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XI'S VISION | A SHARED FUTURE

Poverty fight sets example for other nations

Translated versions of Xi's book fly off shelves as countries try to learn from China's story

By ZHOU JIN
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As Uzbekistan increasingly looks eastward for development solutions, especially for poverty alleviation, linguist Dilsora Mirzaakhmedova is trying to introduce China's development philosophy to the Central Asian country while building bridges for cross-cultural communication.

Invited by the Chinese Embassy in Uzbekistan, Mirzaakhmedova, an associate professor at Minzu University of China's School of Foreign Studies, spent nearly a year from 2021 to 2022 translating the book *Up and Out of Poverty* into Uzbek.

The book is a compilation of President Xi Jinping's speeches and articles from 1988 to 1990 when he was secretary of the Communist Party of China Ningde Prefectural Committee in Fujian province. Ningde, once among the most impoverished regions in Fujian, declared itself poverty free in 2018.

It outlines Xi's perspectives on various topics including economic development, construction of the Party, cultural advancement and talent cultivation.

Although Mirzaakhmedova has rich experience in translating Chinese books into Uzbek — she began studying Chinese in 2005, finished her master's degree and then obtained a PhD in the language — she was hesitant to take up this task at first.

"Translating political books is particularly challenging," Mirzaakhmedova recalled. "However, after reading it, I was captivated by its clear and accessible language as well as the profound ideas it presents. That's when I decided to take up the task."

"It is a book that talks about China's politics, society and history," she said, adding that the chapters discussing how to improve education impressed her the most as she believes that education plays a crucial role in poverty alleviation.

"President Xi prioritizes education, and in Uzbekistan, our president shares a similar vision. The phrase that 'it takes a decade to grow a tree but a century to nurture a person' resonates deeply with our own educational policies."

"Even with the best economic policies, if education lags behind, poverty alleviation will not be sustainable," she said.

Poverty alleviation has garnered widespread attention in Uzbekistan. When the book was released in the country in 2023, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev wrote the foreword.

"The book traces the arduous road of poverty alleviation that China has gone through with vivid examples, profoundly summarizes China's practical experience in poverty alleviation, and highlights the hard-working quality of the Chinese people."

The book was first published in 1992, and has continued to hold significant value for national social governance for more than 30 years, the Uzbek president wrote, adding that the rich connotation and spiritual value continue to be widely studied by economists, political scientists, and a broad range of readers.

Calling China's success in poverty alleviation a "miracle", Mirziyoyev wrote that he is pleased to see that Uzbekistan and China are helping each other and moving forward hand in hand in the process of solving similar or identical development issues.

Mirzaakhmedova said many people in the Central Asian country have already read the book, not only government officials but also ordinary people who are interested in China.

"When I returned to Uzbekistan and expressed my desire to buy 10 copies of the book, I was told that they were sold out."

Mirzaakhmedova said that she believes that different readers look at the book from different perspectives — some from a political angle while others focus on economy, but all stand to learn from China's experiences.

Active bilateral cooperation to reduce poverty is deemed by the Chinese Foreign Ministry as a highlight of the comprehensive cooperation between the two countries.

The Central Asian nation has been piloting and promoting China's poverty reduction experience across its regions. It has sent multiple delegations to China in order to gain firsthand understanding of local experiences in areas such as agricultural development and rural revitalization.

Su Chang, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social

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Anger over sackings



Federal workers in the United States gather at the Hart Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill, Washington, to meet with US senators over the large-scale termination of government employees. More than 20 civil service employees resigned on Tuesday from Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, stating that they refused to use their technical expertise to "dismantle critical public services". CELAL GUNE / ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES See story, page 8

New round of stimulus steps anticipated

By OUYANG SHIJIA and ZHOU LANXU



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Chinese policymakers will likely adopt a more pro-growth stance and strengthen "extraordinary countercyclical measures" to spur the economy amid pressing challenges from sluggish domestic demand and external uncertainties, economists said.

They anticipate a new round of stimulus packages focusing on driving domestic demand and boosting consumption to address domestic structural issues, offset the rising headwinds from a grimmer international environment and foster sustainable, high-quality growth in the long run.

The economists also said they believe that measures in the pipeline may include more public borrowing and spending, with a growing shift of policy emphasis to consumption, enhanced financial support for low-income households, and increased spending on the property sector via the buying back of land or by helping developers finish presold homes.

Their comments came as the market is closely watching how China will draw up growth targets and policies to revive the world's second-largest economy when China's top legislative and political advisory bodies meet at the annual two sessions in early March.

Noting that the broader economy is still facing pressures from a harsh

supportive measures in the pipeline, Sun said he expects to see a pickup in consumption.

At a study session held last week by the State Council, China's Cabinet, Premier Li Qiang emphasized boosting consumption and improving people's livelihoods through stronger and more targeted measures, in a bid to strengthen the fundamental role of consumption in driving economic development.

Wang Tao, chief China economist at UBS Investment Bank, said her team expects the government to ramp up fiscal spending to support consumption and the household sector, including more than doubling the size of the trade-in program to over 300 billion yuan (\$41.3 billion).

"These much-anticipated measures could gradually help underpin household confidence and unleash consumption potential in the long run," Wang said.

On the monetary front, Wang said she anticipates that the two sessions will follow the "moderately loose" monetary policy tone set during the recent Central Economic Work Conference, with an explicit call for lowering the funding cost of corporate financing and household credit, cutting reserve requirement ratios and policy rates.

