job, so I encouraged her to come to France to find something new to learn," said Huo Huo, 26, who has studied in France for nine years.

"Studying abroad has enriched my life. Now that my mom has the time, I want her to experience this herself, and we can also look after each other overseas," Huo Huo said.

She added that having something to do and learning would keep her mother's brain active and help prevent Alzheimer's disease.

Du took her daughter's advice and kicked off her journey to France in October. She is studying French at a language school in Paris.

Over the past few months, Du has risen before dawn and taken freshly baked bread that she buys on the way to school for her classmates. Her fellow students are from all over the world.

"This is something I would never have imagined," Du said.

"From working and doing household chores, it suddenly feels like I'm returning to my twenties, but not the impoverished version of my twenties. Instead, it's more like the twenties of a completely new, luckier girl with more life experience," she added.

More challenges

Both Wang and Du said that studying at an older age is even more of a challenge, not only in terms of language and memory function, but also in using educational tools and talking with younger classmates.

Before the semester started, Wang tried to familiarize herself with multiple electronic devices, including a voice recorder, iPad and Kindle reader, to assist her in



ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

studying. "But I was fumbling with which buttons to press to turn them on and how to lower the volume," she said.

"I could only type with two fingers, and I couldn't type fast enough to keep up with the teachers talking."

While other classmates were typing quickly on their laptops, she was the only one taking notes with a pen.

On campus, she is called "Auntie Wang" or even "Granny Wang". Some students' behavior brings back memories of her teaching days in China.

"A young man who likes playing video games with others after class always reminds me of my own son — he used to be a teenager addicted to the internet," she recalled. "When I see these boys, I often wonder if I should talk to them and encourage them to join group activities."

Du said she had to make several times the effort on studying than she did when she was young, and the language barrier sometimes makes it hard to communicate with classmates.

"Sometimes I can't remember the information, even though the teacher has explained it many times," Du said. "What's worse is that Huo Huo helped me review the content, but I didn't pass the exam, so I had to start all over again."

'Go for it'

But Du has not given up. She relishes these challenges, and sees them as gifts for someone over age 50.

"Whether I pass the language exam or which university I choose is not that important. It's the experience that truly matters," she said.

"The most wonderful phase of a person's life is no longer 15 to 25, the traditionally emphasized years, but it is an entire life full of infinite possibilities," she said.

"Every stage of life can be lived brilliantly."

She added that having the time to study abroad in her fifties makes her feel unique and surrounded by love. "My life is extremely rewarding," she said.

For energetic, self-motivated and well-educated Wang, pursuing studies overseas at this stage of life is not necessarily about obtaining a degree.

The experience provides her with a new opportunity to explore the world, chase the dreams of her youth and get to better understand herself.

"When I was young, I would feel really down if I didn't do well in exams. But now, I'm not upset, nor do I force myself to do anything," she said.

The program she is studying can be completed in a maximum of six years.

"If I can graduate on time, that would be great. But my principle for this overseas study is to do my best," she said. "Go for it, and enjoy it."

For now, she has one small goal. When her friends visited Greece, she accompanied them to an archaeological museum, designed tour routes and explained some history to them.

"I realized that I enjoy doing this, and it is related to what I'm studying now," she said.

"If I can graduate successfully and obtain the museum work certificate, maybe I can become a cultural ambassador. I think this is the motivation for my current studies, and it will also make my learning more meaningful and interesting," she added.

Silver travelers' tailored demands a sign of maturing market

By CAO YIN

Silver-haired consumers in China are seeking more than just sightseeing when they travel. They are also looking for enriching experiences that combine travel, learning and interactions, industry insiders and experts said.

Data released by Trip.com, a popular travel portal, showed that reservations on the platform last year by users age 61 to 65 surged 58 percent compared with 2023.

Among tourism products, those integrating learning activities

with sightseeing have been increasingly popular among silver-haired consumers and meet their wider travel demands, Bai Wenxi, vice-chairman of the China Enterprise Capital Union, said in a China City News report.

Combining sightseeing with learning not only suits the pace of life of older people, but also enhances their participation in group activities.

"It is a good way to improve their physical and mental health," he told the paper.

Hong Tao, deputy head of the

China Consumer Economics Society, said in the report that silver-haired study tours and programs are conducive to boosting consumption among senior citizens and contribute to their quality of life and value to society.

Hong Yong, who is from a think tank on digital technology and finance, told the paper: "This also means the tourism market is becoming more refined and specialized, showing that seniors value quality of life more, and prefer experiential travel over just traditional sightseeing of popular

landmarks and attractions."

Schools for senior citizens across the country have organized overseas study tours to offer more opportunities for them to explore the world and have exchanges with foreign peers.

For instance, a college for seniors in Xiangyang, Hubei province, took a number of students to Thailand last year on a six-day study tour.

During the trip, they visited scenic spots, including temples and beaches, but also had Thai language lessons, made handicrafts,

and engaged in cultural exchanges with local residents, according to Hubei Daily.

The college said that it will organize more such tours and take advantage of international tourism resources to help senior students expand their horizons and learn something new, the daily newspaper added.

While praising the pivotal role played by silver-haired consumers in energizing the tourism market, experts said that there is still much work to do in developing tourism products for this demographic.

"It's essential to ensure the safety and comfort of tourism products, taking into account the physical conditions and special needs of elderly travelers," Hong Yong noted, underscoring the importance of medical services and emergency rescue measures for older travelers.

Bai suggested that the country give seniors easier access to tourism bookings online in order to help narrow the digital gap, and encouraged enterprises to provide more user-friendly apps for older people.

TOP NEWS



Members of the United Nations Security Council cast a vote during a council meeting on the third anniversary of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, at UN headquarters in New York on Monday. DAVID DEE DELGADO / REUTERS

UN backs end to Ukraine-Russia conflict

By MINLUZHANG
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The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on Monday proposed by the United States calling for "a swift end to the conflict" between Ukraine and Russia and urging "a lasting peace" as the world observed the third anniversary of the war.

The resolution was approved with 10 votes in favor, none against, and five abstentions from France, Britain, Denmark, Greece and Slovenia. The resolution also mourns the loss of life in the war, without blaming Russia.

"Despite differences in positions, dialogue is always better than confrontation, and peace talks are always preferable to war. China supports all efforts dedicated to peace, including the consensus reached between the US and Russia on initiating peace talks," Fu Cong, China's permanent

representative to the UN, said at the meeting.

"China expects all parties involved, as well as relevant stakeholders, to engage in the peace process at the appropriate time, seeking a fair and lasting resolution that addresses mutual concerns. The goal should be to reach a binding peace agreement that is accepted by all parties," he said.

Fu then emphasized that because the conflict is taking place on European soil, "Europe has a responsibility to contribute to peace." He called on all parties to "jointly address the root causes of the crisis through negotiations and to establish a balanced, effective and sustainable security framework to ensure long-term stability in Europe".

Fu reiterated China's guidance on the Ukraine issue is that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected; the purposes and principles of the UN Charter observed;

the legitimate security concerns of all countries given due regard; and all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of the crisis supported.

Fu noted that China has dispatched special envoys to engage in diplomatic mediation, maintaining contact with all relevant parties, including Russia and Ukraine. He said China also has initiated the "Friends of Peace" group with countries such as Brazil to "build and strengthen momentum for peace".

Earlier Monday, the UN General Assembly also approved two draft resolutions on Ukraine. One resolution, proposed by Ukraine and co-sponsored by European countries, demands an immediate withdrawal of all Russian troops from Ukraine and condemn Russia's role.

It was passed by 93 countries, while 18 opposed, and 65 abstained. Both the US and Russia voted against the resolution.

The US declined to endorse Ukraine's UN resolution, and at the last minute, introduced its own competing version, urging its allies to support it instead. The US resolution was approved by 93 countries, opposed by eight, while 73 abstained.

The vote took place in the 193-member General Assembly, where resolutions are not legally binding but serve as a gauge of global opinion. Seeking stronger backing, the United States pushed for a vote on its proposal in the more influential UN Security Council, where adopted resolutions are binding. China, which holds the council's presidency this month, presided over the voting.

"We expect the international community to foster a favorable environment for the political resolution of the crisis and the General Assembly to play a constructive role in building a consensus for peace among its member states," Fu said at the General Assembly.

Talks: Putin expresses high regard for China

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Putin expressed Russia's high regard for its relationship with China, saying that in the year ahead, his country looks forward to maintaining high-level exchanges with China and deepening practical cooperation.

Putin added that Russia is willing to work with China to jointly commemorate the 80th anniversary of victory in the World Anti-Fascist War and in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

He pointed out that developing relations with China is a strategic choice made by Russia with a view to the long term. It is not an act of expediency, not affected by any temporary incidents, and not subject to interference by external factors, Putin said.

He emphasized that in the current situation, close communication between Russia and China is in keeping with the two countries' comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for the new era, and will send a positive message that Russia and China play a stabilizing role in international affairs.

The phone talks between the two presidents came just four days after the meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Johannesburg, South Africa, on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

AI: Cheaper, more open and efficient tech advancement benefits everyone

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More importantly, DeepSeek has committed to open source much of its technology, a move that stands in sharp contrast to the increasingly closed models developed in the West. This openness potentially fosters more collaboration, accelerates innovation, and democratizes access to AI values that the US tech industry itself once championed.

For too long, the conversation around China's AI progress has been framed in adversarial terms as a driver of geopolitical competition rather than a technological revolution that benefits all of humanity.

But that mindset is limiting and, frankly, outdated. The truth is that China has become an essential player in the global innovation ecosystem, not just as a selective competitor, but as a true contributor.

Consider the broader AI landscape. China has produced some of the most sophisticated AI applications, from Baidu's Ernie model to Huawei's AI-driven chip optimizations. Its researchers regularly publish world-class papers in top AI journals and are invited to speak at major international AI conferences. And its vast domestic market allows for rapid deployment and testing of AI at a scale unmatched anywhere else.

DeepSeek's success is a wonderful example of some important broader trends. By proving that AI breakthroughs do not require endless financial resources, the com-

The future of AI should be a collaborative effort, not a zero-sum game. China is no longer just following in the footsteps of the US; it is carving its own path and, in some ways, potentially leading the way.

pany is challenging the status quo not just in China, but globally. It shows that AI can be more accessible, environmentally friendly and inclusive.

What lies ahead

The knee-jerk reaction from some corners of Washington and Silicon Valley has been to dismiss or downplay DeepSeek's achievements. Many naysayers have already downplayed DeepSeek's approach. That would be a mistake. The US still leads in foundational AI research, but if China continues to innovate at this pace, that US lead could shrink very quickly.

Instead of trying to stifle China's AI progress through restrictions and bans, the smarter move would be to engage with it. There is room for collaboration, particularly in areas where AI poses shared challenges: ethics, safety, bias mitigation and climate impact. DeepSeek's efficiency-first

approach should be seen as an opportunity for AI development everywhere, not just in China.

Moreover, if the US really wants to stay ahead, it needs to rethink its own AI strategy. Realistically, throwing massive resources at bigger, more expensive models is not a viable long-term solution. What DeepSeek has done is optimizing software to do more with less; its approach should inspire similar efforts in AI development in the US.

The AI revolution is not going to be won or lost by a single country. It is too big, too complex and too important for that. The future of AI should be a collaborative effort, not a zero-sum game. China is no longer just following in the footsteps of the US; it is carving its own path and, in some ways, potentially leading the way.

The sooner the rest of the world acknowledges this, the better. AI progress is not about the dominance of one nation over all the others. Ultimately, it is about technological advancement that benefits everyone. If DeepSeek's innovation regarding AI has any lasting meaning, it is that the next phase of AI development will be cheaper, more efficient, and more open. And that is something worth paying attention to for the US and many other countries.

The author is nonresident fellow of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a think tank based in Washington, DC, the United States. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Nation firmly opposes US' restrictions

Ambiguities in policy scope may heighten uncertainty for investors, researcher says

By ZHONG NAN
and ZHANG YUNBI

China is strongly dissatisfied and has lodged solemn protests with the United States after Washington issued the latest restrictions on the two countries' two-way investment.

Washington's tightening of security reviews targeting Chinese investment in the US "is a serious blow to the confidence of Chinese enterprises in investing in the US", and the restrictions will only damage the US' own business environment, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said at a daily news conference on Monday.

China's business community also strongly opposes the restrictions on two-way investment, warning the measures will hinder economic and trade exchanges between industries in the two countries, according to the nation's top foreign trade and investment promotion agency.

The restrictions are listed in the "America First Investment Policy", which was signed on Friday by US President Donald Trump. The policy aims to tighten security reviews and specifically targets investment from China, while also imposing further restrictions on US companies' investment in China.

Imposing restrictions on US investment in China is a deliberate intervention in the independent decision-making of US companies and distorts the investment exchanges between the two countries, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin said.

"By shutting out Chinese companies and the Chinese market, the US will end up hurting its own economic interests and international credibility," he said.

Beijing urges Washington to "abide by international investment and trade rules, respect the laws of market economy, stop politicizing and weaponizing economic and trade issues, and stop undermining China's legitimate right to development", Lin added.

Furthermore, he said, China "will take measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests".

Chinese businesses firmly reject Washington's repeated broadening of the concept of "national security", a spokesperson for the Beijing-based China Council for the Promotion of International Trade said in an online statement on Monday.

The US move will undermine the international economic and trade order, and will disrupt the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains, the statement said.

It also noted that the US is using investment security reviews and other regulatory measures to restrict Chinese enterprises' investment in sectors such as technology, critical infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, energy and raw materials.

Furthermore, the US continues to expand restrictions on outbound US investment in China through economic sanctions, financial audits and other methods, further broadening the scope of restricted indus-

tries, investment types and funding sources, the statement added.

Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics in Beijing, said that with the US adopting an increasingly broad definition of national security, Chinese investors will encounter significant compliance pressures in emerging technology sectors, and ambiguities in policy scope may further heighten uncertainty.

Amid growing investment restrictions from the US and geopolitical tensions in other parts of the world, China issued an action plan last week to stabilize foreign investment in 2025.

The country will support foreign companies' participation in China's new industrialization, with a focus on high-tech fields.

Jens Eskelund, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, said the chamber takes the action plan as a continuation of China's ongoing efforts to improve the business climate for foreign investors.

"We are looking forward to seeing this policy implemented in a way that delivers tangible benefits for our members," Eskelund said.

Zhao Jie, public affairs director for China at Decathlon, a French sports equipment and sportswear manufacturer and retailer, said the action plan will support the company's long-term expansion in the Chinese market. Decathlon plans to expand its number of stores in China over the next three years, with an expected growth of 10 to 20 new locations, Zhao said.

Sally Loh, president for China at Otis Worldwide Corp, a US elevator manufacturer, highlighted that China's latest policies, coupled with its ongoing focus on urban renewal, digital transformation and smart city development, provide a highly conducive environment for multinational corporations.

"We will continue to drive digitalization and harness artificial intelligence solutions across product development, services and operations within the country," she said.

As China continues to push for a more open and stable investment environment, it is actively engaging with global business communities to enrich economic and trade ties.

For example, a business delegation led by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade left China on Monday for a three-day visit to Germany.

The delegation consists of representatives from nearly 30 companies and industry associations, covering industries such as finance, transportation, agriculture, automotive and machinery manufacturing. Its members will meet with senior executives of leading German companies including Bosch, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Wacker Chemie, the CCPIT said in another statement.

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Fruit float



People parade a dragon float made out of durian and other fruits on Sunday during the durian festival "Kenduren Wonosalam" in Wonosalam village of eastern Java island, Indonesia. JUNI KRISWANTO / AFP

CHINA

DeepSeek is reshaping AI industry

Experts say company prompts market players to explore infinite possibilities

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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The rapid rise of DeepSeek, a Chinese artificial intelligence company, is reshaping the AI industry and prompting market players to explore new possibilities, experts said at the 2025 Global Developer Conference, which concluded Sunday.

DeepSeek specializes in large language models, particularly in coding-related AI, and aims to provide high-performance models with efficient training. The company, based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, gained global attention last month after launching its AI reasoning models. The models are fully open source, cheaper to train and perform on par with leading global counterparts.

"I hope not just Chinese AI companies, but other global AI companies learn from what DeepSeek is doing. Starting by open-sourcing your software ... they've made it really financially approachable to build your own language models," said Andrew Aitken, a technical oversight committee member of the Linux Foundation's FINOS Foundation. "They've done that really well, and the rest of the world can learn from that."

Industry experts at the conference expressed admiration for DeepSeek-R1, one of the company's latest AI developments.

"DeepSeek's open-source adoption has set a role model for how AI can benefit everybody," said Gu Ruiquan, product director at Lanyun Technology. "It helps create an ecosystem to build better AI products because everybody can stand on the shoulders of giants."

Gu added that as costs decline, demand for computing power is rising across the industry, creating new opportunities for AI development.

Experts said DeepSeek's open-source approach is driving the growth of similar models, accelerating AI applications across various industries.

"I am extremely excited about the outlook of large models, which can now be developed in a cheaper, faster, better and more efficient way," said Jia Anya, product director at SenseTime.

"The recent breakthroughs in AI indicate that integration can happen more quickly, reasoning can be accelerated with large models, AI capabilities can be further optimized and better AI applications will be developed," Jia said.

Shen Haozhan, an algorithm expert at OM AI Lab, said DeepSeek's success highlights how AI models can be developed at sig-



I hope not just Chinese AI companies, but other global AI companies learn from what DeepSeek is doing."

Andrew Aitken, technical oversight committee member of the Linux Foundation's FINOS Foundation

nificantly lower costs and provides a roadmap for other companies to train their own models.

"I am personally inspired by DeepSeek's open-source strategy. It gives us new research directions beyond conventional methodologies, which is a huge contribution to the open-source community," Shen said.

The 2025 Global Developer Conference, held from Friday through Sunday in Shanghai, was themed "AI Shaping the World, Unlocking Infinite Opportunities."

The event brought together global developers to collaborate, innovate and explore AI applications while promoting commercialization efforts.

"Artificial intelligence will continue to be one of Shanghai's leading industries," said Chen Jie, vice-mayor of Shanghai, during the conference's opening ceremony on Saturday.

Chen noted that under the guidance of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Shanghai has made significant strides in technological innovation, industry-finance cooperation and international partnerships. The city's AI market reached a scale of more than 450 billion yuan (\$62 billion) last year, and it has hosted the World Artificial Intelligence Conference for seven consecutive years and filed 60 large models.

"I'm really impressed with what Shanghai has done around AI. Large corporations are investing in AI, and the government is providing incentives, support and investment to grow the developer community and focus on open source. Shanghai is really positioning itself as a leader in this space," Aitken said.

As open-source AI models continue to evolve, Shanghai will leverage its strengths as a megacity and accelerate efforts to establish itself as an internationally influential AI hub, Chen added.

Li Junfeng contributed to this story.



Penguin parade

Spectators look on as penguins waddle onto the floor at Wanda Square in Daqing, Heilongjiang province, on Sunday. The penguins came from Harbin Polarland in Harbin, Heilongjiang. This year, the theme park will introduce 30 penguins to Daqing and an additional 30 to Qiqihar, a city in western Heilongjiang, to help infuse vitality into the regional culture and tourism industry. LIU GUOXING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hunan bars use of AI to prescribe medicines

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha
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Health authorities in Hunan province have explicitly prohibited the use of artificial intelligence to write prescriptions, requiring all e-prescriptions to originate from physicians certified under the province's medical insurance system.

According to a notice issued recently by the Hunan Healthcare Security Administration, all designated medical institutions must be fully connected to the provincial electronic prescription circulation platform to ensure traceable prescriptions and transparent processes.

The notice also bans internet-based hospitals from using AI-generated prescriptions. Internet hospitals must integrate their systems with the provincial medical insurance electronic prescription center to facilitate prescription transfers, and physicians are required to conduct thorough consultations — either with patients or their families — before issuing prescriptions.

To enhance medication safety, pharmacists must perform a "dual-

review" process. After an initial verification by medical institution pharmacists, retail pharmacists must conduct a second review to confirm the authenticity, appropriateness and compliance of prescriptions.

The policy underscores Hunan's efforts to standardize prescription practices. At the same time, hospitals have increasingly adopted DeepSeek, an advanced AI system, to enhance efficiency in research and administration.

However, the growing role of AI in hospitals has raised public questions about whether patients still need to seek help from doctors when AI can provide detailed medical suggestions.