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DIVERSE TOURISM SPOTS PROSPER FROM ICE SHOWS, HOT POTS

Country's top travel destinations boosted by online celebrity, quality services for visitors

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu and ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin

Zhang Jiajia felt like she was flying as she glided down a 521-meter-long ice slide, her one-minute experience making the wait in line for over an hour worthwhile.

"It's incredibly thrilling, and my heart soared with me," said Zhang, a tourist from East China's Zhejiang province, after trying the Super Ice Slide at Harbin Ice and Snow World in Heilongjiang province.



Harbin, one of China's coldest cities, emerged as the nation's most popular tourist spot early last year, followed by Tianshui in Gansu province, Altay in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and Shanxi province.

The breathtaking landscape, exhilarating ice and snow sports programs, and an inviting atmosphere — which included offering free rides, rolling out carpets on icy streets, and free frozen pears for visitors — made the "ice city" a social media sensation and a top winter tourism destination.

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US gets off to shaky start in Middle East

In his second stint as United States President, Donald Trump got off on the wrong foot with the Arab world by brazenly proposing to displace Palestinians from their ancestral homeland while simultaneously suggesting taking away portions of Egyptian and Jordanian territories to accommodate Palestinian refugees. The proposal not only disregards international law and basic norms but also infringes on the territorial integrity of two sovereign nations.

The new US administration assumed office at a time the global order is going through a deep structural shift, including in the Middle

WORLD WATCH
By Ebrahim Hashem

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East, where the US' role is being redefined. The US is finding itself dealing with an increasingly unfamiliar world and an assertive Middle East, which is defying US diktats while remaining determined to realize its full potential.

This has been clearly demonstrated by the Arab nations' flat-out rejection of the US proposal to dis-

place Palestinian people. A ministerial meeting on Feb 1 of six Arab states — Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Qatar — in addition to the Arab League — rebuffed the proposal and refused to even consider it for discussion.

The latest proposal is another step in the wrong direction by the US administration. Although the Middle East is still dealing with the consequences of US adventurism in the region, the recent arrogant public statements by some US and Israeli officials that they are on a

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Stranded by outage



Commuters try to force their way into a bus in Santiago, capital of Chile, on Tuesday, after a massive power outage brought public transport to a halt. The blackout forced the evacuation of the Santiago subway. Chile's president declared a state of emergency till power supply was restored. JAVIER TORRES / AFP See story, page 8



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Left: Tourists line up to buy steamed buns at a morning market in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Jan 28. **Middle:** Visitors enjoy the thrill of the Super Ice Slide at Harbin Ice and Snow World on Jan 5. **PHOTOS BY** LIU YANG / XINHUA **Right:** People take photos of the Buddhist statues at the Maiji Mountain Grottoes in Tianshui, Gansu province, on Nov 2. **CHEN BIN / XINHUA**

Cities: Distinctive identities seen as key to success

From page 1

Official statistics show that during the last snow season, Harbin received over 87 million visits, a 300 percent increase year-on-year, and generated 124.8 billion yuan (\$17 billion) in tourism revenue, up 500 percent.

Ice-and-snow fever

This winter, Harbin has been experiencing another tourism boom with upgraded tourism facilities, improved visitor services and an international sports event.

During the Spring Festival holiday, which ran from Jan 28 through Feb 4, the city welcomed 12.15 million visitors, a 20.4 percent year-on-year increase. It also saw a 144.7 percent surge in inbound tourists during this period, according to statistics from Harbin's culture, radio, television and tourism bureau.

The 9th Asian Winter Games, held from Feb 7 through 14, attracted 1,200 athletes from 34 Asian countries and regions, putting the city under the spotlight. Meituan Travel said searches for "Asian Winter Games" surged 862 percent on its platform in the first week of February compared with the previous month.

Harbin Ice and Snow World, the city's iconic attraction, had over 3 million visits, a record for the event, during its 52 days of operation.

Built with 300,000 cubic meters of ice and snow, the park was expanded to 1 million square meters this winter, the largest since it started in 1999.

Luo Xin, deputy general manager of Harbin Ice-Snow World Co, said the venue integrated elements of the Asian Winter Games, creating a more dazzling winter wonderland.

The number of lanes at this year's Super Ice Slide, the longest the park has ever had, was increased from 16 to 24. A 300-meter-long windproof structure was erected in the line-up area, allowing visitors to enjoy the scenery while being protected from the cold.

"A series of activities, including an ice harvest festival, a new fantasy show, outdoor performances and ice carving competitions, have enriched the visitor experience," Luo said.

Wang Hongxin, director of Harbin's culture, radio, television and tourism bureau, said the city has been striving to provide a thorough and multilevel experience for domestic as well as foreign tourists.

There are over 1,300 bank branches in the city that can handle foreign currency exchanges and more than 5,800 shops that can accept foreign card payments, he said.

On Harbin's Central Street, icy stairs were covered with non-slip carpets, while the railings were wrapped in frost-resistant material. Tourists had easy access to services including free Wi-Fi, temporary rest areas, ginger tea, hot water and luggage storage.

The city also launched eight special tourist bus routes that connected nearly all major attractions and ice-and-snow tourism facilities. In addition, the Harbin Metro extended its operating hours to better serve visitors.

Black Myth miracle

Unlike Harbin, which draws tourists through innovative strategies and detailed services,

Shanxi's tourism skyrocketed in popularity overnight almost solely due to a video game — *Black Myth: Wukong*.

Sun Jing, who drove with her parents during the National Day holiday in October to visit the Xiaoxitian scenic area in Xixian county, said it was the popularity of the video game that prompted the trip.

"Although I'm aware of Shanxi's rich cultural heritage and ancient architecture, I still couldn't help but be amazed when I saw them in person," she said.

The game, based on the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, quickly gained worldwide popularity after its release in August, fueling a tourism boom as travelers sought to view the ancient Chinese architecture depicted in the game. Twenty-seven out of the 36 scenes in the game are inspired by the province's rich cultural heritage.

In August, the province saw a 50 percent increase in visits and an impressive 120 percent rise in hotel bookings compared with the previous month, according to travel portal Luniu.

Chen Shaoqing, first-level inspector at Shanxi's culture and tourism department, said that by the end of last year, social media topics spurred by the game and related to the province's cultural tourism and ancient architecture had been viewed more than 10 billion times.

To turn the internet traffic into actual tourist visits, the department launched the "Travel Shanxi with Wukong" campaign on Aug 22, introducing three themed tourist routes and an eight-day self-driving tour.

Liu Xiaogang, the person in charge of Xiaoxitian, said the daily visitor numbers remain high compared with previous years. The scenic area had to raise its daily visitor capacity from 3,000 to 10,000, due to the unexpected huge influx of tourists.

By the end of November, the scenic area had received a record 653,100 visits, a year-on-year increase of 394 percent, he said.

Liu said the scenic area is building a digital display platform that uses virtual reality and augmented reality technologies to offer an immersive experience of the Buddha statues. It will also enhance its appeal to visitors by adding recreational facilities, developing vegetarian dishes and staging immersive performances.

Lu Yi, director of the Shanxi Institute for Ancient Architecture, Colored Sculpture and Mural Protection and Research, said the success of *Black Myth: Wukong* and the attention it has brought to Shanxi's cultural heritage demonstrates the immense potential of the digital culture industry in promoting culture and boosting tourism.

Many classic video games are dubbed "travel simulators." For example, the highly acclaimed *Grand Theft Auto V* is set in a city modeled after Los Angeles, while *Assassin's Creed* accurately re-creates Paris.



Above: People visit the Guangsheng Temple in Linfen, Shanxi province, in September. **PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY** **Below left:** Visitors pose for a photo in front of the gate of Fuxi ancient town in Tianshui, Gansu province. **HOU CHONGHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY** **Below right:** People wait in line after they select food ingredients for their *malatang* at a restaurant in Tianshui. **FENG LEKAI / FOR CHINA DAILY**



Below: Tourists take a selfie in the Central Street of Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Jan 30. **WANG JIANWEI / XINHUA**



However, no game has ever triggered such a significant surge in tourism enthusiasm in China as *Black Myth: Wukong*.

Malatang's magic

Tianshui, a lesser-known small city in Northwest China, gained in popularity simply because of a signature street snack — a spicy hotpot called *malatang*.

Ha Haiying, owner of Ha Haiying Malatang, never expected that her restaurant would experience a huge increase in customers because of a short video.

In February last year, a seven-second video featuring the *malatang* served at Ha's restaurant went viral on social media, drawing a large influx of food enthusiasts and social media influencers to Tianshui to explore its culinary delights and share their experiences online.

Ha said the customer numbers tripled or quadrupled soon after the video's release, a phenomenon she had never experienced in her 28-year restaurant career. "The customer flow has dropped from the peak period, but it still takes over an hour to get a seat on weekends and holidays," she said.

He Xiaozu, head of Gansu's culture and tourism department, said *malatang* transformed Tianshui into a popular travel destination, bringing the provincial tourism market into peak season two months earlier than usual.

Statistics from Tianshui's culture and tourism bureau show that the city, with 3 million residents, received 59.5 million visits in 2024, up 23.9 percent year-on-year, and generated tourism revenue of 38.3 billion yuan, an increase of 25.6 percent.

Zhang Hui, deputy director of the Maiji Mountain scenic area's management committee, said the popu-

larity of Tianshui's *malatang* led to a 53 percent increase in visits last year.

To attract and retain tourists, the scenic area will upgrade its infrastructure and create new visitor experiences this year, he said.

The rise in *malatang* consumption has also boosted the production, processing and sales of local agricultural products, especially the raw materials used in its production.

Xie Gong, general manager of Xiaolage Agricultural Technology Co, who has grown Gangu chili peppers for three years, a main ingredient of Tianshui *malatang*, expanded the planting area from 33.3 to 100 hectares as demand for the product soared.

"Previously, I only sold fresh or dried chili peppers. After *malatang* became popular, I registered my own brand and set up a plant to produce a range of products, including chili powder, chili oil and chili sauce," he said.

From March to August last year, major chili distributors in Gangu county sold 1,118.2 metric tons of chili products, with total sales of 44.6 million yuan, a fivefold increase year-on-year, according to statistics from the county's agriculture and rural affairs bureau.

Online excitement

The emergence of "internet celebrity" cities reflects deeper shifts in the country's cultural and tourism consumption patterns, highlighting a growing demand for immersive, experiential and interactive tourism, experts said.

Sun Jiuxia, a professor at the School of Tourism Management of Sun Yat-sen University, said people no longer seek just traditional tourist destinations, but also authentic cultural practices they can participate in.

"In Tianshui, for example, tourists

come to sample the local dishes such as its famed *malatang*, which is so popular that one vendor's tired expression, overwhelmed by customer demand, has gone viral," she said.

Sun said the key to success for the "internet celebrity" cities lies in their ability to develop a distinctive identity, which requires them to offer something that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

The rise of "internet celebrity" cities is also triggering a fundamental shift in urban governance and destination management. When something about a city's culture goes viral, its administration must be ready to handle the ensuing popularity and cash in on it, she added.