Three hospitals in Hunan — People's Hospital of Hunan Province, Hunan Chest Hospital and Chenzhou First People's Hospital — have successfully implemented localized deployment of DeepSeek, according to the local media outlet Hunan Daily.

On Feb 16, People's Hospital of Hunan Province integrated DeepSeek with its office automation system, streamlining administrative tasks such as approvals, schedul-

ing and document processing.

As of Friday, DeepSeek has processed 4.27 million requests, with an average of 1,237 active daily users among medical staff, said Lu Xi, deputy director of the hospital's information center. The platform is frequently used for interpreting test results and providing medication guidance, he said.

DeepSeek is also widely used in scientific research, where it assists medical staff in accessing cutting-edge research findings and extracting key information from medical literature, helping to accelerate research processes, Lu said.

In clinical practice, DeepSeek is being used for decision support. At Hunan Chest Hospital, the AI-based "Medical Research Assistant" has helped optimize tubeless thoracic surgeries by providing precise recommendations based on extensive medical knowledge.

Shi Zili, director of the hospital's surgery department, compared DeepSeek to a mentor that helps "correct your homework" and said it has improved clinical accuracy.

The increasing presence of AI in

hospitals has also sparked concerns that it could replace doctors. However, medical professionals emphasize that AI serves as an invaluable assistant rather than a substitute.

AI aids in diagnostics and treatment suggestions, but experienced healthcare providers make the final decisions, considering the unique circumstances and needs of each patient, they said.

He Qing, vice-president of Hunan Chest Hospital, said medicine is not just about knowledge and skills, but also involves humanitarian concerns.

"Doctors need to fully consider patients' conditions and concerns before providing medical advice and support," he said. "In the short term, AI cannot replace doctors, as it can only offer suggestions. Doctors make the final call."

Lu from the People's Hospital of Hunan Province said AI has limits in handling complex cases and providing diagnoses tailored to individual needs. He stressed that the experience, instinct and consideration of individual differences by doctors play a key role in medical decision-making.

Chinese scientists decode 'blueprint' of human brain

By YAN DONGJIE
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Chinese scientists have made a significant leap in understanding the human brain's complex structure, revealing the intrinsic link between genetic characteristics and the organization of neural connections.

A team from the Institute of Automation, part of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, analyzed tens of thousands of brain scans, identifying three primary "axes" within the brain that dictate the positioning of different regions in the cerebral cortex. The researchers further mapped the relationship between these axes and genetic influences.

"In the past, scientists have debated whether brain partitioning is determined by innate genes or shaped by acquired connections. This study provides a groundbreaking answer — genes set up the mac-

ro axes, allowing acquired connections to naturally form the detailed network," said Fan Lingzhong, a researcher at the institute.

The team's findings, published in *Journal of Neuroscience*, suggest that genes provide a foundational blueprint for brain structure, guiding the development of neural networks through spatial gradients.

"It's like finding the blueprint of the brain. Now we can not only understand the blueprint, but also see that there is room for modification," Fan said.

The research identified three dominant topological axes: the dorsal-ventral axis, anterior-posterior axis and medial-lateral axis. These axes align with the distribution patterns of genes during embryonic development, indicating a strong genetic influence on brain organization.

Beyond genes, the researchers

plan to investigate how genes interact and whether environmental factors modify genetic control of brain connections.

"This provides important evidence and insights for understanding changes in the brain during human development, especially in early development, and brings new possibilities for treating brain disorders such as schizophrenia and autism. These disorders are influenced by genetic factors and are characterized by disrupted brain connectivity," Fan said.

The team also discovered a significant shift in these three topological axes at birth, coinciding with the brain's ability to process external stimuli. The switch is delayed in premature infants, offering potential insights into early brain development abnormalities.

"This may help us understand abnormalities in early brain development," he said.

Experts say that understanding brain structure could also advance artificial intelligence, including brain-machine interfaces and brain-like chip designs.

"This is timely work and an important contribution to the field that explores the relationship between underlying genetic gradients and macroscale anatomical wiring," a reviewer said in *Journal of Neuroscience*.

Fan acknowledged that the research raises further questions and emphasized the need for higher-resolution brain imaging and more precise genetic analysis.

"Although this study has made significant discoveries, it also raises more unresolved questions. We will continue to explore using higher-resolution brain imaging technologies and more precise genetic analysis tools, hoping to uncover more mysteries of the human brain," Fan said.

Visit Lushan, other scenic spots for free in Jiangxi

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang
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Lushan Mountain, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Jiangxi province, will waive entrance fees for both domestic and international tourists throughout next month as part of the province's push to attract more visitors with improved services.

The free admission period will run from March 1 to March 31, according to an announcement Friday from the cultural, broadcasting and tourism development committee of Lushan, a county-level city in Jiangxi.

The waiver applies to attractions such as the Lushan Mountain Scenic Area and the Bailudong Academy, also known as the White Deer Grotto Academy, one of ancient China's four great academies. It also

includes the Sandiequan Waterfall, or Three-Step Waterfall, a renowned site praised in the poetry of Tang Dynasty (618-907) writer Li Bai.

Visitors must book tickets online in advance, and only a limited number of motorists will be allowed into core zones that include mandatory pre-reservations, the announcement said.

Lushan Mountain, one of China's first World Heritage Cultural Landscapes and a UNESCO Global Geopark, is a key attraction for tourists visiting Jiangxi.

Since December, when various regions in China, including Jiangxi, implemented a 240-hour visa-free policy for foreign travelers, the number of inbound visitors to the eastern province has increased.

"Thanks to the visa-free policy and various favorable measures, our province's inbound tourism

may reach a new peak this spring," said Yang Yongsheng, director of the inbound department at the Jiangxi Tourism Group International Travel Agency.

During the Spring Festival holiday, the number of reservations made by tourists who planned to visit Jiangxi increased 78 percent year-on-year.

Domestic tourism has also surged, with interprovincial travel becoming a top choice.

According to a report on 2025 Spring Festival tourism released by Trip.com Group, interprovincial travel accounted for 62 percent of reservations made during the holiday, with tourists traveling farther distances. Ticket orders for Jiangxi's scenic spots increased by 21 percent year-on-year, with popular destinations including Lushan Mountain and Tengwang Pavilion

in Nanchang, the report said.

The free admission announcement has sparked discussions on social media, with many users inquiring about ticket reservation methods. A wave of Lushan travel guides has also emerged on platforms such as Xiaohongshu.

"I want to go. I hope I can finally see the mist and rain of Lushan this March," a Xiaohongshu user from Zhejiang province posted.

Following Lushan's announcement, other sightseeing locations in Jiangxi have introduced similar initiatives to boost tourism. The Jinggang Mountains in Ji'an city, one of the first national key scenic spots designated by the State Council in 1982, will offer free admission from March 8 to March 16. Sanqing Mountain in Shangrao city, another UNESCO-listed natural heritage site, will be free to visi-



A blanket of snow envelops the Lushan Mountain Scenic Area in Jiujiang, Jiangxi province, in February, transforming the region into a magical wonderland of ice and snow. CHENG PENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

tors from March 7 to March 9.

Jiangxi's tourism industry saw record-high numbers last year. Both tourist arrivals and revenue reached historic levels, Jiangxi

Governor Ye Jianchun said in a government work report in January, adding that promoting cultural and tourism growth will be a priority this year.

CHINA

Performer captures essence of sleeve dance

Years of devotion and study have led to grace and agility

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha
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Dressed in a red dance skirt and wielding blue water sleeves, Yin Tao's performance was a mesmerizing blend of colors and movements, set to lively music that captivated the audience.

What makes him more special is that the 36-year-old from Changsha, Hunan province, has embraced his passion for dance and the art of cross-dressing to interpret the allure of performance art for 17 years. As the Spring Festival holiday drew to a close on Feb 4, the vibrant atmosphere at the Fire God Palace scenic area in Changsha was palpable. Amid a plethora of captivating performances, Yin's act stood out. Wielding 20-meter-long water sleeves, he moved with the grace of a swan and the agility of a dragon, eliciting thunderous applause from the audience.

Yin sang two songs in a female voice and gave a dance performance. The whole show lasted for almost 20 minutes and the atmosphere was electric. "There were hundreds of people in the audience and the louder they cheered for me, the more excited I became and more determined to give them my best performance," he said.

After he sang the first song, he told the audience that he was a cross-



Yin Tao performs a water sleeve dance at the Fire God Palace scenic area in Changsha, Hunan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

dressing performer singing in his original voice, which brought amazement to the spectators.

As a full-time cross-dressing performer, Yin plays 100 to 200 times every year. After Yin graduated from Ningxiang Normal School in 2007, majoring in dance, he started working for a local dance troupe.

In 2008, at the age of 19, he embarked on his journey of learning

water sleeve dance, driven by a deep love for the art form.

"After I saw people perform the dance, I immediately fell in love with it, instantly captivated by its grace and beauty," he said.

This new art form demanded not only exceptional dance skills but also a nuanced understanding of gender characteristics, which presented a fresh challenge for him. He started to

learn it by himself and practiced several hours every day.

Meanwhile, his path as a cross-dressing performer was not easy. "I guess the biggest obstacle was to overcome my own psychological hurdles. Occasionally, people didn't understand my choice, but I need to find the courage first by myself," he said.

He said he is also lucky to have family support.

The first time he gave a performance, Yin did not tell his parents, who were in the audience. After the show, he removed the costume and left the make-up on. When he moved toward his parents, however, his mother noticed he was the performer. To his surprise, his parents told him that he did a wonderful job, which gave him much confidence, he said.

He noted that despite performing

hundreds of shows a year, his parents always make a point to attend whenever they can, offering their unwavering support.

His wife, a colleague at the dance troupe, is also very supportive.

Yin said his biggest idol is Mei Lanfang, who has significantly advanced the art of cross-dressing in Chinese opera by perfecting the portrayal of female roles, enriching the performance with his exceptional skills and emotional depth, and bringing international recognition to this traditional art form.

Therefore, he chose to learn from Mei to prove his worth through performances. He delved into traditional Chinese opera, studying the subtleties of female roles, including their expressions, movements and emotional portrayals. Adorned in elaborate costumes, he manipulates his water sleeves with a fluidity that ranges from gentle waves to dramatic surges, which blends the elegance of traditional Chinese opera with the dynamism of modern dance.

Each movement of his sleeves is a testament to his passion, and every spin reflects his artistic aspirations.

"The recognition and affection from the audience and my family are my greatest joys and the driving force behind my continuous progress," he said. Yin hopes that through his performances, more people will come to understand and appreciate the art of cross-dressing and the charm of traditional Chinese culture.

"Cross-dressing performance is a beautiful form of art, which allows the beauty of traditional arts to flourish in the modern world," he said.

Yungang Grottoes boosts English language services

By ZHU XINGXIN in Datong, Shanxi and CHEN LIANG

The Yungang Grottoes, a renowned UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site, has seen a steady increase in international visitors following the relaxation and optimization of China's 240-hour visa-free transit policy. To better serve the influx of global tourists, the scenic area administration has enhanced English training for its frontline staff.

"I felt the service at Yungang Grottoes was very attentive. The staff's English explanations helped me understand Chinese culture better," said 26-year-old Anthea Flerianou, a visitor from Greece.

"Visiting here has been incredibly fortunate. My guide's explanations have brought so much insight into Buddhist teachings," she added.

Dating back 1,600 years, the Yungang Grottoes is one of China's largest cave complexes. The site features a blend of artistic elements from

India, Central Asia, Greece and Rome. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001, it stands as a testament to historical cultural exchange.

On Jan 26, the Yungang Research Institute launched an English training program for front-line staff, including tour guides, security personnel, cleaners, ticketing staff and workers at other key positions. This initiative aims to enhance the site's ability to accommodate international visitors.

Hang Kan, director of the institute, emphasized the importance of preserving and promoting the site.

"Yungang Grottoes is a historical chronicle carved in stone. We have a duty to protect, research, exhibit and pass it on," he said.

The training program focuses on practical English skills regarding dining, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping and entertainment. The curriculum integrates real-life scenarios to enhance the

practical application of English, ensuring that front-line staff can engage in basic daily conversations with foreign visitors.

"Besides regular classroom lectures, we arranged on-site interactive activities to make the training more engaging," said Wen Lili, head of the institute's visitor services department.

"We started with basic English vocabulary, designing 45-minute courses to ensure employees of all ages and backgrounds can keep up. Through gradual and consistent learning, we aim to improve our workers' English proficiency and communication skills," Wen said.

Looking ahead, Wen mentioned plans to provide multilingual brochures, signage and audio guides, alongside continued English training sessions. "We aim to organize more diverse and comprehensive English learning activities, continuously enhancing the international service level of the site," she said. "It will inject new vitality into our goal of becoming a globally recognized cultural tourism destination."

After the training, participants returned to their roles with new-found skills. Zhou Hui, a front desk customer service representative, said: "The training gave me a new perspective on the practical use of tourism English. The content was very down-to-earth and useful."

In 2024, Yungang Grottoes welcomed 4.42 million visitors. The scenic area implemented an online real-name reservation system starting Jan 1, eliminating on-site manual ticket sales.

To protect the site and enhance visitor experience, daily visitor capacity is capped at 46,000.

Ma Jingbo contributed to this story.

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A worker (right) guides foreign visitors in a cave at the Yungang Grottoes in Datong, Shanxi province. SONG JIAYE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chinese nurse praised for treating passenger on flight to Ireland

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and CHEN LIANG

Chinese nurse Jia Shuaiqing recently garnered widespread attention in Ireland for her heroic act of saving a passenger on an international flight.

Last month the anonymous passenger, around 50 years old, and her family members traveled to the University of Limerick's Postgraduate Students' Union to meet and express their gratitude to Jia, who is studying there.

"I was deeply moved and very happy to have met her. She helped me with great enthusiasm," the female passenger said.

The incident occurred on Dec 17, on Hainan Airlines flight HU751 from Beijing Capital Airport to Dublin Airport when the passenger collapsed after exiting the restroom. The crew immediately broadcast a call for medical assistance.

At that moment, 34-year-old Jia, a nurse from Fenyang Hospital in Fenyang, Shanxi province, identified herself as a medical professional and rushed to the passenger's aid. "I was resting in the last row and heard the commotion. I was very close by," Jia said. "I crouched in front of her to check her vital signs. Her face was extremely pale, and her limbs were cold and clammy."

Jia suspected the patient was experiencing a heart attack, but there were still about three hours before the plane would land in Dublin.

With the assistance of a passen-



Jia Shuaiqing takes care of the patient on Hainan Airlines flight HU751 on Dec 17. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ger who offered nitroglycerin, Jia quickly administered the medication, directed the crew to provide high-flow oxygen, and fetched a blood pressure monitor. She advised the patient to place the medication under her tongue without swallowing, ensuring it dissolved slowly.

Jia also advised the crew against moving the patient unnecessarily to prevent exacerbating her condition and asked nearby passengers to disperse to ensure proper air circulation.

"I was particularly worried about cardiac arrest, so I kept giving her oxygen. Once she regained

consciousness, I continuously checked her condition, monitored her blood pressure and ensured a steady oxygen supply," Jia said.

A few minutes later, the patient coughed slightly, and her complexion improved. Jia continued to monitor her vital signs until the plane reached Dublin.

Jia was traveling to Ireland for her master's graduation ceremony in nursing, and her high-altitude rescue was a testament to her dedication.

Upon meeting Jia at the university, the patient's family expressed their gratitude, saying, "Thank you for saving my sister's life."

Jia learned from the family that after landing, the patient fainted again but received timely emergency care from medical professionals on the ground. She was hospitalized for a week, and the hospital's diagnosis confirmed Jia's initial assessment.

"As a nurse, especially one in respiratory and critical care, the rescue was instinctual, just like in my daily work," Jia said.

Her actions have been widely reported in Chinese and Irish media, earning widespread acclaim.

Influenced by her family's medical background, Jia entered the nursing program at Shanxi Medical University in 2009.

"Disease knows no borders, and neither does our profession. I'm grateful I could step up and help someone in need," Jia said.

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Government support helps people in need find meaningful work

XI'AN — Ahead of the recent Spring Festival, Mou Wengui moved agilely through his small store, aided by a crutch and a prosthetic leg. He adorned the space with intricate paper-cuts and Chinese knots, while stocking shelves with drinks, snacks and other goods.

It was a marked improvement on previous years, when the idea of living independently and savoring life's joys seemed out of reach for him.

"The work is not strenuous and the income is decent. Neighbors in my community often drop by to chat in my store," said 42-year-old Mou, who runs the store in the mountainous county of Zhenba, Shaanxi province.

His small business brings in a net annual income of up to 10,000 yuan (\$1,400), a modest yet meaningful

sum that has become a cornerstone of his independence.

About 13 years ago, Mou fell from a ridge while feeding pigs, leaving him reliant on a crutch for mobility. In 2017, he was diagnosed with a femoral tumor and underwent surgery to amputate his right leg.

"After going through so much pain and misfortune, I became depressed," said Mou. "However, with the government's support, I gradually gained courage and tried to make a living optimistically."

In 2016, Zhenba initiated a poverty alleviation initiative to boost medical care and social assistance, organizing a team of nearly 700 family doctors. Since then, people with disabilities like Mou have been eligible for at least one home clinic per month.

Through the project, about 86 percent of the 13,000-yuan cost of Mou's amputation was funded by the government. Without it, the proportion would have been only about 58 percent. Beyond financial aid, a medical team provided Mou with rehabilitation guidance and psychological support.

With the government's assistance, including startup loans, on-site guidance and links with businesses, Mou returned to work. He raised bees and pigs and planted Chinese medicinal herbs from 2017 to 2020, earning an annual income of over 15,000 yuan.

Mou met his wife, Cao Xiaoxia, through a local support group for people with disabilities. Despite living with paraplegia, Cao's upbeat

spirit inspired Mou, and the two married in 2018. Through a relocation project, the couple moved from the remote mountain village to a four-bedroom apartment in downtown Zhenba in 2019.

"Never give up. People like my husband and I may face challenges, but we have not been left behind. Life keeps getting better and better," Cao said.

In 2019, the couple started the store in a room in their apartment. Cao has been helping her husband handle payments and looking after their daughter, who was born in 2021. She also works as an online customer service agent for a store on several e-commerce platforms, earning an additional 3,000 yuan a month.

The story of Mou's family offers a glimpse of the Chinese government's people-centered approach to helping people in need achieve a better life, through social and medical insurance, vocational education and other practicalities.

Thanks to the targeted poverty alleviation policy, 99 million people in rural China were lifted out of poverty by the end of 2020, and all 832 impoverished counties were officially recognized as having escaped poverty.

China has been ramping up efforts to consolidate the achievements in poverty alleviation and propel rural revitalization.

Between late 2020 and November 2024, China prevented 5.3 million people from returning to poverty. For

farmers in counties that have been lifted out of poverty, the per capita disposable income in real terms increased 6.5 percent year-on-year in the first three quarters of 2024 to 12,384 yuan, according to Zhang Xingwang, vice-minister of agriculture and rural affairs.

Since 2016, the government has provided over 200,000 yuan in assistance to Mou's family, including subsistence allowances, disability subsidies and employment funding. Cao said she is grateful for what her family has received, and her greatest joy lies in their ability to stand on their own.

"We may be disabled, but we strive for independence," Cao said. "This year I hope we can earn more with our own hands, and read more books to improve our knowledge and skills."

XINHUA

Editor's note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.

Securing safe haven for green sea turtles

Conservationists ensure nesting grounds on South China Sea islands are protected

By **YAN DONGJIE** in Sansha, Hainan and **CHEN BOWEN** in Haikou

The islands in the South China Sea serve as an important habitat for sea turtles, with 90 percent of China's sea turtle population found there.

"Sea turtles have a unique habit - they return to the place where they were born to lay eggs when they reach adulthood," said Li Yupei, director of the Marine Protected Area Administration of Sansha City in Hainan province.

"The Xisha Islands are favored nesting grounds for green turtles. By protecting the beach where they were born, generations of sea turtles will continue to return to lay eggs," he added.

In 2017, a turtle protection center was established on the North Island, a part of the Xisha Islands.

Experts from Chinese universities, along with staff at the protection center, protect the turtles and their habitats and conduct studies on the status of green sea turtle populations.

Since the 1980s, the global populations and habitats of green sea turtles have seen a significant decline due to factors such as marine pollution, human activities and climate change.

Sansha, composed of over 280 islands, shoals, reefs and atolls along with their surrounding waters, has established a 24-hour monitoring system for precious wildlife, including green sea turtles.

"Once the turtles approach the islands, the cameras capture images, contributing to the study and protection of the species," Li said.

An important task for Yu Yangfei, a turtle patrol officer in Sansha, is to locate the nests where turtles lay eggs during the breeding season from June to September, and assist in the conservation and monitoring of hatching, helping the young turtles return to the sea.

"The survival rate of sea turtles is very low. A typical clutch of turtle eggs may have dozens, but ultimately only around one in a thousand hatchlings can successfully evade all predators and survive to adulthood," Yu said.

In over 154 years since the establishment of the protection center, Yu and his colleagues have rescued more than 280 green sea turtles and helped tens of thousands of them return to the sea.

Conservation efforts are yielding tangible results, with a total of nearly 2,000 nests containing green sea turtle eggs discovered on the Xisha Islands.

Contact the writers at yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Shi Yudie contributed to this story.

The limbs are paddle-shaped and covered with large scales; the forelimbs are longer than the hind limbs, and each has an inner claw. The claws of the male forelimbs are powerful and curved into hooks.

Sea turtles will dig a hole in a secluded spot on the beach to lay their eggs, and then bury them to hatch. The nesting site is usually under the bushes that grow near the sea, providing safety and stable temperatures due to the foliage shading the area and preventing the temperature from getting too high due to direct sunlight. Each time 90-160 eggs are laid, the eggs are white and spherical.

The incubation period is approximately 45 to 75 days.

After hatching, baby sea turtles will crawl toward the ocean. In the early stages of life, crabs, birds and other predators are their enemies.

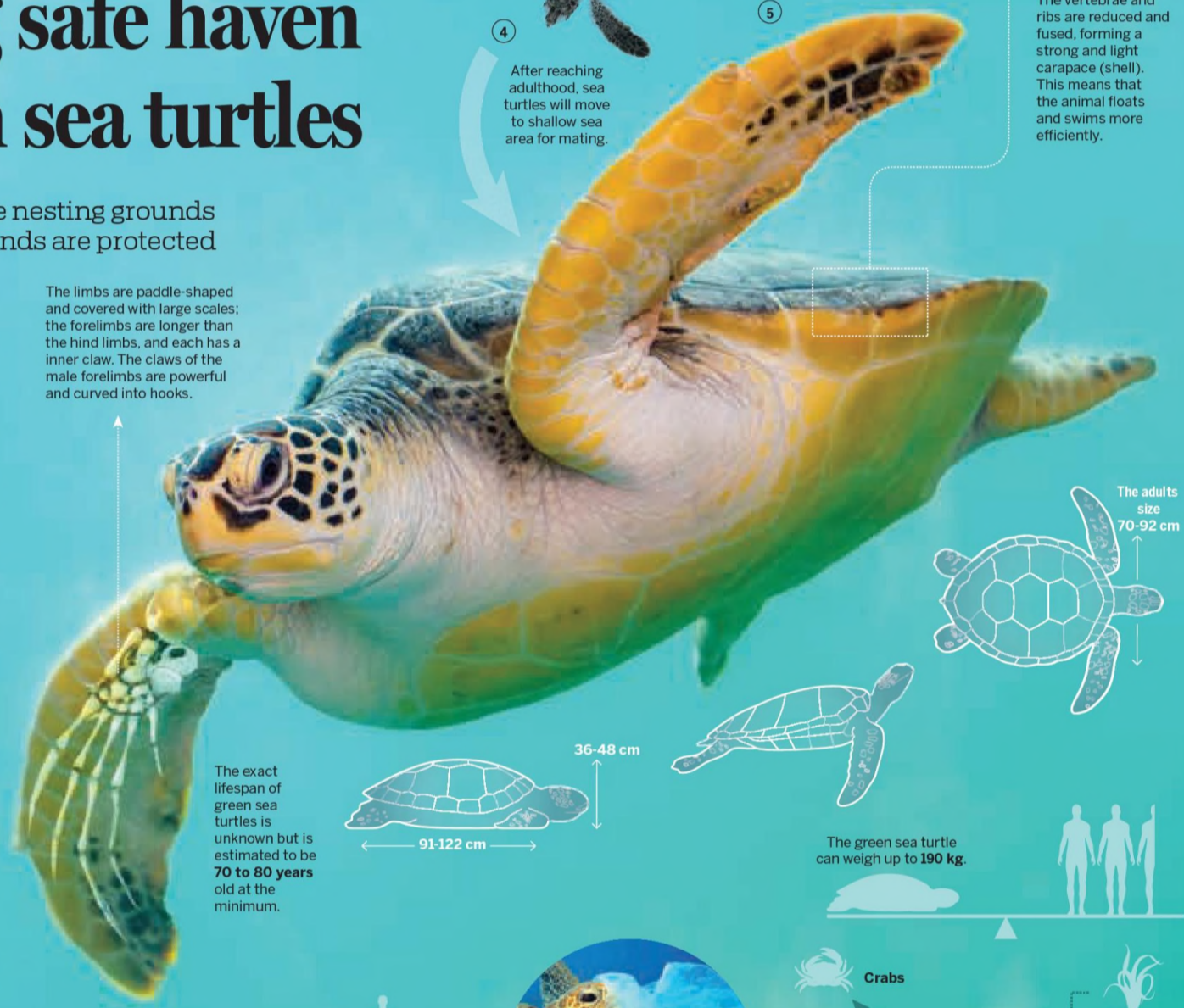
From birth to adulthood, sea turtles often have a survival rate of only about one in a thousand.

After reaching adulthood, sea turtles will move to shallow sea area for mating.

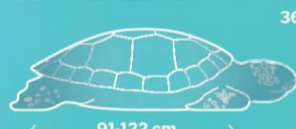
THE SHELL IN LAYERS



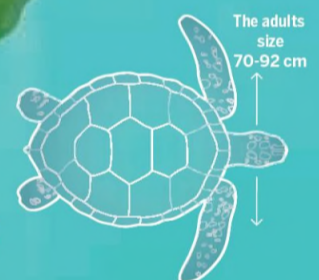
SHELL STRUCTURE
The vertebrae and ribs are reduced and fused, forming a strong and light carapace (shell). This means that the animal floats and swims more efficiently.



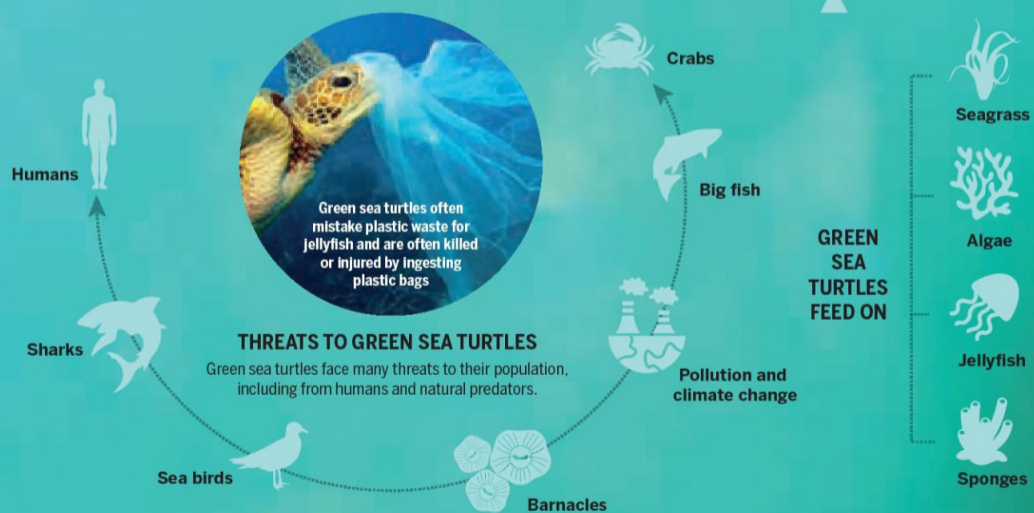
The exact lifespan of green sea turtles is unknown but is estimated to be 70 to 80 years old at the minimum.



The green sea turtle can weigh up to 190 kg.



NUMBER OF GREEN SEA TURTLE NESTING SITES IN NORTH ISLAND



Green sea turtles often mistake plastic waste for jellyfish and are often killed or injured by ingesting plastic bags.

THREATS TO GREEN SEA TURTLES

Green sea turtles face many threats to their population, including from humans and natural predators.

SEA TURTLE SPECIES

There are a total of seven species of sea turtles in the world, with five of them living in Chinese waters. However, in China only the green sea turtle comes ashore to lay eggs.



Sources: The Marine Reserve Management Bureau of Sansha City in Hainan province

GRAPHICS BY TIAN CHI AND MUKESH MOHANAN / CHINA DAILY, TEXT BY YAN DONGJIE AND CHEN BOWEN / CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Airborne again

After being grounded for 18 days because of adverse weather, hot air balloons once again grace the skies over Nevsehir, Turkey, on Sunday. Against a backdrop of snow-covered fields, the long-awaited spectacle returns, filling the winter air with vibrant colors and adventure.

Behcet Alkan via Getty Images



Starmmer, Macron expected to walk a fine line with Trump

UK, France aim to address defense, trade as Europe seeks to rebuild ties with ally

By EARLE GALE in London
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United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer and France's President Emmanuel Macron have been meeting with advisers ahead of important and difficult visits to the United States in the coming days, during which they will try to rebuild Europe's fast-eroding relationship with its traditional ally.

In the aftermath of comments from US President Donald Trump that suggested he no longer sees Europe as the close natural ally it once was, both Starmer and Macron will want to repair the damage already done, and avoid triggering new rifts.

Starmer, who arrives in the US on Thursday, has said he will tell Trump he plans to meet one of his major demands: that European nations

spend more on their defense and rely less on Washington to protect them.

Starmer took that message to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Finland's President Alexander Stubb over the weekend, with The Associated Press quoting his spokesperson as saying that he told them, "Europe must step up for the good of collective European security."

The spokesperson said Starmer will also want to mention to Trump that any peace deal reached to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict is agreed upon carefully, and with safeguards in place to ensure fighting cannot easily restart.

Macron, who arrived in Washington on Monday, would carry similar messages and try to leverage his already close relationship with Trump, which began early in the latter's first term in office.

Reuters reported that Macron wants to remind Trump that a peace deal to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict would need to be fair to Ukraine because one that is too generous to Russia would make the US look weak on the world stage.

Macron wrote on social media ahead of his trip: "I will tell him: deep down, you cannot be weak in the face of (Russian President Vladimir Putin). It's not you, it's not what you're made of, and it's not in your interests."

The two leaders' visits come against the backdrop of Trump having called Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky a "dictator", and after he said Ukraine started the conflict.

Marked contrast

The assertions are in marked contrast to pro-Ukraine stances adopted by the previous administration and set up a difficult scenario in which Ukraine's European neighbors may start to weigh up whether it is in their best interests to also shift their stances.

Starmer and Macron will also be eager to talk to Trump about US trade policy after Trump said he would introduce hefty tariffs on items Europe exports to the US.

Philip Golub, a professor of international relations at The American University of Paris, told Reuters that Trump's decisions and announcements during his first few days in office have clearly alarmed many European nations.

"They could not have expected that somehow within the United States would emerge this ultranationalist coalition of forces that would actually challenge Europe's voice in world affairs in such a stark and strong way," he said.

Trump described Macron as "a friend of mine" and Starmer as "a very nice guy" during a Fox News podcast on Friday, suggesting he may be open to listening to their observations, but he also criticized them strongly for not having done more to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Moscow-Washington talks 'promising', says Kremlin

By REN QI
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The Kremlin on Sunday hailed the dialogue between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his US counterpart Donald Trump as "promising", while Ukraine's leader offered to step down in exchange for NATO membership.

Trump broke with Western policy earlier this month by phoning Putin to discuss how to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict — a call hailed by Moscow as ending three years of isolation for Putin since he launched the special military operation in February 2022.

Top Russian and United States officials met in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, last week to discuss the "restoration" of ties and start a discussion on a possible Ukraine cease-fire — all without the involvement of Kyiv or Europe.

"This is a dialogue between two extraordinary presidents," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told state TV, adding "that's promising".

"It is important that nothing prevents us from realizing the political will of the two heads of state," he said.

Peskov ruled out any territorial concessions as part of a settlement. "The people decided to join Russia a long time ago," he said, referring to Moscow-staged votes in eastern Ukraine held amid the special military operation, which were slammed as bogus by Kyiv, the West and some international monitors.

"No one will ever sell off these territories. That's the most important thing," Peskov said.

Amid his outreach to Moscow, Trump has also verbally attacked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, claiming Kyiv started the conflict and that Zelensky was hugely unpopular at home.

Zelensky said on Sunday he was not "offended" by Trump's comments and was ready to test his

popularity in elections once martial law ends in Ukraine.

"One would be offended by the word 'dictator' if he was a dictator," Zelensky said.

He also called for the Western coalition that has been helping Kyiv during the conflict for the past three years to hold strong.

"We must do our best to achieve a lasting and just peace for Ukraine. This is possible with the unity of all partners: we need the strength of the whole of Europe, the strength of America, the strength of all those who want lasting peace," he said.

Conditional resignation

During a news conference in Kyiv on Sunday, Zelensky said he was ready to quit as president if it meant Ukraine would be admitted to the NATO military alliance.

He spoke as Russia's TASS news agency reported that US and Russian diplomats would meet in the coming week, a follow-up to the Riyadh talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Zelensky has been calling for Ukraine to be given NATO membership as part of any deal to end the crisis, but the Washington-led alliance has been reluctant to make a pledge.

"If there is peace for Ukraine, if you really need me to leave my post, I am ready. ... I can exchange it for NATO," Zelensky said, adding he would depart "immediately" if necessary.

"I want very much from Trump understanding of each other," he said, adding that "security guarantees" from the US president were "much needed".

Zelensky also called for Trump to meet with him before any summit with Putin. He also said there had been "progress" on a deal to give the US preferential access to Ukraine's critical resources.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (center) arrives in Kyiv on Monday for a summit on Ukraine. ANSGAR HAASE / AP

Chinese enterprises in Silicon Valley looking to play vital role in relations

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco
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As Chinese enterprises operating in Northern California celebrated the Year of the Snake, they vowed to play a more vital role in underpinning bilateral business collaborations and more.

A gathering on Sunday, themed "Welcome the New Year", brought together the majority of the Chinese Enterprises Association (CEA) members at the Q Bay Center in San Jose, a multifunctional platform funded by Hangzhou, Zhejiang investment.

Since its inception in 2018 in Silicon Valley, the center has been a beacon of economic vibrancy and technological innovation.

Zhang Jianmin, China's consul general in San Francisco, said at the event that the Year of Snake offers an opportunity to "solve problems", adding that he sought the answer using DeepSeek, China's artificial intelligence app that was released in January.

“Chinese enterprises have been and will be an invaluable force to promote China-US business and trade. Your importance by no means can be underestimated.”

Zhang Jianmin, China's consul general in San Francisco

"In recent years, problems and issues keep popping up in the China-US relationship," Zhang said. "No worries, we need to calm down and find solutions to bring the bilateral relations back to the track of steady, sound and sustainable development."

Zhang urged Chinese companies

operating in the United States to abide by Chinese and US laws, and be clean.

"Chinese enterprises have been and will be an invaluable force to promote China-US business and trade. Your importance by no means can be underestimated," he said.

"Zhejiang recently has been a world focal point due to its technology breakthroughs, particular the debut of DeepSeek and Yushu Technology, aka Unitree Robotics; both are based in Hangzhou," said Zhang Dan, who is in charge of the Q Bay Center's operations.

In January, DeepSeek released its first AI model, DeepSeek-R1, with a chatbot. It immediately caused a sensation and reaction in the US stock market and tech industry. DeepSeek's product is forecast to overtake rival ChatGPT to become the top-rated free application.

Since 2016, Unitree Robotics has specialized in quadruped (four-legged) robots with a focus on individual consumers, a market of vast potential, as China and the

world address the needs of an aging society.

"We are grateful for the science and technology cooperation and exchanges between China and the US; the flow of ideas and innovation that enables creations of such products," said Zhang. "It remains no secret that without Jerry Yang's vision and investment in Alibaba, we wouldn't be able to have an e-commerce giant of its kind."

In 2005, Yang directed Yahoo!, even before he took over as the tech giant's CEO in 2007, to purchase a 40 percent stake in Alibaba for \$1 billion, plus the assets of Yahoo! China, valued at \$700 million.

CEA President Liu Qing, from the Bank of Communications, commended the achievements of the association's members and pledged to unite all for a stronger and more vibrant presence for China's enterprises in the US.

"Facing uncertainties and rough waters, we need to strengthen our confidence and work more closely," Liu said.

Support for absolute win slumps even in Ukraine

By XING YI in London
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Willingness to support Ukraine "until it wins" has declined sharply across Western Europe, while more than half of Ukrainians now favor a quick, negotiated end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict after it has dragged on for three years, two recent polls have found.

According to a poll in December by YouGov, a London-based global public opinion and data firm, support for backing Ukraine until victory has slumped in all seven European countries surveyed.

When asked about their preferred resolution to the conflict, more respondents in Germany, France, Italy and Spain favored a negotiated settlement over supporting Ukraine until Russia withdraws — even if that meant prolonging the conflict.

The results — Germany, 45 percent favored negotiations versus 28 percent for continued support; France, 43 percent versus 23 percent; and Spain 46 percent versus 25 percent — marked a flip in public opinion compared with the response to the same question asked in February 2023, one year after the conflict began.

Few in Western European countries believed that either Ukraine or Russia would win soon, with most thinking that both countries would either continue fighting or come to a peace agreement through negotiations, according to YouGov's survey. Even in countries where more

people preferred supporting Ukraine until it won, enthusiasm had waned. In the United Kingdom, support dropped from 53 to 36 percent; in Denmark, from 56 to 40 percent; and in Sweden, from 63 to 50 percent.

The fatigue over prolonged conflict also grew in Ukraine. A Gallup poll published in November showed that, for the first time, a 52 percent majority of Ukrainians favored negotiating an end to the conflict as soon as possible.

This contrasts with a drop in those who favored continuing the fight until victory, from 73 percent in the early months of the conflict to 38 percent.

Support for continuing the fight has declined across Ukraine, with the sharpest slump in areas far from the front lines. In Kyiv, support fell by 39 percentage points, while in the western regions, it dropped by 40 percentage points.

In the conflict-heavy eastern and southern Ukraine, backing for continued fighting fell below 50 percent, down from 63 percent and 61 percent in 2022, respectively.

Among people in Ukraine who continued to support the fight until victory, the Gallup survey showed evidence that their definition of victory appears to be shifting: the percentage of people who believe that victory means regaining all territory lost since 2014, including Crimea, has dropped from more than 90 percent to 81 percent.

Zhu Xue'er contributed to this story.

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Shenzhen thinking long term

Humanoid robots, AI key sectors in South China tech powerhouse city

By CHENG YU and WANG XU

Shenzhen, a high-tech powerhouse in South China's Guangdong province, plans to launch targeted supportive policies, including 4.5 billion yuan (\$630 million) in financial incentives, to drive the city's artificial intelligence and robotics sectors.

The initiative comes as China intensifies its efforts to become a global leader in AI and robotics, with humanoid robots emerging as one of the key sectors receiving attention. Shenzhen, home to some of the world's largest tech companies — including Huawei Technologies, Tencent Holdings and BYD Auto — is positioning itself as a national hub for these high-tech industries.

Lin Yi, director of Shenzhen's AI industry department, said the city plans to launch a special policy for humanoid robots designed to promote breakthroughs in key technologies, databases and large-scale manufacturing.

The above-mentioned 4.5 billion yuan will be allocated to the initiative this year, with company applications set to open in March. The policy package will offer subsidies to businesses, including up to 60 percent support — capped at 10 million yuan — including for computing power costs.

The government will also offer model and database vouchers to further incentivize growth in these emerging sectors. The city also plans to integrate AI and robotics into its major science and technology projects to foster partnerships between industry, academia and research institutions, Lin said.

Shenzhen's move follows similar plans nationwide, where regional governments have included embod-



Robots attract visitors during a recent global developer conference in Shanghai. ZHU WEIHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

ied intelligence and humanoid robots as key economic strategies for 2025. This year's government work reports from over a dozen provinces and cities — including Beijing, Chongqing, Shandong province and Anhui province — emphasize the role of these technologies in advancing industrial upgrades and driving economic growth.