Jiang Yiyi, deputy dean of the sport, leisure and tourism school of Beijing Sport University, said that improving tourism infrastructure and services should be the first priority, as quality tourism services are key to propelling the industry's high-quality development.

Harbin's promotion, for example, has been successful not only because of its ice and snow show, but also its welcoming and thoughtful services, which show its concern for tourists, she said. "However, if cultural tourism departments and travel agencies believe they can replicate the success of Harbin by blindly following its promotional methods, they are wrong," Jiang said.

She suggested that cities identify their tourism advantages, focus on their unique selling points and develop branded cultural tourism products to attract more visitors.

Zhu Xingxin in Taiyuan and Ma Jingna in Lanzhou contributed to this story.

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TOP NEWS

Ready for Ramadan

Laborers sort bananas on Tuesday at a market in Karachi, Pakistan, in anticipation of increased demand for fruits during the holy month of Ramadan, which is expected to begin on Mar 1.

REHAN KHAN / EPA-EFE



Inflation vexes US consumers

Persistently high prices at grocery stores leave many Americans struggling to buy basics

By BELINDA ROBINSON
in New York
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A growing number of middle-class Americans say they are finding it challenging to cope with inflation. The price increases have led them to cut spending in order to afford food, gas and groceries.

"My grocery bill went from \$150 for two weeks of grocery shopping to \$250," Claire, 34, of New York, who declined to give her surname, told China Daily. "It's awful. It's absolutely enough."

"I think everybody who has the power to fix it is benefiting from it. So, they're making us think they're trying to fix it, but they're not," she said. "I won't be affected by tariffs because I try and shop local as much as possible."

Inflation jumped to 3 percent in January and is picking up again. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 0.5 percent last month, the biggest gain since August 2023 on goods and services, up from 0.4 in December, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

For many shoppers, groceries are now among their biggest expenses, as the cost of meat, poultry and fish has soared. Some are paying \$8.99 or more for a dozen eggs amid an avian flu outbreak, when the average price was \$4.15

“My grocery bill went from \$150 for two weeks of grocery shopping to \$250. It's awful.”

Claire, 34, a New York resident

in December, according to the BLS.

Lucy, 36, from New York, who declined to give her surname, is a mother of two who works full time and gets her groceries delivered.

"I was horrified at my Whole Foods bill the other day," she said. "I have another child now, so that probably affects it. It's definitely getting higher. I can feel it."

"I feel like people who voted for [President Donald Trump] have made their bed and will soon find out how bad it's going to get. They're going to see."

As a candidate, Trump vowed to "bring prices down starting on day one" of his administration. But a month into his tenure they are still high.

Food prices climbed 0.4 percent, and grocery store prices rose 0.5 percent, CPI data showed. Prices will likely remain high, as wholesale food prices are elevated.

"BIDEN INFLATION UP!" Trump posted on Truth Social after the January inflation figures came out, blaming his predecessor, Democrat Joe Biden. Trump took office on Jan 20.

The reason for the persistent inflation and high cost of goods is varied, say analysts. Some businesses may have "preemptively raised prices in anticipation of higher and broad tariffs on imported goods," Reuters reported.

Trump's current tariffs include 10 percent on all Chinese goods and across-the-board-tariffs on steel and aluminum. While his proposed 25 percent tariffs on goods from Mexico and Canada was put on hold on Feb 3, they are scheduled to take effect in March, he confirmed.

Mexico sent 63 percent of its vegetable exports to the United States, and 47 percent of its fruit and nut exports, according to US Department of Agriculture data.

"The high prices in stores and in general are almost burdensome," said Arnold Pri, 55, a financial adviser from Brooklyn, New York.

"I think a lot of families are experiencing hardship due to the high price of eggs, high price of gas. They have to do something. It's just whether this administration can fix it."

"I'm coping. But you know, you're pulling back on discretionary spending. I graduated with a bachelor's in economics, so I understand the impact of tariffs, and that it is inflationary. I think that [the government] believes that the benefit of the revenue that they receive will offset it. And I'm not quite sure that's going to be the case."

US Vice-President J.D. Vance urged consumers to be patient, telling CBS News that "Rome wasn't built in a day," adding that

"consumers are going to see lower prices at the pump and at the grocery store, but it's going to take a little bit of time."

A reduction in prices can't come soon enough for Duke Stewart, 45, from Brooklyn, New York, who said that the cost of food is "crazy right now."

"Everything is going up, especially food," Stewart said. "I used to spend more money on clothes and things like that, but now I spend more on food. I want the prices to come down. Not sure what they can do."

The Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index for February released Tuesday fell to 98.3 — the largest monthly decline since August 2021.

The University of Michigan's February survey showed consumer sentiment declined in February, down 10 percent from January.

The president's overall plan to tackle inflation involves cutting taxes, weeding out waste with the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, and increasing oil-drilling leases.

"I think that the idea that they can provide tax cuts means they're not thinking about the impact that will have," Pri said. "We have to find that money in order to pay off our debt, so they want to increase the debt and give the rich tax breaks."

"I'm in the finance business, and I look at this on a daily basis, and what's on the surface is not what's below," he said. "We are headed into some very tough times, and people are walking around not understanding that."

Ne Zha 2 continues to captivate global audiences

By XIN XIN in Sydney and XU FAN

China's animated blockbuster *Ne Zha 2* continues to make waves at the international box office, with its massive earnings in Australia and New Zealand further boosting its success in Oceania.

The fantasy adventure film rose to second place in New Zealand's weekend total box office list by Sunday, according to the country's industry tracker Numero.

In Australia, the film took third spot with at least A\$1,504,128 (\$948,879) in takings from the weekend.

James Curtis, an undergraduate student in Sydney who had watched the film, said he was impressed by its storyline and animation.

"I can understand why local and foreign moviegoers crowded the cinema for this," said the 20-year-old. "I do want to know more about these aspects of Chinese culture. It definitely helps build better understanding across our peoples."

Ne Zha 2, the sequel to the 2019 animation based on the eponymous childlike Chinese folk deity, recorded its second straight weekend as the third-highest-grossing feature in Australian cinemas, reaping more than A\$5.2 million in the country, according to The Sydney Morning Herald.

Its first weekend per-screen average of A\$25,000 is "the best of any film this year," putting *Ne Zha 2* on track to surpass the \$1.9 billion mark globally in its second week, the newspaper said.

The University of Adelaide communication and media studies researcher Hong Yanyan told China Daily that the film "breathes fresh life into traditional Chinese mythology and philosophy in a way that feels both modern and rooted" in Chinese culture.

"What made the film truly take off was simple: it delivered a solid, entertaining story with even more advanced and breathtaking visuals than *Ne Zha*, the first film in the series."

"The box office success of *Ne Zha 2* shows that audiences, both Chinese and non-Chinese, are open to stories that reflect different cultural perspectives," Hong said.

"It's not just about nostalgia or national pride; it's about storytelling that feels universal while staying true to its roots."

She added that social media and streaming services have also played a significant role in increasing the film's impact.

"Word-of-mouth spreads fast, and when a film like *Ne Zha 2* gains traction, it doesn't just stay within Chinese-speaking communities, it reaches global audiences through fan discussions, reviews and digital platforms," Hong said.

"This is an exciting time for Chinese animation and storytelling in general. As long as film-

makers continue to innovate while staying authentic to their cultural heritage, I think we'll see more and more Chinese stories making an impact worldwide," she added.

Ne Zha 2 was officially released in four Oceania countries, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, on Feb 13.

The Chinese embassy in Fiji held an event for audiences to view the film on Feb 22, amid celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Fiji.

Nearly 400 people, including local and Chinese officials, politicians, diplomats, overseas Chinese and Fijian citizens attended the event, according to an embassy statement.

Audiences "lauded the film for its captivating traditional Chinese aesthetics, profound cultural connotations... the world-class special effects were also highly commended," it said.

China's ambassador to Fiji, Zhou Jian, said in a speech that *Ne Zha 2* brings "a visual feast of Chinese traditional culture to the world."

"As this year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Fiji, we hope that the two countries will carry forward *Ne Zha*'s spirit of bravery and hard work to create a bright future for China-Fiji relationship," he added.

A diplomat from the embassy in Fiji told China Daily that impressed audiences remained glued to the screen for the post-credit scene of the film.

The embassy is also set to host a Chinese film week later this year as part of the anniversary celebrations.

Zhi Feina, a professor at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, said that *Ne Zha 2*, which has been released overseas in subtitled versions, has not reached many foreign moviegoers who are more accustomed to watching films with English dubs.

Compared to director Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and director Zhang Yimou's *Hero*, the top-grossing Chinese films in North America, *Ne Zha 2*'s cultural backdrop, involving knowledge of Taoism, may pose a challenge in engaging more foreign moviegoers.

Lynn Wu, a 43-year-old Chinese immigrant in Brisbane, recalled that she accompanied her two children to watch *Ne Zha 2* in the opening week but found that it had limited screenings in nearby cinemas.

"We hope such an excellent Chinese film could have more promotions so that more locals could know about the movie," she said.

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Book: Essential reading material for international leaders

From page 1

Sciences' Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, said that Uzbekistan's enthusiasm for learning from China's poverty reduction strategies reflects both a pressing domestic need and strong recognition of China's development model.

Uzbekistan acknowledges China's success in economic development and social governance, seeing China's poverty reduction model as both practical and adaptable, Su said.

"Uzbekistan has already seen notable progress in poverty reduction, and China's experience has

played an important role in that progress," she said.

Ravshan Nazarov, a senior researcher at the Institute of State and Law of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, said that China's successful approach to combating poverty provides substantial support in implementing the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and showcases a diverse and systematic model of poverty reduction that can serve as a practical example for other countries.

"China's successes in poverty alleviation are based on the harmony between economic development

and social protection. It has not only developed infrastructure but also created long-term opportunities for self-improvement for the underprivileged through the advancement of education, healthcare and vocational training," he said.

In addition to the Uzbek edition, the book *Up and Out of Poverty* was translated into English and French in 2017, and then published in Spanish, Cyrillic Mongolian, Hausa, Swahili and Lao in the following years.

In November last year, the Portuguese version of the book was launched.

With its unique anti-poverty theory with Chinese characteristics that can

be drawn upon, the book has become an essential reading material for many international leaders, especially for those from the Global South.

Osmar Junior, executive secretary of Brazil's Ministry of Development and Social Assistance, Family and Fight against Hunger, said the book holds even greater significance in a world of turbulence and transformation.

He said the book shares profound insights into national governance and social development, offering valuable lessons on poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



People walk past a poster of *Ne Zha 2* on Wednesday at a cinema in Sydney, Australia. XIN XIN / CHINA DAILY

Policy: US should forge partnership on equal footing

From page 1

mission to "reshape the Middle East" are outrageous, and have caused a huge uproar in the Arab world.

Unlike the US of post-World War II and post-Cold War that was supremely powerful and self-confident, the current US is confused and paralyzed domestically while exhausted and insecure internationally. Such a US is failing its own people; how can it take the lead in shaping or reshaping the Middle Eastern order against the will of the regional states, let alone single-

handedly define the new global order?