Hefei in Anhui plans to commercialize embodied intelligence products and attract over 100 companies in the AI and algorithm sectors. Shandong, for instance, plans to accelerate the development of a full industry chain encompassing embodied intelligence.

Meanwhile, major Chinese tech companies are making their own moves in the humanoid robot sector. At least 18 automakers have joined the race, spurred by government incentives and technological advancements in AI.

Xiaomi, Xpeng and Nio are

among the latest firms to announce their entry into the humanoid robot market. Foreign automotive giants like Tesla and BMW have introduced their first humanoid robot "employees" on assembly lines.

Xu Xiaolan, former vice-minister of industry and information technology, said that humanoid robots are expected to become another "disruptive product" after computers, smartphones and new energy vehicles.

"Currently in China, new technologies, products and formats represented by humanoid robots and general artificial intelligence are thriving and becoming the pinnacle of global technological innovation, a new track for future industries and a new engine of economic growth," Xu said.

According to market consultancy Coherent Market Insights, China's humanoid robot market is rapidly growing and clocked \$2.9 billion in sales revenue last year, and is projected

to skyrocket to around \$46.31 billion by 2031, at a staggering compound annual growth rate of 48.6 percent.

Rick Xiong, general manager of the Beijing Embodied Intelligence Robotics Innovation Center, said: "Combined efforts from both the government and companies will shape the future in our favor. Chinese robot companies have the right timing, the right place and the right people to accelerate the humanoid robot push."

Xiong said that leading Western countries have witnessed deep-pocketed industry giants dominating the robot landscape, whereas China is characterized by a proliferation of small to medium-sized enterprises striving to navigate the competitive terrain of humanoid robots.

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Construction SOE to increase focus on BRI

By ZHONG NAN
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China Railway 20th Bureau Group Corp (CR20G), a unit of State-owned China Railway Construction Corp, said it will intensify efforts to expand in markets involved in the Belt and Road Initiative and other emerging economies this year.

The company plans to deploy additional resources to strengthen infrastructure development, enhance project execution efficiency, and foster deeper collaboration with local partners in both emerging economies as well as participant countries of the BRI, including Cameroon, Mozambique, Algeria and Central Asian nations, in 2025.

The Xi'an, Shaanxi province-based company said it will focus on incorporating advanced construction technologies, green building practices and digital solutions to optimize project outcomes and support long-term development in these markets.

The Chinese company delivered the Ntui-Mankim Highway project to its client in Cameroon late last month, marking the official commissioning of this asphalt road traversing the tropical rainforest.

The project encompasses the rehabilitation of a 60-kilometer roadway and the construction of 10 rural roads spanning a total of 89 kilometers.

Launched in October 2021, the development of the Ntui-Mankim Highway not only enhances mobility for residents in remote areas, but also serves as a vital conduit for agricultural products to reach broader markets beyond the tropical rainforest, said Shi Fei, the highway's general manager.

"The road plays a significant role in driving regional urbanization, fostering economic growth and improving overall infrastructure connectivity," he said.

The highway connects Yaounde, capital of Cameroon, with several northern regions of the country, serving as a key driver for job creation, improving transportation infrastructure and stimulating economic growth in villages and towns along its route.

Globally recognized for its rich reserves of ebony and mahogany, Cameroon boasts a thriving forestry sector.

"Today, timber and cash crops along the route can be efficiently transported to Yaounde or exported via the country's ports," Shi added.

Cameroon, located near the equator, has a tropical climate characterized by high temperatures throughout the year and an extended rainy season.

During the construction of the highway, Shi said the entire team overcame the challenges of the rainy season by adjusting the construction schedule. Experts from both China and Cameroon also optimized the construction plan in areas such as foundation structure design and road drainage systems.

CR20G created over 900 job opportunities for the local community while enhancing the skills of local employees through professional training between 2021 and 2024. After the highway became operational, it generated more than 800 long-term jobs in the areas of road maintenance, management, retail and catering services, establishing it as an essential livelihood project in the African country.

With over 17,000 employees, CR20G has established a presence in more than 20 countries, including Mozambique, Morocco and Mongolia.

Chen Jianwei, a researcher at the University of International Business and Economics' Academy of China Open Economy Studies in Beijing, said that building a comprehensive, interconnected network for the emerging countries and economies participating in the BRI represents a major upgrade and expansion of the existing connectivity framework, encompassing ports, roads, railways and airports.

"Accelerating infrastructure digitalization, strengthening industrial and supply chain services, and optimizing transportation efficiency will further drive new growth opportunities in these markets," he added.

China's nonfinancial outbound direct investment (ODI) surged 10.5 percent year-on-year to \$143.85 billion in 2024, data from the Ministry of Commerce show.

Chinese companies' nonfinancial ODI in countries and regions participating in the BRI amounted to \$33.69 billion last year, up 5.4 percent from the previous year.

Swiss biotech firms hike investment footprint

By ZHOU LANXU
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Swiss biotechnology companies are stepping up expansion and investments in China, eyeing its huge market potential and improved policies to accommodate foreign capital, said executives and industry mavens.

Bettina Ernst, a board member of Switzerland-based Versameb, said the pharmaceutical company is enthusiastic about collaboration opportunities in China, aimed at serving the immense demand for treatment of stress urinary incontinence, or SUI.

SUI refers to involuntary leakage of urine during day-to-day activities and is believed to affect about one in three women during their lifetime. Versameb proposes a pharmaceutical treatment for SUI that is in the clinical stage, in the form of next-generation mRNA to restore muscle tissue.

Having decided to establish operations in Beijing and leading further clinical trials in the nation, Versameb aims to bring solutions to people in need in China as well as across the Asian region, Ernst said.



Rani Jarkas

"At this stage, investments up to \$25 million are discussed to achieve upcoming milestones, including those related to the clinical trial," she added.

Ernst made the remarks on the sidelines of the China-Swiss Companies Investment Cooperation Exchange last week. Versameb was one of the over 20 Swiss biomedical companies that participated in the event.

The event, focusing on fostering investment and collaboration in the fields of life sciences and biomedicine, attracted over 80 enterprises from the two countries and was jointly organized by the Beijing Investment Promotion Bureau and Cedrus Group, a Swiss international financial group.

Demonstrating the interest of Swiss life sciences companies in exploring opportunities in research and development, market expansion and production in China, the exchange saw the signing of three

agreements between participating companies and Cedrus.

These partnerships will foster cross-border growth, as Beijing Dachao Biotechnology Co Ltd will invest and pursue market expansion in Switzerland, while Swiss companies Orexa and Kadence Bio will establish operations in Beijing.

Ard Peeters, Orexa's CEO, said that the clinical-stage pharmaceutical company developing therapeutics to increase food intake is excited to bring its innovative treatment to the Chinese market.

"We look forward to working with Cedrus as our partner in initiating clinical trials in China as well as collaborating with China's research institutions," Peeters said.

Rani Jarkas, chairman of Cedrus Group, said, "We see firsthand that Swiss and other global companies have significant interest in investing and expanding in the Chinese market.

"This is driven by supportive policies, a capable workforce, world-class infrastructure, and a large addressable market," Jarkas said, with the event serving as a catalyst to transform this interest into tangible deal-

making and commitments.

China has vowed to further open up the biomedicine sector in an action plan that outlined 20 measures to stabilize foreign investment this year. The action plan was released by the State Council, China's Cabinet, on Wednesday.

The plan promises to support eligible foreign-funded enterprises in participating in pilot programs for segmented production of biological products, facilitating faster market approval for innovative drugs and enhancing the predictability of medical device procurement.

Biomedicine has emerged as a new driver of China's foreign direct investment inflows, as foreign capital used in pharmaceutical manufacturing increased by 68.4 percent year-on-year in January, said the Ministry of Commerce.

Overall, China utilized 97.59 billion yuan (\$13.5 billion) in foreign capital last month, marking a 13.4 percent year-on-year decline but a 27.5 percent month-on-month rebound, the ministry said.

Dong Yilang contributed to this story.



Engineers from China Railway 20th Bureau Group Corp at work on a section of the Ntui-Mankim Highway project in Cameroon. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Private sector encouraged to invest in major energy projects

By ZHENG XIN
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As the country's energy sector is shifting toward greater market-driven dynamics, private companies will be further encouraged to invest in energy development, utilization and infrastructure construction, according to China's top energy authority.

The government will continue promoting private sector involvement in major energy projects this year, including nuclear power, energy storage and smart grids, to deliver a more efficient and smooth operation of the market, according to the National Energy Administration.

The administration will continue encouraging private enterprises to

participate in the nuclear power industry's supply chain and to invest in nuclear power projects. Furthermore, the government will continue to support private companies in various forms of oil and gas exploration, power infrastructure construction and other projects, it said.

There will be an emphasis on supporting private businesses to invest in and build new technologies such as new energy storage, smart microgrids and innovative business models.

Private companies are expected to spur more technological innovation and increased efficiency within the energy sector, enhancing its overall competitiveness and sustainability, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Poli-

cy at Xiamen University.

The energy sector requires substantial long-term investment for expansion, especially in emerging fields such as new energy storage and smart grids, he said.

China vows to further deepen its energy market reform this year, working to improve mechanisms where energy prices are mainly determined by the market, legally regulate the energy market order and strengthen the construction of a unified national market.

Zhu Gongshan, chairman of GCL (Group) Holdings Co Ltd, China's largest private power conglomerate, said a more market-driven energy sector could lead to increased efficiency in the allocation of resources.

China's solar power sector, from upstream silicon production to downstream photovoltaic power station construction, exemplifies the growing role of China's private economy in energy transformation, he said.

To deepen market-oriented price reforms of new energies, the National Development and Reform Commission and the National Energy Administration issued a notice recently to promote the integration of new energy sources like wind and solar power into the electricity market.

This means that around 80 percent of China's power consumption and generation will be transacted through competitive markets, significantly up from the 61 percent traded in 2024, according to Deng

Simeng, a senior analyst for renewables and power research at global consultancy Rystad Energy.

GCL Group said the company is very optimistic about the virtual power plant market in China, which, according to estimates by Huatai Securities, is projected to reach 10.2 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion) this year and further grow to over 100 billion yuan by 2030.

A virtual power plant is a network of decentralized energy resources that are controlled via software to function as a single, flexible power source. It allows these dispersed resources to operate in a way that mimics the behavior of a traditional power plant, providing electricity to the grid or responding to changes in demand.

Briefly

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 21 pips to 7.1717 against the US dollar on Monday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

China sees surge in GEC issuance in Jan

China's issuance of green electricity certificates soared in January. The National Energy Administration issued 231.2 million GECs last month, an increase of 225 percent year-on-year.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS



Xiyang perfume products are on display at a store in Wuhan, Hubei province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Entrepreneur expands perfume biz with scents of nature

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and CHEN MEILING

Shen Ao, a young woman in Wuhan, Hubei province, brings the fragrance of cherry blossoms to the world through her Xiyang perfume, making a profitable business by meeting people's aesthetic demands.

Shen, 23, was impressed by Wuhan's cherry blossoms when she first visited the city to study at college.

"It symbolizes fervor, purity and nobility in Chinese culture, representing renewal and rebirth," she said. "They are highly fitting for Wuhan, a heroic city, and serve as an important cultural symbol, bridging the emotional connection between tourists and the city."

In February last year, Shen decided to develop a brand new perfume made with cherry blossoms so that tourists could take away and keep a special memory of the city with them. At first, she bought cherry blossom spice from the internet to create essential oil blends. However, regardless of the formula used, she couldn't achieve the scent that she envisioned as the most fitting one which is coupled with the "faint earthy aroma of the rainy season".

Then, she and her three team members began to collect fallen cherry blossoms throughout Wuhan, the petals of which filled more than 30 knee-high buckets. Undergoing multiple extractions, they managed to get around 10 kilograms of floral essential oil from the petals.

After trying 13 different formulas in nine months, and asking for

advice from fragrance lovers in a questionnaire, she finally had her perfect scent.

At an outdoor fair in March last year, Shen was promoting the perfume from her booth when Saudi Arabian trader Bahadur Bahir showed great interest. He was seeking an aromatherapy brand that embodies the fusion of Wuhan culture and modern aesthetic life.

"He inquired in detail about the raw materials, production processes and brand philosophy. He appreciated our use of natural plant essential oils, emphasis on environmental protection and dedication to cultural intellectual property. He also shared his understanding of Middle Eastern aromatherapy culture. We had a very engaging conversation, discovering a lot of resonance in our ideas and visions for the industry," Shen said.

Bahir now places about 100 orders monthly, which brings "much confidence and many opportunities" to Shen's team. "Customers from the Middle East and the West have a high recognition for perfume. We also developed new products using crystal as a diffuser, to further captivate the hearts of foreign clients," she said.

Her team is also developing new fragrances, including one using plum blossoms, the city flower of Wuhan, and one using lavender by cooperating with suppliers from the Ili Kazak autonomous prefecture in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Her product range includes perfumes, essential oils, candles and aroma stone diffusers whose shape resembles a choice of real flowers,

butterflies and flowers on a plate. On social media platform Xiaohongshu, netizens commented — "the artworks are so beautiful" and "I bought two of them and placed them at home. Every time I see them, they can make my mood better."

Now, monthly revenue has reached an average of 100,000 yuan (\$13,805) from online channels such as WeChat and Xiaohongshu, as well as offline channels, 60 percent of which comes from cherry blossom products. Shen attends the outdoor fairs organized by Jiang'an district three days per week and is charged a fee of only 100 yuan per day. The fairs provide a platform for young entrepreneurs to show off their products. Her products are also exhibited at cultural creative product stores at scenic spots popular with tourists.

Shen said the products can be used at home such as in bathrooms and living rooms, inside cars and as a decoration for wine cabinets. The unit price ranges from 49 yuan to 388 yuan. She also sells to hotels, bars and clothing stores through large orders. As the fragrance can last for about four to six months, customers are constantly re-purchasing them.

"A fragrance first expresses individuality. Akin to dressing, it reflects a person's character traits. Secondly, fragrances can be used to elevate the happiness index of life," she said.

She believes there is significant room for growth in the industry. "Driven by a healing economy, in the face of the fast pace of modern life, the therapeutic aspect of a fragrance becomes particularly important," she added.

According to consulting firm Frost & Sullivan, the size of the perfume market in China is expected to increase to 44 billion yuan by 2028.

"Inventory pressure is a major challenge when starting a business. Inaccurate predictions of market demand led to a large amount of unsold products," Shen said. "Later, as we gradually accumulated a certain customer base, we started pre-selling to address this issue. Each month and each quarter, new fragrances we introduce attract eager customers. As for our basic fragrance, they have maintained a high repurchase rate."

As the business expands, she also buys spices from suppliers and fresh flowers from merchants in Yunnan province, a major production source of fresh flowers in China.

Shen said that not only does Wuhan have a rich cultural atmosphere with huge consumption potential, it also has a stable and growing demand for products that can improve the quality of life, such as perfume. Most of her clients are young females with high educational backgrounds.

The local government has provided different types of support to Shen's entrepreneurship, such as in taxes, finance and training. "Entrepreneurs make exchanges frequently and there are many entrepreneurship activities to help expand business opportunities. It's a good choice for people who want to begin their own business," she said.

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Italian fare gets bigger table space

Cooperation between Mایدelong stores, ITA to fuel opportunities in China

By WANG ZHUOQIONG wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

The Italian Food Festival was launched in Mایدelong membership stores, formerly known as Metro China, in Beijing on Friday, marking a collaboration between the Italian Trade Agency (ITA) and the retailer to boost the presence of Italian foodstuffs and agricultural products in China.

Running through June 10, the festival will be held in three Mایدelong stores in the nation's capital, offering discounts on Italian specialties and introducing new delicacies to Chinese consumers. Top Italian chefs will also host offline cooking classes to promote authentic Italian cuisine among interested gourmands.

Italian officials expressed strong confidence in China's market potential and said the market is a key driver for Italian food exports.

"We see tremendous opportunities in China," said Massimo Ambrosetti, Italian ambassador to China, at the event.

"We want to cooperate more in (food trade), and we have these cultural components related to healthy food and regional cuisines. In China, we benefit from many excellent Italian restaurants that you can find everywhere in China. There is a new generation of Chinese chefs and cooks who prepare in wonderful ways. All these factors are driving the growth of our agricultural food exports," Ambrosetti said.

He said China is a vast market, and large-scale distribution networks are crucial for expanding awareness and accessibility of Italian products.

Despite an overall decline in China's food imports, Italian food exports have bucked the trend.

According to China's Customs data, total food imports fell 9.3 percent year-on-year to \$127.1 billion in 2024, but food imports from Italy surged 9.9 percent to \$737 million, elevating Italy from 31st to 27th place among China's food import sources. Chocolate, cocoa and confectionery products accounted for 19 percent of Italy's exports to China, reaching \$143.2 million, a 21.8 percent increase from 2023.

"This distinct growth signals strong demand for Italian foods in China," said Yu Lu, vice-president

China is an absolutely strategic market for us — not just for food and beverages, but across multiple sectors."

Francesco Pensabene, Italian trade commissioner of ITA to China

of the China Chamber of Commerce of Import and Export of Foodstuffs, Native Produce and Animal By-Products.

Francesco Pensabene, Italian trade commissioner of ITA to China, said he is optimistic about the market potential for Italian goods.

"China is an absolutely strategic market for us — not just for food and beverages, but across multiple sectors. I envision a very high potential in exporting further to China."

He said there are ongoing efforts to strengthen Italy's presence in China, adding: "We are organizing events, master classes on olive oil and wine, and bringing in delegations of Italian entrepreneurs. I am very confident that our collaboration with China will continue to grow stronger."

Mایدelong China is leveraging its robust global supply chain to bring more premium Italian products to Chinese consumers.

Xu Shaochuan, chairman of Mایدelong's supply chain, said: "Mایدelong has always focused on 'best origin' and 'direct sourcing'. By leveraging our five global procurement centers, we ensure high-quality, differentiated imports for Chinese consumers."

With 100 stores across 60 cities, serving over 20 million households and 200,000 corporate members, Mایدelong has expanded its selection of Italian delicacies, from Tuscan cheeses to Sicilian olive oil and premium Italian wines.

"This festival is a bridge to deepen cultural and trade ties. We are confident that Italian products will continue to win the hearts of Chinese consumers and strengthen their reputation in China," Xu said.



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BUSINESSFOCUS

Market vitality fueling growth, novel trends

Nation's consumption dynamics not only reflect pulse of economic recovery, but also highlight deeper structural transformations

BEIJING — While insufficient domestic demand remains a challenge, China has seen its consumption sector, a key driver of economic growth, unleash more vitality in recent months, with hustle and bustle in the market and new demand fueling and shaping trends.

According to the nine major tasks identified at the Central Economic Work Conference held in December, the foremost priorities for policymakers this year are to boost consumption, improve investment efficiency and expand domestic demand on all fronts.

From buzzing market activity and revealing economic data to evolving consumer scenarios, China's consumption dynamics not only reflect the pulse of economic recovery, but also highlight deeper structural transformations.

During this year's Spring Festival holiday, crowds flocked to ancient town scenic spots, restaurants were fully booked for New Year's Eve dinners, movie theaters were packed with large audiences, and home appliance stores saw customers lining up in significant numbers.

In Chaoshan area of South China's Guangdong province, more than 200,000 people were attracted to Yingge dance shows. Yingge is a type of folk dance that was listed among the first batch of China's national intangible cultural heritages in 2006.

Yingge dance is just one example of many cultural attractions that have become popular among tourists. According to data from Fliggy, a leading online travel agency, the number of tourists participating in "intangible cultural heritage tours" that include folk performances had increased by 36 percent year-on-year during the 2025 Spring Festival.

The ice-and-snow economy has also emerged as a new hot consumer category. It is not only flourishing in China's northern regions, but also gaining popularity in the south, where snow resources are relatively scarce.

For instance, since the opening of the Shanghai L+SNOW Indoor Skiing Theme Resort in September 2024, a venue which features the world's largest indoor ski facility, daily visitors flow have averaged from around 1,500 to 2,000 people. During the recent Spring Festival holiday, this number surged to about 8,000 visitors per day.

"As ice-and-snow consumption moves from niche to mainstream, it will help China build a robust ice-and-snow economy, offering a new and vital pillar for the country's economic growth," said Zheng Liansheng, a researcher with the Institute of Finance and Banking, affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Vibrant consumer spending data stemming from the 2025 Spring Festival holiday confirm a strong and energetic start to the year for the world's second-largest economy.

Domestic travel spending during



As ice-and-snow consumption moves from niche to mainstream, it will help China build a robust ice-and-snow economy, offering a new and vital pillar for the country's economic growth."

Zheng Liansheng, researcher with the Institute of Finance and Banking, affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences



Top: A Yingge dance team performs during an event to celebrate Spring Festival in Shantou, Guangdong province, on Feb 2.

YAO JUN / XINHUA

Above: Tourists ride a cable car in the Shanghai L+SNOW Indoor Skiing Theme Resort on Sept 6. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the holiday reached 677 billion yuan (\$94.42 billion), representing a 7 percent increase from the same period last year, according to data released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The Spring Festival box office also enjoyed a very positive run, with revenue soaring to 9.51 billion yuan — a record high. The animated blockbuster "Ne Zha 2" was the star of the show as it became the first Chinese film to gross over 12 billion yuan and secure its place in the top 10 of global box office rankings.

China's policy-backed trade-in program for consumer goods served as a further boost, significantly lifting holiday market sentiment. Sales revenue for household appliances and audiovisual equipment surged by 166.4 percent compared to the 2024 holiday period, while sales of communication devices skyrocketed 181.9 percent year-on-year, data from the State Taxation Administration revealed.

XINHUA

In addition, sales of new energy vehicles increased 29.4 percent year-on-year to 944,000 units in January — accounting for 38.9 percent of total new vehicle sales last month.

"On the one hand, trade-in programs offer consumers more affordable and greener high-quality products. On the other, they significantly promote the green transformation of industries such as the automobile and home appliance industries," said Li Chang'an, a researcher at the Academy of China Open Economy Studies under the University of International Business and Economics.

With the rise in living standards in China, people are increasingly pursuing personalized and high-quality goods and services.

In response, a Yonghui Supermarket store in Beijing has streamlined its product range while enhancing product quality and service management, following its renovation initiatives that were inspired by popular supermarket chain Panguo.

The store's daily average sales have more than quadrupled compared to pre-renovation levels, while its average transaction value has increased by over 60 percent, said Liu Shuhan, a regional deputy general manager of Yonghui Supermarket.

Notably, the consumption focus of residents is also shifting from goods to services — fueling the rise of new consumer trends.

"The cleaner was a young woman from Sichuan, and she was incredibly efficient," said a woman surnamed Fan, a resident of Dongcheng district in Beijing, after recently booking a home-cleaning service on JD.com.

In addition to housekeeping, many venues and businesses have rolled out a variety of other new services in seeking to adapt to consumer demands, with such services ranging from online fitness options to pet care and on-demand personal chefs.

"As the society develops rapidly and the pace of life accelerates, the demand for diversified and personalized services is growing," said Chen Ping, deputy manager of a housekeeping service provider in Jinan, capital of Shandong province.

Technology is also fueling China's booming consumer market. For example, by having digital avatars and human hosts taking turns, brands can keep their livestreaming rooms running round the clock, effectively boosting their sales potential.

"The recent consumption boom highlights China's strong domestic demand potential and broad prospects for future growth," said Chen Lifan, a researcher at the Development Research Center of the State Council, adding that China's consumption market is expected to maintain a trend of diversification and high-quality growth in 2025.

China's consumption upgrade presenting new opportunities

BEIJING — Whether it's purchasing premium goods at large supermarkets, selecting the latest smart home appliances at electronics stores, or indulging in cross-border travel, China's consumer market is demonstrating recovery and ongoing upgrades.

Sustaining the momentum, besides a raft of measures announced in January to expand the scope of its consumer goods trade-in program, the Chinese government has emphasized stronger and more targeted steps to boost consumption, in a bid to strengthen the fundamental role of consumption in driving economic development.

In their 2025 economic outlook, several global financial institutions have highlighted China's high-quality development, noting the gradual shift toward a more consumer-driven and service-oriented economy. Citigroup remarked that "China had a solid start to the Year of the Snake".

Going through profound transformation from quantitative growth to qualitative progress, China's super-sized consumption market is offering enormous cooperation opportunities for countries around the world.

As quality has gradually surpassed price as the key consideration for many shoppers in China, the consumer mentality shift is driving the rise of quality-focused retail giants like Sam's Club, Walmart's membership-only store chain in China.

Having first entered the Chinese mainland market in 1996 with its first stop in Shenzhen in South Chi-

na's Guangdong province, this retailer has since opened 53 stores in more than 20 cities in China, covering first and second-tier cities, while planning to further accelerate the layout.

Walmart's results report for its third fiscal quarter in 2024 revealed that Sam's Club saw net sales via e-commerce in China rising by 25 percent, while membership income rose by 22 percent — thereby maintaining double-digit growth for multiple consecutive quarters.

As of November, the retailer's net sales in China totaled \$15.2 billion, with membership rising to 8.6 million and online sales accounting for nearly 50 percent of total revenue. Its continued success is attributed to its blend of high-quality, cost-effective products and an online-offline integration model that is resonating with Chinese consumers.

During holidays such as Spring Festival in particular, consumers showed a preference for premium goods, with many choosing imported fruits and high-end gift boxes from Sam's Club.

"I spent more than double what I did in previous years, but it was worth it. The products are not only what I love, but also trustworthy, making them perfect for gifts," a customer told Xinhua News Agency.

This shift in consumer attitudes is particularly evident among younger generations, who have ditched the traditional focus on quantity and low prices, but are more concerned with the value they get for their



A consumer shops at a supermarket in Tengzhou, Shandong province, on April 11. SUN YANG / XINHUA

money and the overall shopping experience.

Amid continued efforts to embrace digital retail in China, Sam's Club has rolled out 500 front-end warehouses across 25 cities, offering services such as fast delivery within one hour, citywide delivery and even nationwide delivery.

The global retailer's success in China is also aided by its collaboration with local suppliers to enhance product quality and lower costs. Its osmanthus-flavored sweet rice wine *mochi*, made using premium raw materials from Central China's Hubei province and South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and taro basque cheesecake

which blends local Guangxi taro with New Zealand cream, have both proven hits with Chinese consumers.

In line with the demand for quality, Ferrero, the global chocolate giant, also reported impressive sales growth in China, particularly during Spring Festival. In its recent sales update, Ferrero highlighted double-digit growth in its China operations, with flagship products benefiting from rising consumer demand, especially through emerging sales channels such as Sam's Club and Costco, which have seen incredible growth over the past three years.

Ferrero's Chinese factory, based in Hangzhou in Zhejiang province since 2015, saw record production

value and exports last year, supplying not only the domestic market, but also exporting to regions including other parts of Asia, Oceania and North America.

As China's consumer market grows, so does its demand for greener and more intelligent products. The country's policy-backed consumer goods trade-in program introduced in March 2024 has further stimulated consumer enthusiasm for home appliances and been instrumental in driving the growth of the industry.

Brands like Bosch and Siemens, both part of BSH Home Appliances, saw sales soar by more than 50 percent during the 2024 "Double 11" shopping festival, with dishwashers and French-door refrigerators experiencing growth rates of 160 percent and 113 percent, respectively, on e-commerce platform Suning.com.

Chinese consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability and smart technology, and energy-efficient and automated solutions, which is evident in their growing adoption of energy-saving air conditioners that reduce power consumption by 50 percent, smart refrigerators with food inventory management, and labor-saving appliances like dishwashers.

Yang Daiyou, director of the Modern Industry Research Institute at Guangzhou Academy of Social Sciences, emphasized that the integration of intelligent features and personalized customization will define the future

development trajectory of the home appliance industry.

According to market watchers, these trends are also creating opportunities for foreign firms that cater to growing demand for green and smart products, and foreign-invested companies, by actively participating in the consumer goods trade-in program in 2024, have already secured significant benefits.

A close look at the trade-in program for the home appliances sector reveals that foreign brands accounted for over 16 percent of sales across eight major product categories, according to commerce ministry data, while third-party agencies reported that this policy had driven a year-on-year increase of about 31 percent in online sales and 49 percent in offline sales for foreign brands.

The transformation of China's dynamic consumption market from sheer volume to quality has been a key feature of its high-quality development, which is creating new opportunities for global companies to tap into China's increasingly sophisticated consumer base.

The integration of traditional cultural elements and modern consumer preferences is exemplified by companies like Starbucks which recently launched a special coffee bean blend to celebrate Chinese New Year, further tapping into the market by catering to local tastes while incorporating elements of Chinese tradition.

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COMMENT

Editorials

USTR public hearings nothing but circuses for ringmaster China hawks

The Donald Trump administration's campaign to streamline the federal government system should not only target the departments it regards as "useless" but also those it considers "useful". The latter should include the Office of the United States Trade Representative. An office that might be one of the busiest departments under the incumbent administration, which appears to be committed to making America great again primarily by weaponizing tariffs.

Through an interagency structure, the USTR is expected to coordinate trade policy, resolve disagreements, and frame issues for a presidential decision. But in practice, it has become a mundane transmitter between the lawmakers and the president's office, a yes-man department to both sides.

The office has many procedures, such as those related to soliciting public comments on an initiative and subsequent public hearings, that now exist only for the sake of appearances, particularly when it comes to China-related trade policies. Initially, these procedures were designed to ensure the objectivity of policymaking, but they have now become a cover for the office to ignore public comments so as to transform the personal will of individual politicians into public policy.

In its latest move, the office started inviting comments from the public on proposed Section 301 actions on Friday that are aimed at eliminating China's so-called acts, policies and practices that seek to ensure its dominance in the maritime, logistics and shipbuilding sectors. The deadline for the submission of comments is March 24, and USTR will hold a public hearing about the proposed actions on March 24.

In this Section 301 investigation, the USTR has supposedly found China's acts, policies, and practices to be unreasonable and to burden or restrict US commerce. So the USTR proposes to impose certain fees and restrictions on international maritime transport services related to Chinese ship operators and Chinese-built ships, as well as to promote the transport of US goods on US vessels.

Despite the seemingly serious attitude the office assumes in going through the procedure, the process is nothing but a waste of public resources. Experience shows no matter what public comments the office collects, and no matter how strong the opposition voiced in the public hearings, its China-targeted proposal will become policy.

For example, the USTR invited public comments on "China's Acts, Policies, and Practices Related to Targeting of the Semiconductor Industry for Dominance" in December; "China's Acts, Policies and Practices Related to Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property and Innovation" in September; and "China's Compliance with WTO Commitments" in August. And despite the strong opposition of the US semiconductor companies, high-tech sectors and trading enterprises, the USTR's proposals invariably became policies.

Looking further back at the USTR's China-related work, the list of China-targeted trade policies becomes even longer, involving almost all aspects of China's competitive trading sectors. US industries and its business community have voiced strong opposition to these policies and practices. Yet the USTR has turned a deaf ear to them.

Sometimes because of the USTR's hastiness to transform its immature proposals, which actually originate from some freakish China-hawk lawmakers, into policies, the US has to subsequently admit that certain Chinese companies, such as DJI, a Chinese drone maker, are not a threat to national security and remove them from its blacklist, as the US cannot find any alternative to their products.

It should be noted that China's maritime, logistics, and shipbuilding sectors play important roles in world logistics industry, including that of the US. The USTR has to bear in mind the huge cost and long time it will take, even if it is feasible, to get the US ports, maritime transportation industry and other logistics sectors rid of Chinese-made equipment and facilities.

The USTR has been involved in every step of the US' trade attack against China, particularly its weaponizing of tariffs. Yet since the US levied additional tariffs on Chinese imports in 2018, citing China's sizable trade surplus with the US, China's surplus has surged from \$323.33 billion to \$361 billion last year. Not to mention that, according to the Peterson Institute for International Economics, about 90 percent of the cost of the additional tariffs imposed by the US during this period was borne by US consumers.

The USTR's public hearings and debates on policymaking have become a politicized circus. It is high time the USTR reflected on its discarding of its independence, which results in its failure to objectively assess the public comments on major trade policies related to China.

Window of peace should not be squandered

For many, it might be no exaggeration to describe the disruptive impacts of the first month of the second Donald Trump administration as earthshaking.

That has certainly been the case for the United States' European allies, as his administration's approach to the Russia-Ukraine conflict has left them floundering as they scramble to adjust.

What has taken the rest of the world aback is not that the US president, whom his most zealous admirers call the "greatest dealmaker on Earth", is prepared to broker a deal, but that he has initiated talks with Russia that so far exclude all other parties. Even Ukraine and the European Union have not been invited to the table.

It is the Trump administration's approach to the settlement that has left the US' allies and partners bemused and anxious, as they have been left wondering whether they can continue to count on the US security guarantees, and what form of European order they can expect going forward.

The first weeks of the Trump administration have made it clear that nothing matters in the face of the imperative to put "America First". To "Make America Great Again", it appears that the administration will not hesitate to throw the US' allies, let alone Ukraine as a non-ally, under the bus.

After blaming the war on Ukraine and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the US president is mounting pressure on the latter to sign an agreement that surrenders half of Ukraine's mineral resources in exchange for so far unsubstantiated US support.

The US administration seems determined to press ahead with its one-on-one engagement with Russia. It is already talking about improved bilateral relations post settlement.

On Ukraine's part, President Zelenskyy has expressed willingness to sign such a deal and resign in exchange for a just end to the war and/or NATO membership for his country.

With conflict fatigue setting in after three years of fighting, every stakeholder, Russia included, appears to be in favor of a negotiated end to the war.

That means that although the positions of all parties are not consistent, "a window for peace is being opened", as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi pointed out when speaking to the Chinese media on Saturday, after returning from his visits to the United Kingdom and Ireland and his chairing of a high-level meeting of the United Nations Security Council, and attendance at the Munich Security Conference and the G20 foreign ministers' meeting.

Wang urged support for all efforts committed to peace, saying that "dialogue is better than confrontation, and peace talks are better than war".

China has made its position clear on what the outcomes of any peace talks should be: It expects the parties to find a sustainable and lasting solution that accommodates each other's concerns and promotes long-lasting peace and stability in Europe.

China has always called for an early and peaceful settlement of the crisis and has been actively promoting peace talks in line with President Xi Jinping's four-point observations about what must be done. In his phone call with his Russian counterpart on Monday, in which he said that China is pleased to see that Russia and relevant parties have made positive efforts to resolve the crisis, Xi stressed that the four propositions are the basis for a political settlement. He reiterated that China is committed to creating an atmosphere and accumulating the conditions for a political solution to the crisis.

Wang also made clear that China will continue to play a constructive role in supporting a political settlement of the crisis; working to build a consensus on ending the conflict so as to pave the way for peace and the establishing of a balanced, effective and sustainable European security architecture.

With the Trump team saying they want a deal in place within 100 days, it can be anticipated that things will gather pace. But while it is clear that both Ukraine and Russia will have to accommodate some ceding of their staked out positions, one unanticipated impediment to the long-hoped-for peaceful resolution to the now three-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict may be the Trump administration's attempts to ensure that the US is the one that profits from it.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Rural vitalization is integral to high-quality development

The policy blueprint recently unveiled by the central authorities for agricultural and rural development is expected to give a shot in the arm to China's bid to promote all-round rural vitalization.

The "No 1 Central Document" for 2025, released on Sunday, lists efforts to deepen rural reform and promote all-round rural vitalization from multiple aspects, including enhancing the ability to safeguard the supply of agricultural products such as grain, consolidating the fruits of poverty alleviation, promoting rural construction, improving the rural governance system, and optimizing the allocation mechanism.

Given that this is the concluding year of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and the last year of the five-year transition period linking the consolidation and expansion of the fruits of poverty alleviation and rural vitalization, how to make efforts to promote all-round rural vitalization has

become a focus of social attention. As the first policy statement released by the central authorities each year to show China's policy priorities, the "No 1 Central Document" marks the 13th of its kind since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, demonstrating the importance attached by the top leadership to agriculture, rural areas and farmers.

As China is a large developing country with more than 1.4 billion people, ensuring the Chinese people's rice bowls are held firmly in their own hands with a steady grain harvest has always been the central authorities' priority. With reform and opening-up, as well as scientific and technological innovation as driving forces, the country will improve the basic rural management system to safeguard grain security, and ensure that no large-scale lapsing or relapsing into poverty occurs, the document says.

Even if China's grain output exceeded 1.4 trillion jin (706.50 million metric tons) in 2024 for the first time, the country still needs to improve production efficiency through the use of superior grain varieties and agricultural technology.

An important way to test the effectiveness of the rural vitalization policies is to see whether rural areas are becoming developed and whether farmers are becoming richer.

Without the modernization of rural areas, there is no Chinese modernization, and without an increase in farmers' incomes, there is no common prosperity. This explains why the document says the country will do everything possible to increase the efficiency of agriculture, boost the vitality of rural areas, and increase farmers' incomes, to provide basic support for promoting Chinese modernization.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Germany must avoid another 'traffic light' coalition

Going by exit polls, the Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union alliance led by Friedrich Merz has won the election in Germany, held on Sunday, securing around 28.5 percent of the votes, while Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party received 16.5 percent of the votes.

Notably, the far-right Alternative for Germany came second with 19.5 percent votes. Its leader Alice Weidel expressed her willingness to join the federal government. The AfD, which holds a tough stance on immigration and advocates for lower taxes, less bureaucracy, and an end to sanctions against Russia, has been in the rise.

According to German laws, when

no single party is able to secure over half of the seats in the Bundestag, the rule allows for negotiations to form a coalition government.

Currently, it is highly likely that either a CDU/CSU+SPD or a CDU/CSU+Greens government will be formed.

However, Merz's public statement that he would revoke some of Scholz's policies if he became chancellor has complicated the first possibility, while significant disagreement with the Greens risks a repeat of Scholz's "traffic light" coalition, which was marked by endless disputes among the partner parties.

The elections also have significant

international implications. Europe is facing geopolitical challenges, and changes in foreign policy under the new US administration have increased strategic uncertainty for Germany. Germany must reassess its role within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, and the composition of the new government will determine the direction of development for Germany and Europe.

Both domestically and internationally, it is hoped Germany can form a stable government. However, that could require further coordination among Germany's political factions.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

France demeaning itself playing US' game

France's only nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and accompanying warships were in the Philippines on Sunday after holding combat drills with Philippine forces in some disputed waters in the South China Sea. The show of firepower however, only made themselves look like marionettes controlled by Washington via Manila from behind the curtain.

Although the French side claims its aircraft carrier's engagement with "security allies" was to promote "regional security", that is obviously a poor excuse only serving to highlight how inopportune the French navy's presence in the waters is.

"We aim to deepen our cooperation with regional partners with whom we share common values such as upholding international law and ensuring freedom of navigation in shared maritime spaces," French ambassador to Manila Marie Fontanel said in a news conference on Sunday on the *Charles de Gaulle's* flight deck. The aircraft carrier docked on Friday at Subic Bay, a former US Naval base northwest of Manila. "Our presence is a constant

reminder of the importance to promote and to protect what unites us all — international law and cooperation," Fontanel added.

But that's just US clichés to exculpate its divisive, meddling and coercive "Indo-Pacific" strategy targeting China and a means of marshalling its allies and partners to act as its pawns to implement that strategy. That in turn emboldens the Philippines to continuously provoke China over its maritime disputes with China.

It is pity that such a major Western country that takes pride in upholding its strategic autonomy should condescend to take a leaf out of the United States' hegemony manual, and lower itself to act as a US pawn in the waters half way around the world from its homeland where it has no disputes with any regional countries.

If a water area being a busy shipping route for international logistics can be accepted as an excuse for external parties to intervene in local situations, even when the waters are tranquil — a pretext of the US and all its allies covering up the meddling nature of their presence in the South

China Sea under the excuse of safeguarding "freedom of navigation", "rules-based order" and "laws" — there will be no such thing as real freedom of navigation, rules-based order or international laws.

The *Charles de Gaulle* has been deployed in the "Indo-Pacific" for more than two months. During that period of time, the return of the "America first" Donald Trump administration has prompted an overhaul of the US' domestic and foreign policies, which has left many allies and partners, including France, high and dry over some burning issues, ranging from trade and climate change to the Ukraine crisis.

With the French leader visiting Washington this week with the aim of keeping bilateral ties on the right track, Paris should reflect on the rationality of France continuing to stick to the former US administration's "Indo-Pacific" strategy in the South China Sea. A strategy that has met a cold shoulder from a majority of local countries.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Fu Ying

MSC mirrors EU's diversified diplomacy needs

I arrived early at the conference hall of Hotel Bayerischer Hof on Feb 14 to attend the three-day 61st Munich Security Conference, but the 200 seats had mostly been taken and I found a seat at the back of the hall.