Israel is an integral part of the US strategy in the region. Despite being supported by the massive Western war and propaganda machines, Israel is too tiny and too weak to change the Middle East. The Israelis, excluding Palestinian citizens, number less than 2 percent of the Arabs; their economic output, in purchasing power parity terms, is approximately 5 percent of that of the Arabs, and their geographic area, which they are yet to define, is a minuscule fraction of the huge Arab landmass of 13 million square kilometers.

The US policies of the last 25 years, from the disastrous Iraq War and the Arab Spring chaos to the unconditional support for Israeli war crimes, have backfired and caused the US to lose the long game in the Arab and Muslim world. Recent survey results in Tunisia revealed a stark 90 percent negative perception of the US in the country, highlighting a significant shift in sentiment, especially since Oct 7, 2023. On the other hand, the respondents' view of China was 75 percent positive.

The displacement proposal content is not as surprising as the identity of the person who has announced

it. This is the first time that a US official, let alone a US president, has publicly suggested the removal of Palestinians from their land.

This is not outside-the-box thinking; this is way outside any box. The idea is detached from reality, history and international law, and most importantly, it is divorced from the universal consensus on the Palestinian unalienable right to self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinian cause is not a real estate case disputed by two businesspeople; it is much deeper

than that. It is about protecting and restoring the Palestinians' right to live in dignity in a state of their own in their homeland, guaranteed under international law and numerous UN resolutions.

Unlike most Israelis who have dual citizenship, Palestinians view this land as an integral part of their dignity, life, history and future. Unlike most Israelis, who have other places to go to — more than half a million Israelis have reportedly left the country since Oct 7, 2023 — the Palestinians have nowhere else to go, hence their unwavering determination to stay on their land.

Many in the Arab world hope that the US administration acknowledges that instead of futilely and perilously attempting to impose its will on the Arab world

and, in the process, deepening misgivings about US trustworthiness and risking further loss of influence, the US should forge a new policy of a mutually beneficial partnership on an equal footing.

If the US and Israeli officials are so concerned about the well-being of the Palestinian people in Gaza and genuinely want to help them, a good idea would be to place them back in their original cities on historical Palestinian land from which they were violently and unlawfully expelled in the first place.

The author is former adviser to the chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Office and an Asia Global fellow at the Asia Global Institute of the University of Hong Kong.

CHINA

Temple tribute



A traditional folk performance attracts spectators at the Daokou temple fair in Huaxian county, Henan province, on Tuesday. With a history of more than 700 years, the event is a worship of a fire god held toward the end of the first lunar month to pray for peace and safety in the new year. DENG FANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Probe begins over boat collision that claimed two lives in Hunan

Search continues for 14 missing in crash involving recycling, passenger vessels

By ZOU SHUO and ZHU YOUFANG in Changsha

Authorities have launched an investigation into a boat collision in which two people were killed and 14 others went missing in Huaihua, Hunan province, officials said on Wednesday.

The collision occurred after two boats collided on a river at around 10:26 am on Tuesday when a garbage recycling vessel rear-ended a passenger boat in Yuanling county, Huaihua Mayor Li Chunqiu said at a news conference.

The crash caused the passenger boat, which had 19 people aboard, to capsize. Three people were rescued with non-life-threatening injuries,

while 14 remain unaccounted for. The garbage vessel sailed back to shore, with all three of its occupants unharmed, Li said.

Authorities have launched an investigation, and police are questioning four individuals — three from the garbage vessel and one from the passenger vessel.

The garbage boat involved in the collision has remained docked since the incident.

More than 200 professional rescuers have been deployed for underwater search and rescue operations, with additional personnel en route to the scene.

"We will not give up hope and will do everything possible to minimize the loss," Li said.

The river where the accident occurred is about 500 meters wide, with an average depth of 60 to 82 meters, and has a strong current, making search and rescue efforts challenging, said Xiang Minghua, deputy director of Huaihua's emergency management bureau.

A shortage of underwater robots and deep-water divers has further complicated operations, prompting authorities to request specialized assistance from Zhejiang and Guangdong provinces as well as Chongqing, Xiang said.

Ten professional rescue teams from Hunan have arrived at the site, with three more from other regions expected to join the efforts on Wednesday.

Local authorities have set up teams to support the families of the deceased and the missing, Yi Zhonghua, head of the Yuanling

county government, said.

The families have been provided accommodations near the accident site.

The Ministry of Emergency Management and the Ministry of Transport have dispatched a joint working team to Hunan to guide rescue efforts.

The Ministry of Emergency Management has also dispatched a national water emergency rescue team with sonar and diving equipment to the scene to aid rescue work, determine the cause of the incident and work to prevent a similar event from occurring again.

The Office of the Work Safety Committee of the State Council has placed the investigation under its direct supervision.

Contact the writers at zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

Prosecutors vow swift action against 'extreme' offenders

By CUI JIA cuijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China's top prosecutors have vowed to harshly and swiftly punish those who commit mass murders in retaliation against society, officials said on Wednesday, highlighting the execution of two men convicted in two separate deadly attacks last year.

The Supreme People's Procuratorate emphasized its commitment to combating serious violent crimes, including intentional homicides, robberies and kidnappings, to maintain social stability.

Miao Shengming, deputy procurator general of the SPP, told a news conference that authorities are pri-

oritizing severe punishments for individuals who cause multiple deaths, especially those who carry out "major, malicious and extreme crimes" intended to endanger public safety.

Miao cited two recent high-profile cases as examples: a car-ramming attack in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, that left 35 people dead and 43 injured on Nov 11, and a mass stabbing in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, in which eight were killed and 17 were injured on Nov 16.

According to police, Fan Weiqiu, 62, drove a small SUV through a barrier at a sports center in Zhuhai, striking people exercising at the venue. Investigators said Fan was dissatisfied with the division of financial

assets in his divorce and took out his personal anger on society.

In the Wuxi case, the police said Xu Jiabin, 21, was angry over failing his exams and being denied graduation from the Wuxi Vocational Institute of Arts and Technology last year. Dissatisfied with his internship pay, he carried out the stabbing attack, authorities said.

Miao said prosecutors were deployed to oversee the cases, ensuring expedited legal proceedings. Both men were convicted of intentional homicide and executed in January.

The SPP has established a mechanism to analyze such cases and identify underlying causes, said Yuan Ming, chief of the SPP's major crime

department. He added that close cooperation with courts and public security authorities ensures rapid investigations, arrests, prosecutions and trials.

From January to November 2024, Chinese procuratorial authorities approved the arrests of 669,000 people and initiated public prosecutions against more than 1.46 million. The proportion of severe violent crimes prosecuted has fallen from 7 percent from the same period a decade ago to 3.7 percent, according to the SPP.

"People's sense of gain, happiness and security have been continuously enhanced. And China has been proven to be one of the safest countries in the world," Miao said.

Lawmakers' proposals troubleshoot NEV issues

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

9,235 suggestions

from lawmakers were submitted to the top legislature during the full session last year.

Chinese authorities from various government departments have taken steps to address issues involving new energy vehicles after accepting suggestions from national lawmakers, aiming to meet the public's growing demand.

The Ministry of Transport, for instance, has included NEV mechanics in China's occupational classification database. It has also collaborated with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions to organize maintenance skills competitions to cultivate and select outstanding technicians.

These initiatives followed proposals from several deputies to the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, urging improvements in the management of NEVs.

Cao Jingfang, an NPC deputy from Shandong province, was among those advocating for changes. During the 14th NPC's second annual session in Beijing last year, she called for enhanced training for maintenance personnel and the creation of a public spare parts supply platform.

Cao, an employee of a power plant in Zouxian county, purchased an electric SUV in July 2018 and had a positive experience, which inspired some of her colleagues and friends to also buy NEVs. However, over time, many began complaining about having trouble finding spare parts, high repair costs and insurance claim issues.

Cao also encountered problems with her own car.

"I was elected by the people. I come from the people, and I should serve the people," she said. "It's my duty to help them voice and resolve their difficulties."

To identify the root causes, she visited several auto repair stations in her hometown, consulted mechanics and sought advice from insurance experts.

She found that repair skills for NEVs were more complex than for conventional cars and that maintenance information was relatively scarce. The high cost of key components, such as batteries and electric motors, along with a lack of compatible spare parts, further drove up repair expenses.

To address these concerns, she suggested vocational schools offer specialized courses and training

while advocating for the public spare parts supply platform.

He Guanghua, an NPC deputy from Jiangsu province, focused on improving the management of charging facilities for NEVs.

"In some urban core areas, there was an oversupply of charging stations, while in others, charging spots were often occupied by non-electric vehicles, leading to low utilization rates," said He, an employee of a State Grid power supply company in Wuxi.

"In older residential and suburban areas, charging coverage was insufficient. During holidays, highway service areas often faced charging shortages, resulting in long queues," she added.

Following discussions with He, the Ministry of Transport doubled the charging capacity at busy highway service areas during this year's Spring Festival holiday, according to Gao Bo, a ministry official.

"We added fast-charging and mobile charging facilities in those areas and improved information dissemination about these charging options," Gao said.

Additionally, the ministry has collaborated with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology to encourage enterprises to build recycling networks and educate the public on reusing power batteries.

The NPC Standing Committee said it received 9,235 suggestions from lawmakers during the second session of the 14th NPC, reflecting their engagement in governance and decision-making.

The suggestions were forwarded to 213 relevant departments for review and action, with all lawmakers receiving feedback, the committee said.

To enhance efficiency, the NPC Standing Committee has launched an information platform for proposal submission, communication, handling, response and feedback.

"The platform makes it easier for deputies to submit and track their suggestions and improves the handling process," the committee said.

"It helps lawmakers better fulfill their duties and implement whole-process people's democracy."

Bunny break



Students feed rabbits during break time at Pujia Primary School in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Wednesday. In recent years, pet-raising initiatives have gained popularity in schools across Hangzhou, offering students a chance to relax, reduce anxiety and develop social skills. NI YANQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanghai to create rules for intl commercial litigations

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

Shanghai is aiming to establish rules for international commercial litigations that meet global standards as it aims to improve the handling of foreign legal affairs, a top judicial official said on Tuesday.

The move is among the latest efforts by the city to enhance China's jurisdictional attractiveness, legal influence and institutional competitiveness in trials related to foreign affairs, said Jia Yu, a deputy to the National People's Congress and president of the Shanghai High People's Court. He made the remarks ahead of the annual plenary sessions of the national legislature and political

advisory body, which are set to begin next week in Beijing.

"Shanghai plans to actively pursue groundbreaking pilot projects at the Shanghai International Commercial Court, introduce leading and benchmarking reform and innovation measures, and establish a number of exemplary cases with pioneering and benchmark significance," Jia said.

The city also intends to align its judicial initiatives with global standards and actively participate in the formulation of international commercial rules to enhance China's authority and influence in international judicial matters, he said.