The MSC Chairman Christoph Heusgen, who declared the conference open, praised the expanding range of issues and the growing diversity of participants at the conference. Talking about the Ukraine crisis, he emphasized the MSC's goal of peacefully resolving conflicts, saying that the pursuit of peace through dialogue should be based on the rule of law, not the rule of strength. Earlier, on Feb 10, the MSC Report, insightful as ever, used data and graphs to illustrate humankind's transition toward a multipolar world.

MSC report warns of risks of chaos

The report talked of "the opportunities for more inclusive global governance and greater constraints on Washington, (which has been) long seen as too dominant a power by many". It also warned of the risks of chaos and internal divisions, which could lead to disorder, intensified competition, and even a new arms race, both nuclear and conventional.

While the opening session appeared calm on the surface, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's speech two days earlier (on Feb 12) at NATO created a stir. Hegseth proposed a solution to the Ukraine crisis, excluding the need to consider the 2014 border line and Ukraine's NATO membership.

He also suggested a post-war non-NATO peacekeeping force from the Europe, and urged European countries to take the responsibility for continental defense by increasing defense spending to 2-5 percent of GDP. European participants were already expressing shock over the dramatic shift in the US policy when I arrived at the venue.

The first speeches at the confer-

ence were delivered by European Union leaders. The German president, the Bavarian governor and the European Commission president all emphasized the importance of maintaining strong transatlantic relationship. They responded to the US' call for increased defense spending by saying they are considering legislative measures to that effect.

This year's conference was attended by more than 50 heads of state or government, about 150 ministers, and leaders of major international organizations from more than 110 countries — and over 350 forums and side events were held during the conference.

Vance's speech reflects US-EU divides

US Vice-President J.D. Vance's speech was scheduled at 2:30 pm on Feb 14. Arriving five minutes late, Vance started with some pleasantries. But soon he shocked the audience by lecturing about democratic values, citing cases concerning freedom of speech and other matters in some EU countries. He did not address issues like the transatlantic relations or the Ukraine crisis.

Vance accused EU governments of being afraid about public opinion, blocking opposition parties, and straying from the shared values that the US upholds. He urged the EU to bolster its defense capabilities and address the immigrant issues.

His speech shocked the European audience. Over the next two days, the MSC agenda was more or less reshaped, with the focus shifting to the crisis in transatlantic relations.

There was a time when people in Europe were losing interest in transatlantic ties; there was even talk of "Westlessness". Washington, which was becoming increasingly anxious about "China's rise", became worried about the drifting away of its European allies. The former Joe Biden administration made it a priority to restore and rebuild the transatlantic relation-

ship. Former US secretary of state Antony Blinken even said, "we have to start by approaching China from a position of strength, not weakness..." After the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out, the US leveraged the Europe's fear of Russia to strengthen the transatlantic bonds.

But while Europe was wholeheartedly supporting Ukraine, although Ukraine failed to gain an upper hand in the conflict, the US abruptly, and without consulting its allies, floated a ceasefire proposal, saying the post-war responsibilities should be shouldered by the Europe alone.

European analysts have tried to dissect Vance's speech. Some say that it was more about US domestic politics than addressing the audience. Others suggest that US President Donald Trump, still nursing his grievances from what he perceived as European humiliation during his first term, is seeking retribution. Another theory posits that Trump wants to end the Ukraine conflict, and the Europe's reluctance pushed him to bypass their concerns. Some even said the US is no longer the uncontested leader of the "free world" and this is "the end of an era".

It may be observed that the biggest challenge to Trump's ambition to "Make America Great Again" is probably the US' economic reality. The US national debt has surged to a staggering \$36 trillion, or 124 percent of its GDP. Deindustrialization is difficult to reverse and infrastructure is aging and rebuilding is difficult, with the resurging inflationary pressure increasing the burden.

Perhaps Trump can see better than others the economic strains and feels an urgent need to address the challenge. The administration's priority is clear: reducing expenditure and creating new channels of revenue. According to the latest data, the US accounts for 68 percent of NATO's \$1.47 trillion annual budget, and by the end of 2024, US Congress had approved \$175 billion in aid to Ukraine. Trump is unwilling

to keep shouldering these financial burdens.

However, reducing Vance's speech to mere economic calculations would be an oversimplification, because it also highlights a growing ideological rift between the US and Europe. The Republican Party sees its election victory as a mandate of the people — a rejection of entrenched liberal ideologies and a backlash against the neglect of public grievances.

What are options before Europe?

Europeans, accustomed to being in the warm arms of the US, initially reacted with dismay, even anger. Some European officials condemned Vance for his criticism of European systems and policies, and reaffirmed support to Ukraine, warning that without their commitment, long-term peace could be at risk. Some still hope to convince the US to change its mind, by arguing that if the US withdrew from Europe, China would seize the opportunity and become an increasingly potent threat.

However, more pragmatic voices are considering whether it is possible to adjust European countries' budgets to increase military support to Ukraine and whether the Europe could build its own army. Many suggest that direct negotiations with the US on the responsibilities in post-conflict Ukraine should begin immediately. For example, if European countries are tasked with sending peacekeepers, which country or organization should take the command? And will they receive US air cover, intelligence sharing and security guarantees?

Addressing the conference on Feb 15, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Kyiv will not accept any peace accord without the Europe and that the Europeans should adapt to the new reality and act quickly to achieve the goals. European leaders are worried

that the US may not consult them before making decisions that will directly affect their future security. However, the fact that they are divided and are confronted with economic difficulties may hinder their ability to resolve the crisis. The European position on Ukraine is complicated: despite strong rhetoric, the EU is yet to come with a feasible peace plan, leaving the bloc in a precarious position — caught between ambitious objectives and practical limitations.

After the MSC, French President Emmanuel Macron convened an emergency EU summit in Paris to consolidate Europe's position and focus on a unified response which is followed by a series of consultations. It is not clear how Europe and the US will find a compromise. In the meantime, given the difficulty in bridging the gap between US and Russian demands, finding an overall resolution will not be easy.

Although the original agenda of this year's MSC agenda was somewhat sidetracked, discussions on the global "multipolarization" trend remained vibrant in certain circles. In these conversations, the Europeans often place China alongside the US, acknowledging the unstoppable rise of China. There are chances of equal cooperation and dialogue between the Europe and China though biases and misperceptions exist.

In the discussions on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, China was frequently mentioned, with the participants keen to find out what role China might play in the peace process. Would China join other countries to provide security guarantee for Ukraine? Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech on Feb 14 at the MSC was cited by many as a "sober voice". But some US scholars voiced concerns about the possibility of China seizing the opportunity to influence Europe and strengthen China's ties with it, potentially undermining Western unity. Chinese scholars attending the

conference, in general, believed that, according to China's diplomatic tradition, it would not adopt an opportunistic stance and exploit the US-Europe divide. Nor would China naively assume that the political, value-based and security systems between the US and the Europe would collapse with a single shock.

For China-Europe relations, the developments offer both opportunities and challenges. If China and the Europe engage in proactive dialogue and if the Europe is able to independently consider its policies with China, the two sides should be able to focus on cooperation. That would benefit both parties and contribute to the building of a multipolar world.

In his speech in Brussels on Feb 12, Hegseth defended the US' policy shift by saying that it is "prioritizing deterring war with China in the Pacific". This rhetoric mirrors the Biden administration's justification for its hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan, claiming it was necessary to shift focus to the strategic competition with China. Essentially, all these moves reflect the US' strategic withdrawal and reallocation of resources in response to its diminishing overall strength.

China needs to stay vigilant, and observe the adjustments the US makes in Asia. Will it manipulate regional conflicts and disputes to pose challenges to China, heighten Sino-US friction, or even provoke conflict? The US' strategic competition with China stems from a misjudgment of China's intentions.

As Wang emphasized in his speech, China's policy toward the US remains consistent, reflecting the strategic resolve and international credibility of a responsible power. China will continue to act to provide certainty and strive to be a steadfast constructive force and promote an equal and orderly multipolar world.

The author is former Chinese vice-foreign minister.

Li Guoxiang

Financing facilitates agricultural modernization

The release of the latest No 1 Central Document today marks a significant milestone in China's rural reform and comprehensive rural revitalization efforts. With a focus on key agricultural and rural development priorities, this year's document underscores the importance of ensuring food security, consolidating poverty alleviation achievements, and advancing reforms to boost agricultural productivity. By emphasizing the role of technology in driving agricultural advancements and advocating for tailored innovations, the document sets the stage for continued progress towards building a strong agricultural nation. To achieve comprehensive revitalization in rural areas, bold reforms in agricultural financing are imperative.

The comprehensive vitalization of rural areas in China requires bold reforms in agricultural financing. Since prioritizing agriculture and rural development is essential, the financial sector must play a pivotal role in driving progress. Financial institutions have been hesitant to invest in rural areas, leaving farmers struggling to repay loans as well as access financing. But recent reforms and innovations are gradually transforming the situation, unlocking new opportunities for rural growth.

Agriculture is underfunded, with financial institutions reluctant to give loans to farmers due to high costs and risks. This has left farmers with limited resources and hampered rural development. Recognizing these problems, the government has implemented systemic reforms to make the sector more efficient. By improving assessment mechanisms, policymakers have made it clear that supporting rural development is a core responsibility of financial institutions.

The results have been promising. Agricultural loans now account for a steadily increasing share of total lending, growing by more than 1 percentage point a year. Innovative

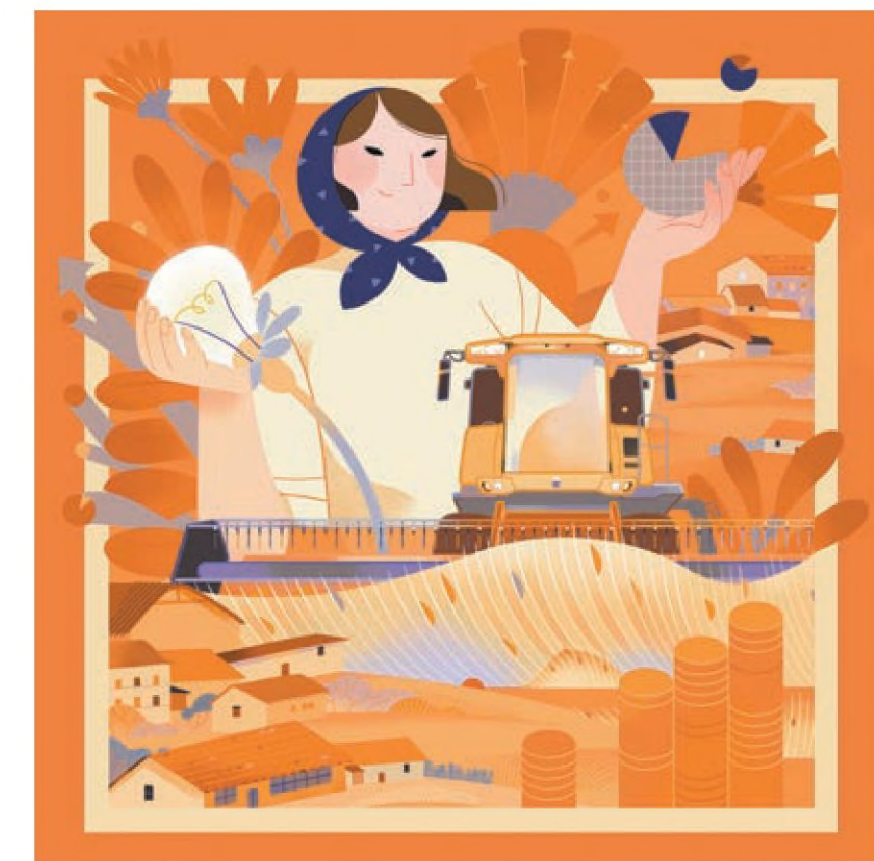
Such measures represent an effective model of collaboration between public and financial sectors, directly benefiting farmers while maintaining the sustainability of financial operations.

approaches are fostering synergy between finance, industry and public funding, allowing the financial sector to support modern agriculture and strengthen food security. These efforts have significantly enhanced agricultural output while boosting farmers' incomes.

While financial innovation is strengthening food security, financial institutions are prioritizing high-standard farmland projects and modern agriculture infrastructure by providing long-term credit. This approach has narrowed the gap created because of limited fiscal funding, resulting in the creation of 1 billion *mu* (66.66 million hectares) of high-standard farmland across China. Also, advances in crop breeding, including superior corn varieties, have greatly increased yields, bringing them closer to global standards.

Financial support is also helping modernize agriculture through investments in seed technology, smart agriculture and cutting-edge research, while localized solutions are enabling the development of new agricultural productivity models, accelerating the sector's transition to a high-tech future.

Another critical area is the integration of rural industries. Financial institutions are supporting the development of agricultural processing, rural e-commerce, and agritourism, which are adding value to agricultural products and increas-



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

ing income channels for farmers. By unlocking the cultural and ecological potential of rural areas, these initiatives are helping farmers achieve more diversified and sustainable incomes. Today, the added value of agriculture and related industries accounts for more than 15 percent of China's GDP.

While fiscal support remains vital for modernizing agriculture, it

is not without limitations. Non-repayable subsidies can lead to inefficiency, rent-seeking and corruption, burdening public finances without ensuring sustainable growth. To address these shortcomings, some regions are exploring innovative partnerships between public and private funding. For example, fiscal subsidies and interest discounts are being used to incentivize financial

institutions to channel resources into critical agricultural projects.

Notably, a groundbreaking initiative has extended cost and income insurance for rice, wheat and corn. This program enables farmers to pay insurance premiums with government subsidies, ensuring financial stability and minimizing systemic risks for insurance providers. Such measures represent an

effective model of collaboration between public and financial sectors, directly benefiting farmers while maintaining the sustainability of financial operations.

Significant strides have also been made in reducing financing costs for rural areas. With falling interest rates and ample capital supply, agricultural loan rates have dropped from more than 10 percent to below 5 percent, making borrowing more affordable.

However, challenges remain. To address them, financial institutions need to devise differentiated financing models, such as issuing loans by using agricultural facilities or livestock as collateral and expanding credit loan availability.

In addition, improving the agricultural insurance systems is crucial. Precision-focused insurance products and streamlined claims processes will provide farmers with greater financial security, helping them weather unforeseen challenges and ensuring stable agricultural production.

Financial innovation is a cornerstone of rural vitalization. To sustain development, financial institutions should continue to align their services with the different, unique needs of rural areas. Tailored loans, robust insurance systems, and collaborative public-private funding models will remain essential to promote modernization of agriculture and improve the livelihoods of farmers.

China's journey toward rural vitalization shows that finance can be a powerful tool for transformation. By leveraging innovative financial solutions, the country is not only addressing historical challenges in agriculture but also paving the way for a prosperous, inclusive future where rural communities thrive alongside their urban counterparts.

The author is a researcher at the Rural Development Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG YUYAN

Apt response

Countries adhering to six principles would reduce the global governance deficit, which is an imperative need

President Xi Jinping has mentioned on multiple occasions that changes of the world, of the times, and of history are unfolding in unprecedented ways, and the world once again stands at a historical crossroads.

Amid these changes, four major deficits have emerged: a peace deficit, development deficit, security deficit and governance deficit. The global governance deficit, represented by challenges such as climate change, degraded ecosystems, and the liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment, has become a critical variable concerning the survival and prosperity of all humanity. "Humanity has a choice: cooperate or perish." That's the somber warning United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres gave to the world at the 2022 UN climate conference, known as COP27. The remark reflects the global community's strong expectation for solutions to the governance deficit and shows that reducing the governance deficit is in the common interest of peoples of all countries.

In the face of increasingly severe and highly entwined global challenges, as well as the exacerbation of the global governance deficit, it is imperative to foster a universal consensus on the principles for global governance. Fair, reasonable and effective basic norms of global governance should be established to guide the resolution of global issues. The fairness of global governance is primarily reflected in the principle of sovereign equality and voluntary compliance. Its reasonableness is demonstrated through the principle of balanced rights and responsibilities and mutual benefit with compensation. Its effectiveness is manifested in the principle of giving priority to outcomes and emphasizing feedback on evaluation.

The first principle is sovereign equality. Sovereign equality has

been a crucial norm governing international relations for centuries and has become a basic tenet upheld by the UN and its affiliated agencies. The essence of sovereign equality lies in treating all countries equally, regardless of their size, strength or wealth, ensuring that rules apply uniformly and that rules binding other nations also bind each nation itself. This principle holds fundamental significance in ensuring the normal development of international relations, promoting peace and cooperation, and particularly in safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries. Only by adhering to the principle of sovereign equality can the equality of rights, opportunities and rules among nations be ensured.

The second principle is voluntary compliance, which refers to the fact that global governance rules must have the consent of the nations they are intended to bind before being established and implemented. This principle has gained international recognition in the field of global climate governance and has proved to be viable to a certain degree. The Paris Agreement established a new model of responsibility sharing based on Nationally

Determined Contributions, which ensures that all parties actively fulfill their shared responsibilities in addressing climate change. At the same time, it reflects the differences in capabilities through voluntary commitments to reduce emissions,

thereby fully mobilizing the initiative of countries.

The third principle is balanced rights and responsibilities. Currently, an imbalance in rights and responsibilities is prevalent in certain areas of global governance, and

this is the primary cause of the persistent global governance deficit. The majority of existing global governance rules and mechanisms were established under the leadership of developed economies, and are therefore either more favorable to them or even designed to suppress competitors. In such a system, many emerging and developing economies are unable to enjoy fair treatment. Therefore, the principle of balanced rights and responsibilities must be upheld as a universally recognized principle of global governance.

The fourth principle is mutual benefits with compensation. While the principle of sovereignty ensures equality among nations, it can also lead to externalities. In other words, domestic policymaking, which is a nation's internal affair, may negatively impact the welfare of other countries. For example, the Amazon rainforest, which is often referred to as the "lungs of the world", has 80 percent of its area located within Brazil, and how it is developed and utilized is a matter of Brazil's internal affairs. However, over the past few

decades, the Amazon rainforest has shrunk by 31 percent, reaching a point where strict protection is essential. It would be neither fair nor feasible for Brazil alone to sacrifice its development for the sake of forest conservation. Therefore, it is critical to build a mechanism that can compensate countries that bring benefits to the entire world at

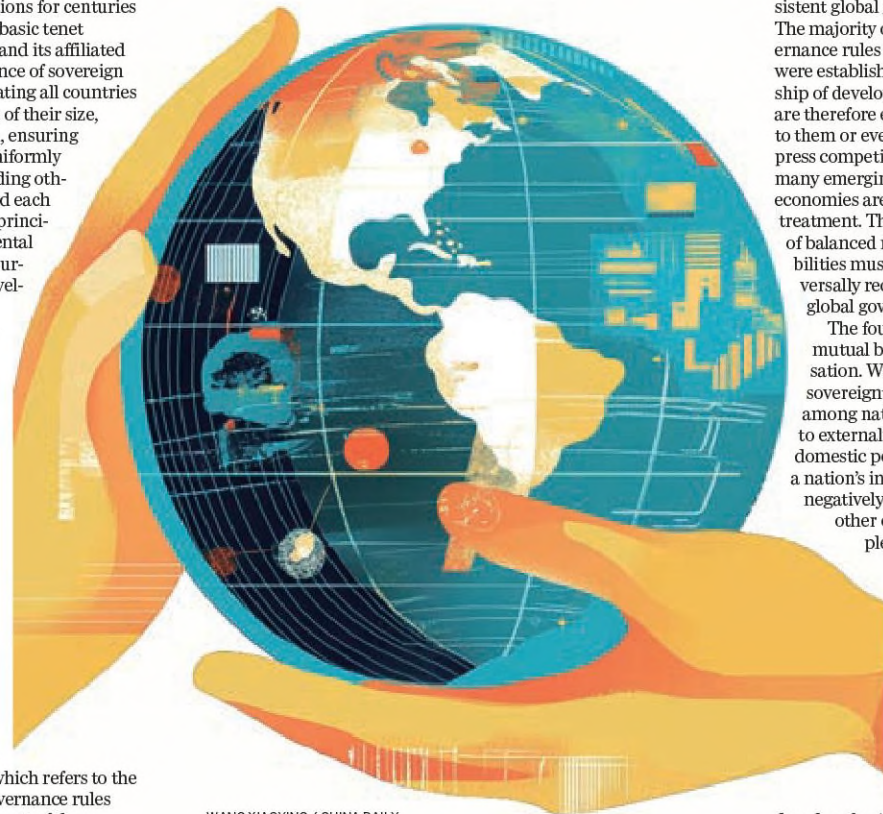
their own expense.

The fifth principle is giving priority to results. Slow action, inefficiency, and even making empty promises have long plagued global governance. On the one hand, the principle of giving priority to results refers to nations working together to figure out practical solutions to global challenges. On the other hand, it requires coordinated and efficient actions by countries, with reward and punishment mechanisms to enforce global governance rules. The principle of prioritizing outcomes is an inevitable choice for ensuring the long-term success of global governance.

The sixth is the principle of evaluation and feedback. Many global issues are fraught with uncertainty and unpredictability, and improving the global governance mechanisms is a long-term process. It is of significant value to regularly evaluate the performance of countries participating in global governance and give feedback to the countries involved, as it helps to timely address obstacles in global governance and formulate new solutions. Evaluating performance and giving feedback can be conducted by multilateral institutions, independent think tanks, commercial organizations, or experts and academics.

The above-mentioned six principles embody China's philosophy of global governance. They call for extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, practicing true multilateralism and the democratization of international relations. They are aimed at promoting a just, reasonable and effective global governance system and at building a community with a shared future for humanity.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

LI XING AND FRANCISCO LEANDRO

Bitter pill

EU must reassess its complex relationship with the US in light of the Trump administration's disregard for transatlantic ties

Henry Kissinger once said: "It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal." When applying Kissinger's warning to the ongoing events in Europe, it reflects a critical view of how US alliances have sometimes been abandoned or

betrayed when US priorities no longer align with the interests of its partners.

The Ukraine crisis and the recent Trump-Putin telephone dialogue serve as a stark reminder to European allies of the constraints imposed by their lack of security independence and foreign policy autonomy. The ongoing United

States-Russia discussions on the crisis without even European participation, which have caused shockwaves in the European Union, likely stem from concerns over strategic exclusion, diplomatic distrust and the possibility of unilateral concessions that could undermine European security interests.

When the US engaged with Russia without consulting its European partners, it sparked fears among the latter that crucial European interests — such as security, energy and sanctions policy — could be overlooked or even compromised. Most notably, the US is now seen not just as a global power embracing classic realism, but primarily as an unreliable partner.

The EU is concerned that any US-Russia agreement could legitimize territorial gains made through force, such as recognizing occupied Ukrainian territories, or lead to the premature lifting of sanctions, which would weaken the West's united position. European leaders, especially those in Eastern Europe, see this as a dangerous precedent for regional security. A unilateral US action could disrupt the EU's carefully maintained consensus on sanctions and military support for Ukraine. Internal divisions might



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resurface, with Hungary's pro-Russia stance and the occasional diplomatic overtures from Germany and France, potentially undermining collective determination.

This shock might reinforce calls for greater EU defense autonomy, as seen in initiatives such as the European Peace Facility and proposals for an EU army. Trust in the US' leadership may decline, accelerating Europe's push to reduce its dependency on NATO. The EU's outsourcing of its security to NATO — essentially relying on the US for defense — has eroded its own strategic autonomy. The Ukraine crisis has only highlighted this vulnerability, as Europe now finds itself deeply reliant on US military assistance, intelligence, and strategic decision-making.

This dependency on the US security umbrella often restricts Europe's ability to pursue inde-

pendent foreign policies, particularly in areas such as defense, trade, finance and global security. Historically, Europe has relied on affordable and reliable Russian energy, but following the Ukraine crisis, the EU shifted to US liquefied natural gas imports, creating a new dependency.

Historically, differing national interests among EU members have often hindered the creation of a unified and effective foreign policy, reinforcing Europe's dependence on US leadership. Eastern Europe's pro-US position, in particular, complicates the effort for EU strategic autonomy. The term "new Europe", introduced by former US secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld before the Iraq War, was used to contrast with "old Europe", emphasizing the distinct historical, geopolitical and security concerns of the two regions, especially regarding their

relationships with Russia during the Cold War.

The "Russia factor" and the "China threat" theory sold by the US play a key role in dividing Eastern and Western Europe, as these regions have differing perceptions of these challenges. The so-called China threat has, in fact, been largely promoted by the US to distance the EU from China. Eastern European countries strongly support NATO but often block the development of the EU's own defense capabilities, such as the European Defence Fund or Permanent Structured Cooperation. Meanwhile, Western Europe tends to focus more on issues such as terrorism, energy security, relations with Africa, and competition with China, while advocating for a more independent approach and struggling to find consensus on common policies.

For a long time, the EU has viewed itself as a third major power, alongside the US and China. However, Europe-US transatlantic relations have been significantly weakened by a series of crises and a shift in US foreign policy driven by its internal politics. In practical terms, the transatlantic bond is deteriorating due to the growing divide between the two sides on issues such as global perspectives, international institutions and norms, multilateralism, climate change, and even NATO, which has been the cornerstone of their security relationship.

China-EU relations are unavoidably influenced by the intensifying global power competition between China and the US. The EU now finds itself caught in the midst of this US-China strategic rivalry. The US' containment of China is significantly impacting the global trading system and could lead to short-term disruptions and long-term destabilization of the current global order. Nevertheless, the EU seemingly remains confident that its member states can continue to uphold the values and norms they have historically and culturally shared with Washington, while also benefiting economically from closer engagement with China.

As the US may continue to engage Russia on the Ukraine crisis without Europe, this could reshape the EU's strategic approach, particularly in relation to China. Strengthening EU-China relations aligns with the interests of both parties and benefits the global order. For years, the EU has balanced cooperation, competition and rivalry with China, often highlighting human rights and democratic values. However, given the US engages with Russia without fully considering European interests, the EU may need to reconsider its position. Softening its rigid stance on China could enhance eco-

nomical and strategic cooperation, especially in areas such as trade, technology and climate change.

The importance of EU-China relations cannot be overstated. As the EU navigates its complex relationship with the US, it must also consider its strategic engagement with China. The EU's approach to China has been multifaceted, involving cooperation on global issues such as climate change and trade, while also addressing competition (not rivalry) in areas such as technology and human rights. This dual approach is crucial for the EU to maintain its strategic autonomy and to balance its relationships with both the US and China.

China is a significant economic partner for the EU, and the two have extensive trade relations. The EU is China's second-largest trading partner, and China is the EU's second-largest trading partner after the US. This economic interdependence highlights the importance of the EU maintaining a stable and constructive relationship with China. The EU must navigate this relationship carefully, balancing economic interests with strategic and political considerations. In recent years, the EU has taken steps to strengthen its strategic autonomy and reduce its dependency on the US. This includes initiatives such as the European Peace Facility, which aims to enhance the EU's ability to act independently in defense and security matters.

Strengthening EU-China relations is a key component of this strategy. By engaging with China on issues of mutual interest, the EU can reduce its reliance on the US.

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CULTURAL HERITAGE



From left: The Mo'er Temple site in ancient Shule, located in the desert outskirts of Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Bashbaliq City, or the Beiting ruins in Jimsar county, Changji Hui autonomous prefecture, Xinjiang. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY The Kizil Cave-Temple Complex in Baicheng county, Aksu, Xinjiang. GUO JIANJIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Xinjiang's sands reveal fascinating finds

Review of archaeological discoveries helps deepen understanding of history, report **Fang Aiqing** and **Mao Weihua** in Urumqi.

Archaeological surveys and excavations in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region over the past year have yielded a new understanding of the region's rich history as well as of the legacy of the ancient Silk Road.

Last year, the region's institute of cultural relics and archaeology undertook 135 projects involving archaeological surveys, explorations and excavations ahead of large construction programs, as well as 15 proactive excavation projects, Li Wenyang, the institute's director, said at a news briefing in Urumqi in January.

The 15 proactive projects, organized in collaboration with institutions such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology, included five in eastern Xinjiang, three in the north, and seven in the south, spanning from the Bronze Age to the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).

The efforts sought to uncover more about the early civilization of Xinjiang, the region's historical role in national unification, and the various religions that once flourished, their development, and local adaptation.

At the Husta archaeological site in Wenquan county in the Bortala Mongolian autonomous prefecture, archaeologists excavated a tin-bronze alloy knife that is considered one of the oldest bronze items found in China, and one of the earliest tin-bronze artifacts found on the Eurasian Steppe, according to State broadcaster China Central Television. Located on the homonymous grassland at the southern foot of the Alatau Mountains, the Husta site is a large-scale Bronze Age settlement that covers tens of square kilometers. The Alatau Mountains are part of the western Tianshan Mountains, which run east-west across Xinjiang into Central Asia.

The core area of the site covers around 12 sq km and consists of city ruins, cemeteries, surrounding military watchtowers and other remains, the majority of which date back around 3,600 years.

During a recent excavation, archaeologists found a large cemetery about 2 km southeast of the core area. It dates back 4,600 to 4,800 years, predating the core area.

It has a rectangular stone-enclosed burial mound whose stone enclosure measures 23

meters in length from north to south and 25 meters from east to west, with a height of around 1.2 meters and an orientation of nine degrees south of the west.

It is one of the earliest Bronze Age sites found so far in Xinjiang.

Previously, this style of mid-Bronze Age (2600-1800 BC) tomb was primarily found in the Altay Mountains in the far north of Xinjiang and about a 1,000 km drive from Wenquan county.

Meanwhile, similar tombs from the late Bronze Age (1800-1000 BC) have been found in both the Altay and the western Tianshan mountain regions.

The discovery of the tomb in Husta has now extended the spatial and temporal distribution of rectangular stone-enclosed burial mounds to the western Tianshan Mountains region in the early Bronze Age, and marks a breakthrough in archaeology surrounding the age in Xinjiang, according to the CCTV report.

Moreover, the burial customs, artifacts and ancient genetic information collected indicate that, while bearing distinct features of the region to the east of the Altay Mountains, the Husta tomb also demonstrates influences from the Eurasian Steppe to the west.

Wang Peng, associate researcher at the Institute of Archaeology, CASS, said during the January event that the excavation has provided clues to tracing the cultural origins of the rectangular stone-enclosed burial mounds in the core area of the Husta site, which belong to the late Bronze Age.

Wang added that it also contributed to exploring the formation of an Altay Mountains-western Tianshan Mountains cultural zone in the early Bronze Age, and the early development and spread of metallurgy across Eurasia.

Apart from the abovementioned tin-bronze alloy knife, artifacts also include pottery, wooden objects, stone scepters, stone and horn arrowheads, and a large number of earrings, beads, pendants and other ornaments made from different materials.

Husta is one of many Bronze Age sites in the Bortala River Basin. This expansive river valley sits in the central part of the Eurasian Steppe, connecting Central Asia with inland



Nestorian monastery ruins at the Xipang site in Turpan, Xinjiang, are evidence of cultural exchanges on the ancient Silk Road. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China. It historically served as an important corridor for cultural exchanges between the eastern and western sides of the mountains, according to an essay published in 2021 by Wang and Jia Xiaobing, a researcher at the Institute of Archaeology, CASS.

Since 2016, the institute has been excavating Husta with Xinjiang's institute of cultural relics and archaeology.

The remains of horse bones have previously been found in the core area. In particular, two horse skulls were found on military constructions.

Molecular biological analysis has confirmed that they are some of the earliest examples of domesticated horses found in China.

Meanwhile, the remains of millet and wheat crops, as well as pottery belonging to the Andronovo Culture — a group of related Bronze Age cultures that flourished in Siberia and Central Asia roughly between 2000 BC and 900 BC — demonstrate that by no later than the 17th century BC, cultural exchange and interaction via the Eurasian Steppe was well-established, according to the two researchers.

Millet is widely believed to have been first cultivated in northern China, whereas wheat is thought to have originated in the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East.

In the past, the Altay Mountains were a crucial passageway for cultural transmission across Eurasia and a key node of cultural exchanges.

Remains of millet, barley and wheat have also been uncovered at the Tongtiandong archaeological site in Jeminay county, Altay prefecture. Human settlements at this group of granite caves began some 45,000 years ago and lasted until the early Iron Age.

The January event revealed that among the carbonized grains discovered, the oldest millet and barley dates back around 4,500 years, while wheat appears to date to around 3,500 years ago, which differs from previous results.

Experts are calling for more attention to the study of the route through which millet was introduced from northern China to the Altay Mountains region.

In Xinjiang, urban archaeology has been a focus over the past year, along with the study of religious relics, given that historically, it was a region where different religions interacted and coexisted.

The Wushituer ruins in Kuqa city, Aksu, are of an ancient city that served a military function and was engaged in border trade. Its major remains date from the Wei (220-265) and Jin (265-420) dynasties to the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

In 2024, archaeologists cleared the remains of nine houses in its southern area and unearthed fragments of Buddhist statues and painted murals, as well as carved wooden Buddha hands, suggesting the site's possible, early association with Buddhism, says Niu Jianzhe, associate research librarian at the National Museum of China, which excavated the site with the Xinjiang institute.

Bashbaliq City, or the Beiting ruins in Jimsar county, Changji Hui autonomous prefecture, used to be a political, military and cultural center on the Silk Road along the northern foot of the Tianshan Mountains from the Tang to Yuan dynasties. It's the largest and best-preserved ancient city in this area.

Cui Jiabao, assistant researcher at the Institute of Archaeology, CASS, says she believes the large government office building that she and colleagues excavated in the northeast of the outer ring last year will advance studies into the ancient city's evolution.

Guo Wu, a researcher at the CASS institute who is leading the excavations of Beiting ruins, said during an academic seminar on China's frontier archaeology in late December that besides its primary military and political functions, Beiting also served significant religious and cultural roles.

"Several major religions once thrived here. While Buddhism was the dominant faith, multiple religions coexisted harmoniously," he adds.

The Mo'er Temple site in ancient Shule, located in the desert outskirts of Kashgar, is believed to have been first built in the 3rd century, and fell into ruin around the 10th century, contemporaneous with the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280) to the late Tang Dynasty in the Central Plains.

Archaeological efforts since 2019 have revealed the Buddhist temple's layout and development over a period of 700 years, providing a typical case of the early adaptation of Buddhism in China, and the influence of the Central Plains architectural style, according to Xiao Xiaoyong, archaeology professor at the Minzu University of China.

The discovery of a vineyard, tombs and a northern slope residential area, artifacts such as metal crosses, and murals, as well as a variety of ancient manuscripts at the 1,300-year-old Nestorian monastery ruins at the Xipang site in Turpan, has provided more material for studying monastery life during the Tang to Yuan dynasties in the Xiyu, or Western Regions, a historical geographic term that referred to an area that includes present-day Xinjiang and part of Central Asia.

Nestorianism, which is referred to as *jingjiao* in ancient documents, was a branch of Christianity that originated in present-day Syria and was once popular in ancient China.

Guo said during the December seminar that the examples of religious adaptation at the Mo'er Temple and in Xipang reflect the inclusive policies adopted in the governance of border regions during the Tang to Yuan dynasties, demonstrating cultural exchanges between the East and West, as well as interactions and integration among different ethnic groups.

According to a meeting attended by cultural heritage authorities in Xinjiang on Feb 8, this year, the region will invest more efforts in studying the ruins of Loulan Ancient City in Ruoqiang county, Bayingolin Mongolian autonomous prefecture, as well as the remains of ancient Kucha, which are widely spread across Aksu prefecture and Luntai county in Bayingolin. Among the latter, the well-known Kizil Cave-Temple Complex in Baicheng county, Aksu, is considered a major site of Kucha culture.

Contact the writers at fangaiqing@chinadaily.com.cn



Above: The Subash Buddhist Ruins in the dusty scrublands surrounding Xinjiang's Kuqa city on the ancient Silk Road continues to attract visitors. CHEN SHUO / XINHUA Top left: The murals decorating the inside walls of the Kizil Cave-Temple Complex. SUN XIAOCHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY Top right: Relics unearthed at the Xipang site. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE



From left: Lanterns feature the god of wealth and heavenly palace in Chinese mythology, as well as a flying saucer with Sichuan's two iconic animals — panda and snub-nosed monkey, at Zigong Lantern Festival in Sichuan province. PHOTOS BY LIU LANYING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Lantern fairs brighten Chinese heritage

Min Liuzhou, a primary school student, was pleasantly surprised to spot a certain book during his recent visit to Zigong, Sichuan province.

Unlike the other books in his classroom, this one is a lantern shaped like a book that illuminates the city's lantern fair.

The 10-year-old from Chengdu, Sichuan, is one of the millions of people impressed by the novelties found at this year's lantern festival in Zigong.

The fair began on Jan 17 and ends on May 5, drawing visitors from across China with its gigantic traditional lanterns, which feature the rice harvest, prosperity and auspicious figures found in Chinese mythology.

The event arouses enthusiasm from young visitors like Liuzhou as it pays close attention to the integration and interaction of technology and culture. It uses cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence to produce AI mechanical dinosaur lantern groups, and introduces mobile game IPs like *Honor of Kings* to create a series of lantern groups.

Viewing lanterns became a Spring Festival tradition in Zigong during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and lantern fairs are a time-honored Chinese tradition.

"The city's lantern festival has been held in more than 70 countries and regions around the world, becoming Zigong's calling card," says Yang Bin, deputy chief of the publicity department of the Zigong municipal committee of the Communist Party of China.

Zigong Lantern Festival is known as the best in China and its craftsmen have been invited to make lanterns in Chengdu and Sichuan's Miyi county.

In Chengdu's centuries-old Temple of Marquis Wu, also known as the Chengdu Wuhou Shrine, visitors could spot gigantic lanterns in the shape of Zhuge Liang and Guan Yu, two heroes from the Three Kingdoms (220-280) during this year's

Sichuan cities merge tradition with cutting-edge technology, bringing novel experiences to visitors, **Huang Zhiling** and **Peng Chao** report in Chengdu.



Left: A lantern depicts an auspicious beast in *Shan Hai Jing*, or *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a major source of Chinese mythology that dates back more than 2,000 years, at the Zigong lantern fair. Below: Visitors walk down a corridor of lanterns featuring flowers at the Jinsha Site Museum in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

Spring Festival temple fair, wrapped up on Feb 12.

In the fair's lantern exhibition area, novel designs were seen everywhere. Among them, the naked-eye dynamic hexagonal palace lantern was spectacular, with its pink-hued shape incarnating a "window." Inside the window were lush flowers, leaves and fluttering, feathered emerald bluebirds appearing to fly out.

In addition, visitors could scan a QR code with their mobile phones to hang their prayer lanterns on auspicious trees.

Xiao Yong, a young visitor from Chengdu, says: "This innovative, interactive approach brings a novel experience to people."

The temple is China's only shrine where a subordinate is

enshrined with his emperor.

Marquis Wu, or Zhuge Liang (181-234), was a legendary premier and strategist of the Shu Kingdom (221-263) during the Three Kingdoms period.

In Zhuge's youth, the royalty of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) was weak and warlords were entangled in fighting, which led to the country being divided into three kingdoms — Wei, Shu and Wu.

Zhugue, the personification of wisdom and loyalty, helped Liu Bei (161-223), a distant but ambitious relative of the royal family, to establish the Shu Kingdom.

Before Liu's death, he said that if his son proved to be a hopeless and weak-minded person, Zhugue could become the emperor. Liu's son

proved to be a poor emperor, but Zhugue offered help instead of dethroning him and eventually died of overwork.

At the time of year, lanterns light up the sky at the Jinsha Site Museum in the western suburbs of Chengdu.



To create a festive atmosphere for visitors during Spring Festival, the local government has sponsored a lantern festival in the garden-like museum, which covers nearly 29 hectares, for 17 consecutive years since 2009.

In the Time Corridor of the museum, visitors find lanterns shaped like colorful flowers.

Near the Ruins Hall, where relics

including gold, jade and ivory from the Jinsha Ruins were unearthed after being discovered in 2001, visitors can see lanterns showing the altar of the ancient Shu people with its famous sunbird gold foil. Shu is the ancient name for Sichuan.

The best-known relic is the sunbird gold foil, which National Cultural Heritage Administration adopted in 2005 as China's symbol of cultural heritage.

More than 500 kilometers from the Jinsha Site Museum, a lantern fair that started in late November and ends in late March is being held in Miyi, a county under the administration of Panzhihua in Sichuan.

Unlike those in Chengdu, the lanterns in Miyi are uniquely placed in the spacious Anning River and feature bumper rice harvests and a carp jumping over a dragon gate.

According to Chinese legend, a carp turns into a dragon after jumping over the "dragon gate" in the Yellow River. The legend encourages people to strive for success by studying and working hard, as the Chinese word for "fish" is also a homophone for "abundance" and a symbol of wealth.

According to Wang Yuan, executive director of the publicity department of the Miyi county committee of the CPC, the lantern fair has been held for 15 consecutive years.

The fair starts very early — in November or December, long before Spring Festival — and ends more than a month after the festival, much to the delight of the locals, Wang says.

Miyi, located at the juncture of the Anning and Yalong rivers, is a nationally famous winter resort known for the residents' good health thanks to its annual average temperature of 20 C, daily average sunshine of eight hours, good air quality for more than 352 days a year and forest coverage rate of nearly 65 percent, he adds.

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Virtual reality facility demonstrates country's sci-fi industry boom

CHENGDU — Strapping on a white head-mounted display at a virtual reality facility in Southwest China's Chengdu, Sichuan province, visitors are instantly immersed into the mind-bending world of *The Three-Body Problem*, embarking on a journey that spans over three millennia, from China's Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-256 BC) to a distant, futuristic realm.

The 25-minute experience culminates in a breathtaking freeze-frame of spaceships orbiting the towering mega structures of the Chengdu Financial City Twin Towers. Guests remove the HMDs and confront the striking reality of standing before the skyscrapers, their imposing 220-meter height a reminder of the stunning fusion of sci-fi imagination and real-world architecture.

This VR facility draws inspiration from Liu Cixin's acclaimed sci-fi *Three Body* novel series.

The Three-Body Four-Dimensional Space is the world's first offline experience facility recreating the Three-Body Universe, quickly becoming a pilgrimage site for fans from China and abroad since its launch on Sept 22.

According to Three-Body Universe (Shanghai) Cultural Development Co Ltd, the developer of the

Three-Body Four-Dimensional Space, over 10,000 people visited the Chengdu VR experience facility during the three-day New Year's Day holiday.

In addition to Chengdu, the VR project was launched in Xi'an in Shaanxi province and Guangzhou in Guangdong province.

Thanks to VR, fans can immerse themselves in the very scenes described in the book, says Du Chengyan, the VR show manager of the facility. "Through this project, we aim to pave the way for Chinese sci-fi to shine internationally."

The Three-Body Problem portrays the story of physicist Ye Wenjie in the 20th century as she makes contact with the Trisolaran civilization, a species inhabiting a three-sun system, sparking centuries-long conflicts between earthlings and aliens.

After winning Best Novel at the Hugo Awards, a prestigious sci-fi award, in 2015, the book gained an international fan base and was translated into over 30 languages.

The first Chinese city to host the Three-Body project, Chengdu is a mecca for Chinese sci-fi fans as it is also the birthplace of Science Fiction World magazine.

On the first floor of the VR hub,



Left: People experience Three-Body VR adventure in the Three-Body Four-Dimensional Space in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Sept 22. Right: A model of the spaceship at the facility. PHOTOS / XINHUA

themed zones showcase several creative cultural products, along with a bar area offering specialty drinks and a space to unwind. On the second floor, visitors can try the VR experience.

Through VR, guests experience one of the novel's most iconic scenes — the "rehydration" sequence. In this segment, Sophon, a key character from the book, guides visitors in engaging conversations with historical figures.

"It's so much fun," exclaims an eight-year-old boy nicknamed Nuo Nuo. "There are so many cool space-

ships, and it feels just like the real thing!"

His mother, Yu, a 40-year-old fan of the novel, believes that grasping the intricate worldview of Three Body through reading can be quite challenging. However, she sees the VR journey as a valuable supplement, helping to deepen the understanding of both the book and the broader world it portrays.

"It's remarkable to visualize the process of 'dehydration' depicted in the book through VR, with King Wen of Zhou frozen right beside me due to the frigid chaotic eras," she says.

Technologically, the VR project incorporates real-time rendering, motion capture, and ultra-high-definition wireless transmission, according to Zhao Jilong, CEO of the Three-Body Universe.

Zhao expresses confidence in the future of the VR project, with plans to enhance the experience by developing more original story-based content and upgrading technologies.

China has experienced significant advancements in science and technology over the past few decades. The rise of sci-fi culture is a natural outcome of this rapid progress, fueling people's imagination for the future.

Sci-fi works like *The Three-Body Problem* meet people's need to envision the future, Zhao says. "Three-Body IP offers an exciting chance to create a globally resonant cultural phenomenon and symbol here in China."

According to the 2024 China Science Fiction Industry Report, the total revenue of China's sci-fi industry exceeded 100 billion yuan (\$13.7 billion) for the first time in 2023, marking year-on-year growth of 29 percent and exceeding 10 times the figure in 2016.

An increasing number of domestic sci-fi novels are finding success

both in China and internationally, with film and television adaptations of these works also achieving widespread global acclaim.

The Chengdu municipal government has also rolled out the Chengdu Science Fiction Industry Development Plan (2023-27), outlining seven goals that include expanding the sci-fi industry cluster and building a vibrant sci-fi market.

Leveraging Chengdu's abundant sci-fi resources and strong policy support, Zhao says that the company plans to fully explore the "sci-fi plus" cross-industry model and develop more projects with educational, economic and entertainment value to further promote sci-fi culture.

At the VR facility, guests can also enjoy themed drinks inspired by the novels, such as "Green Tempest" and "Commander's Tea," combining the thrill of shopping with the immersive atmosphere of the Three-Body Universe.

Tang, a 51-year-old sci-fi enthusiast visiting for the second time, says she ordered a drink called "Humanity's Sunset" and carefully framed her shots, searching for the perfect photo to capture the moment.

XINHUA

LIFE

Swede acts on passion for Peking Opera

Inspired by Jackie Chan films, 37-year-old uses physical comedy to bring cultural exchanges to the stage, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.



Peking Opera has been a game changer for Swedish actor Timothy Pilotti, which led him to China and shaped his passion for cultural exchanges.

The connection between the 37-year-old actor and Peking Opera began with a childhood love for films starring Jackie Chan, who studied Peking Opera when he was young.

"His films blended a lot of acrobatics, rhythm and comedy into the fight scenes. It's not just about defeating someone — it's about telling a story and creatively fighting," Pilotti says.

Unlike kung fu, which is primarily a martial art, Peking Opera caught his attention as a theatrical form designed for the stage with a unique, stylized approach to movement and combat.

Pilotti decided to become an actor at an early age, studying at acting schools and majoring in physical theater at a Finnish university.

The university required students to study a traditional theater form abroad on an exchange program during the third year, which became his first opportunity to study Peking Opera in China.

"Some of my classmates went to India, for example, but my dream was to go to China — it was a no-brainer," he says.

In 2009, he and two other students arrived at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts in Beijing to study Peking Opera for six months.

Although he had no Chinese language skills or background in Peking Opera, teachers from the academy helped him grasp the essence of the performing art form through rigorous teaching and setting high standards.

"We come from a physical theater background, so our strength is good. We are good at splits and somersaults, and our minds and discipline are strong," he says.

During that time, the first performance they rehearsed was *Sanchakou* (The Crossroads Inn), a classic Peking Opera piece where a general and an innkeeper fight each other in a pitch-black room. With meticulous choreography, the performers mimic feeling each other's positions as if it's dark and perform many humorous, thrilling movements.



Sanchakou (The Crossroads Inn), a classic Peking Opera piece where a general and an innkeeper fight each other in a pitch-black room. With meticulous choreography, the performers mimic feeling each other's positions as if it's dark and perform many humorous, thrilling movements.

The general is a *wusheng* (martial arts male role) and the innkeeper is a *wuchou* (martial arts clown). Because of Pilotti's interest in playing a comedic role and his somersault skills, he played the innkeeper and began training to perform the *wuchou* character.



Clockwise from top: Swedish actor Timothy Pilotti gives a speech during an exchange program of young Sinologists hosted by Beijing International Studies University in 2024. Pilotti has been learning and performing Peking Opera since 2009. He performs a Peking Opera excerpt in a variety show on CCTV-4. In the original theater production *The Monkey King*, he merges Peking Opera elements with Western physical theater. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In 2010 and 2014, he returned to the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts to continue studying Peking Opera, which he later merged into his original productions in Sweden.

Traditional Chinese stories inspire him. He has created two theater pieces in recent years — a story about the Monkey King, the omnipotent character from the novel *Journey to the West*; and Jingwei, a mythological character who drowns and turns into a bird, determined to fill the sea.

In *The Monkey King*, Pilotti

embodies the character's agile and mischievous characteristics through Peking Opera movements, inspiring his young audience members to be themselves.

"The show has been really successful. Because it's a children's show, we can introduce the Monkey King to Swedish kids, which we did in 2022 and are still performing. We've performed over 150 times and people are still coming," he says.

"The Monkey King is a famous character with many adaptations, so the kids already know a bit about him. But, when they can see the character up close in the show, it can be a surprise."

Apart from merging Peking Opera elements with Western physical theater, Pilotti also attracts children by interacting with them during the show. After almost every show, he hosts a small workshop to teach the children some of the movements.

In addition to theater productions, he has been working as a cultural envoy between China and Sweden, performing Peking Opera on variety shows, appearing in online videos, and giving speeches at forums as a young Sinologist.

"My dream now is to do more cultural exchanges and maybe create a show where Chinese Peking Opera and Swedish actors perform together," he says.

Pilotti shares his work on his social media platforms, with many followers expressing awe at his performance and commending his efforts in promoting traditional Chinese culture.

"The fusion of Eastern and Western cultures is reflected in Pilotti's every move. A Swede falls in love with Chinese traditions, becoming an ambassador of cultural exchange," one of the comments reads.

"I'll learn from Pilotti and put effort into training. After all, 'one minute on stage requires 10 years of hard work behind the scenes.'"

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Young student develops a taste for Chinese culture

TIANJIN — Nursena Burus, a 19-year-old from the historical city of Manisa on Turkey's Aegean coast, has developed a taste for Chinese culture thanks to its cuisine and her travels around the country.

For Burus, coming to China was not just a language-learning opportunity but a chance to experience a culture that captivated her from afar.

Her sister, who studied artificial intelligence at China's Xiamen University, encouraged her to take the leap and explore China.

"My family and friends thought learning Chinese was too difficult, but my sister showed me pictures of her life in China — her friends, festivals and food," Burus says. "I saw it

as more than just a place to study. It looked more like an adventure."

She arrived in China in February 2024, just before Chinese New Year, and immediately became immersed in the vibrant, celebratory atmosphere. Red lanterns swayed in the wind, intricate paper-cuttings adorned windows, and spirited couples decorated doorways.

"Everywhere I went, the streets were filled with red, a color of celebration and good luck. It was a new experience for me."

After settling into Tianjin University, Burus noticed that the usually busy campus was almost empty as most Chinese students had returned home for Spring Festival.

"It reminded me of the Ramadan

Feast in Turkey when we return to our hometowns to eat, pray and celebrate with family. I love how both cultures value family reunions during important holidays."

As classes began in March, Burus quickly adapted to learning and living at Tianjin University. "The teachers were supportive and encouraged me to practice without worrying about making mistakes. Their passion made me work harder."

Burus quickly built friendships with her Chinese classmates through food and cultural activities.

Her best Chinese friend Meiqi became her food "mentor". Meiqi taught her how to use chopsticks

and introduced her to Tianjin's popular street foods, including hotpot and red bean shaved ice.

She regularly explored the university's cafeterias and discovered her favorite dishes, including Peking Duck. She often followed the recommended foods on the popular short video-sharing platform Douyin to explore new restaurants and shared photos of her culinary adventures on her WeChat Moments.

"Chinese cuisines are rich and delicious, and the convenient digital payment system amazes me," Burus says.

In October 2024, she spent a weekend in the countryside of Tianjin, picking hawthorn and chest-

nuts and eating farmhouse meals. "It is a very beautiful, peaceful place. People seem to enjoy their lives," she says. The experience reminded her of her hometown village near Manisa, where life is slower, simpler and deeply connected to the land.

One of her most cherished memories was celebrating Dragon Boat Festival in 2024. The festival coincided with her birthday and she learned how to make *zongzi* (sticky rice dumplings) with her classmates.

"It reminded me of Nevruz, a Turkish holiday that celebrates the arrival of spring. Both festivals honor seasonal changes," Burus says.

Now more fluent in Chinese, Bur-

us feels that China has become a second home where she has made lifelong friends and experienced the beauty of its culture.

"We share many similar things, like our love for family, traditions and hospitality. I want to build on that connection and show others that the world isn't as different as it seems."

Before leaving China earlier this year after finishing two semesters of a language-learning program, she left behind a wish bottle buried on campus, containing her desire to become a bridge for cultural exchanges between Turkey and China.

XINHUA

Skilled to succeed

Vocational training paves way to career growth for youngsters
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Vietnam railway project to boost bilateral trade
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New engine

Automakers target humanoid robot industry as next frontier
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XI'S VISION | GREEN DEVELOPMENT

Vision drives ecological achievements

Environmental transformation showcased through changes in Inner Mongolia, Jiangsu

By HOU LIQIANG in Beijing and YUAN HUI in Hohhot

Narentuya, who was a deputy from the Inner Mongolia autonomous region to the 13th National People's Congress, vividly recalls the transformative impact of President Xi Jinping's unwavering commitment to green development during the two sessions, the annual top-level meetings in Beijing of the NPC and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

President Xi "has consistently

stressed the importance of adhering to the idea that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets, and steadfastly keeping to a path of prioritizing ecological conservation and promoting green development", said Narentuya, a member of the Mongolian ethnic group, when recalling panel discussions that Xi attended with the Inner Mongolia delegation from 2018 to 2022.

Reflecting on Xi's emphasis on safeguarding Inner Mongolia's ecological heritage, particularly that of Ulansuhai Nur, a lake in the western part of the region, the 54-year-old noted the



TWO SESSIONS

remarkable change in her hometown.

Ulansuhai Nur, which once emitted a pungent odor, now boasts "clear waters, flourishing wildlife and a rejuvenated natural ecosystem", said Narentuya.

As she lives near the lake, she has keenly observed the positive impact these changes have had on the local community. She has seen that, with the influx of tourists, local residents have experienced a notable increase in income.

According to the local tourism authority, the lake received 361,800 tourist visits from May to October

2023, an increase of 696 percent year-on-year. That generated over 26 million yuan (\$3.58 million) in direct income, an increase of 499 percent from the same period in 2022.

Huang Chengliang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Research Institute for Ecological Civilization, understands the logic behind the transformation in the lake and beyond.

Xi's tenure as an NPC deputy of the Inner Mongolia delegation from 2018 to 2022 marked a significant period when his commitment to ecological civilization was notably pronounced, said Huang.

Inner Mongolia is a region where traditional resource-intensive industries such as coal and nonferrous

metal mining play a dominant role, Huang noted. From 2018 to 2022, Xi consistently emphasized the importance of better coordinating development and protection under the premise of supply-side structural reform, promoting the development of new forms of business, and replacing old growth drivers with new ones.

The fundamental solution to ecological and environmental challenges lies in transforming the economic development approach, transitioning traditional resource-intensive industries toward low-carbon, green and circular practices, and making necessary adjustments to industrial structures, Huang said.

See *Ecology*, page 3

WORLD WATCH
By Christine Loh

US retreat from Paris Agreement comes at a steep cost

For the second time, the United States has exited the Paris Agreement. But this is likely just the beginning, judging from its treatment of the World Health Organization, among others.

The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement marks the first step in what promises to be a sweeping rollback of not only climate policies, but also cutbacks in environmental regulations. While many hope that the world will move toward clean energy, the reality is that the transition away from fossil fuels will take much longer than anticipated.

The US wants to use vast amounts of cheap energy to fuel its manufacturing resurgence, which it wants to bolster by imposing tariffs on foreign goods. The White House is using tariffs to bring production back to the US, relying on the fact that the country remains the most profligate consumer and hence a vast export market for the rest of the world.

More urgent and critical, however, is the need to sustain the rapidly growing demand for computing power essential to artificial intelligence and data center expansion — an area where the US perceives it still holds a technological edge and must dominate.

The US administration bets that fossil fuels will provide the abundant, reliable energy needed to maintain this competitive advantage to sustain growth of the US economy. Climate change is not even an afterthought for the Trump administration, no matter that extreme weather events have been devastating communities across the US and the world, from record-breaking heat waves to massive storms, floods and wildfires like the recent inferno that engulfed parts of Los Angeles.

The last time the US left the Paris Agreement was in 2017, during Donald Trump's first presidency. That withdrawal was formalized in 2020, but the next administration under Joe Biden reversed the decision upon taking office in 2021, rejoining the accord as part of a broader climate strategy. The brief absence allowed for a swift policy reset, including renewed US climate diplomacy with Beijing, even as Biden sought to curb China's continuing development.

See *Climate*, page 3

LA port braces for disruptions amid new fees, tariffs

By RENALI in Los Angeles
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The executive director of the Port of Los Angeles has expressed concern that imposing fees on Chinese shipping companies and vessels in that enter US ports — on the heels of new tariffs — could have economic repercussions.

A proposal announced Friday by the US Office of the Trade Representative would require the vessels to pay millions of dollars in new fees each time they dock at a US port, a cost that is likely to be passed down to American importers and exporters through higher freight rates.

Gene Seroka, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, noted that the new fees and tariffs could create significant disruptions for businesses and workers who rely on international trade.

"We are hearing concerns from retailers, manufacturers, exporters, shippers, and consumers alike," he told China Daily. "Right now, there is a lot of confusion and uncertainty."

"While there is merit in fair, rules-based trade and strategic tariffs on specific items, widespread tariffs and counter-tariffs will adversely impact the American economy," he said.

US President Donald Trump, through an executive order, issued an additional 10 percent tariff on all imports from China, which took effect on Feb 4.

"Tariffs have been front of mind across the supply chain industry and for American consumers alike. Importers have been front-loading as a hedge against tariffs for months," Seroka said. "January was our busiest start to the year ever in part due to tariff front-loading. Longer term, however, we will likely see cargo volume begin to decline."

Seroka stressed the importance of engaging policymakers to ensure stability in trade relations.



A cargo ship docks at a container terminal at the Port of Los Angeles in California on Feb 3. PATRICK T. FALLON / AFP

"Our plan is to knock on every door in Washington, building relationships and emphasizing the value of the work that goes on in and around the nation's busiest container port each day," he added. "This port complex is tied to nearly a million jobs in the LA region and 2.7 million jobs in the US. We don't want to see any of those jobs disappear because of tariffs."

The Port of Los Angeles recorded the busiest January in its 117-year history, processing 924,245 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs) — an 8 percent increase over last year.

"This January milestone adds to a great run of strong volume, with the last seven months averaging more than 927,000 container units," Seroka said at a recent media briefing. "A strong economy, along with

importers bringing in cargo as a hedge against tariffs and ahead of Lunar New Year, were key factors."

"We've had about seven consecutive months of peak season volume, much of that in anticipation of what tariffs could mean, and could I leverage my price down before they hit," Seroka said in an interview with CNBC.

The effects of the tariffs are

particularly being felt in the trans-pacific trade, where the majority of cargo arrives from Asia, with China being a key partner. Seroka said that the tariffs would impact a wide range of consumer goods.

"Coming from China — furniture, toys, electronics, household appliances — the gamut," Seroka said.

See *Port*, page 3

Landmark project



Bolivian President Luis Arce waves as he tours a China-funded steel plant on Monday during its inauguration in Puerto Suarez, Bolivia. The \$546 million Mutun megaproject is expected to produce nearly 200,000 metric tons of steel per year. AIZAR RALDES / AFP

MUSIC 'REFUGEES' FROM TIKTOK TUNE INTO FANS VIA REDNOTE

Chinese social media app attracts untapped global audience, builds cultural bridges

By CHEN NAN
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Arthur Udhu doesn't need much to create music — just his guitar and a microphone. He usually records everything in his bedroom or in one belonging to a roommate.

For the 29-year-old musician, born in Fontenay-aux-Roses, France, and now living in Paris, it's all about capturing raw and unpolished energy while channeling the



influences of hard rock, blues and other music genres. But lately, that energy has found a new home — RedNote, or Xiaohongshu, a popular Chinese social media app.

It all started with a little curiosity and a friend's advice. "I had never heard of RedNote before," Udhu

said. "But then I read about it because of the TikTok ban, and my friend suggested I give it a try."

Udhu grew up in a family of artists. His father is a professional piano player and singer, while his mother is a performer who had her own cabaret show for years. Exposed to a musical environment from a young age, Udhu started teaching himself guitar at the age of 12.

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