"In recent years, Shanghai courts have cited the rules of the United Nations Commission on International

Trade Law in some cases and have recognized judgments from other countries, including the United Kingdom and Japan, in others. This demonstrates Shanghai's ongoing efforts in its internationalization of foreign-related commercial trials," Jia said.

As a key hub of China's reform and opening-up, Shanghai has been working to position itself as an international center for economy, finance, trade, shipping and technological innovation. The city's efforts to better manage foreign-related legal affairs play a crucial role in creating a more favorable international business environment, Jia said.

According to the latest World Bank assessment on the business environ-

ment released in 2021, Shanghai ranked third globally in terms of enforcing contracts, with its index of judicial process quality topping global city rankings for two consecutive years.

Over the past few years, Shanghai has sought to establish itself as a leading venue for international commercial and maritime dispute resolution.

"The number of cases where parties voluntarily choose Shanghai courts for jurisdiction has been steadily increasing," Jia said.

Last year, three cases in which international treaties were accurately applied were included in the case repository of the United Nations Commission on International Trade

Law. Additionally, two cases involving judicial review of arbitration were recognized by China's Supreme People's Court as exemplary cases, and dozens of others were featured in reputable international publications and databases, according to the Shanghai High People's Court.

On Tuesday, the court also held a news briefing to announce the release of the second season of a docuseries highlighting the city's foreign-related judicial work.

The 10-episode series features foreign-related cases and interviews with expatriates who discuss the Shanghai courts' innovative efforts to handle legal matters in the business environment.

For example, in a 2023 case involving Tesla engineer Adrian Hamczyk and his team in which trade secrets were leaked, the intellectual property tribunal of the Pudong New Area

People's Court took swift legal action to prevent further leaks.

"There is a Chinese saying: 'timely rain.' The court's assistance was like a timely rain, providing us with strong support in protecting trade secrets," said Hamczyk, who is from Poland.

Additionally, the Shanghai No 3 Intermediate People's Court recently became the first court in China to recognize Japanese bankruptcy proceedings.

The recognition allowed the Shanghai office of Japanese law firm Nagashima Ohno & Tsunematsu to assist a financially troubled Japanese company in disposing of real estate, equity and other assets in China.

"There are a large number of Japanese enterprises with assets in China. This practice has given great confidence to the judiciary and business communities of Japan," said Masanori Kawai, a partner at the law firm.

CHINA

Key extreme-condition research facility opens

By YAN DONGJIE

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A key scientific facility in Beijing that can generate ultra-extreme experimental conditions is now operational, enabling scientists to conduct groundbreaking research with advanced equipment, the Chinese Academy of Sciences announced on Wednesday.

The Synergetic Extreme Condition User Facility can generate experimental conditions such as temperatures near absolute zero (-273.15 C), ultra-high pressure approaching that of the Earth's core and ultrafast light fields that are as quick as an attosecond, or one-quintillionth of a second.

"Under extreme conditions, matter exhibits extraordinary states. For example, near absolute zero, atoms and molecules arrange themselves in highly ordered patterns. Such conditions are vital tools for uncovering new natural phenomena and laws, paving the way for discoveries that could transform our world," said Li Peiling, an associate researcher at the academy's Institute of Physics.

Many Nobel Prize-winning breakthroughs in recent decades, including the integer quantum Hall effect (1985 Nobel Prize in Physics) and high-temperature superconductors (1987 Nobel Prize in Physics), were achieved under extreme laboratory conditions. These foundational discoveries later evolved into transformative technologies such as maglev trains, femtosecond laser eye surgery, satellite telescopes and quantum chips.

"Developed nations such as the United States, European countries and Japan have heavily invested in extreme-condition research. The completion of the SECUF significantly enhances our capabilities in materials science and related fields, playing a pivotal role in advancing technological progress," said Cheng Jinguang, deputy director of the Institute of Physics.

Located in Beijing's Huairou district, the SECUF began construction in September 2017 as the first key scientific facility project in Huairou Science City. It is the world's first facility to integrate ultra-low temperatures, ultra-high pressures, strong magnetic fields and ultrafast light fields into a single platform, according to the institute.

A core component of the SECUF is the Extreme Conditions Quantum State Control System, which provides ultra-low temperatures and ultra-strong magnetic fields to support cutting-edge research such as quantum chip development.

Traditional computer chips face physical limits as transistor sizes

shrink to nanometers, where quantum effects cause current leakage. Quantum chips, however, offer a revolutionary solution.

In December, Google's quantum chip solved a calculation in five minutes that would take a conventional computer longer than the age of the universe.

"This staggering leap in capability — termed 'quantum supremacy' or 'quantum advantage' — is a critical frontier in global computing competition. It's why we're racing to develop quantum technologies," Li said.

At the facility, China's self-developed refrigeration and thermal insulation systems can achieve temperatures infinitely close to absolute zero essential for advanced experiments. Meanwhile, ultrafast light fields allow scientists to capture the motion of tiny particles such as electrons, said Dong Shuo, an associate researcher at the academy's Institute of Physics.

"Attoseconds represent the smallest timescale that human instruments can currently resolve. At this scale, we can not only observe a smaller physical world, but also achieve extremely precise control over instruments by using attosecond lasers as switching devices," she said.

"Imagine this: Using a human hand to flip a switch might take one-hundredth of a second, while a robotic arm could do it in one-thousandth of a second. But a laser switch can operate in femtoseconds," she said.

Femtosecond (one-quadrillionth of a second) laser eye surgery is one such application of ultrafast light technology.

"In this facility, we can expect to generate even shorter attosecond laser pulses and develop new equipment to produce such lasers. Ultimately, these advancements will find applications in fields such as medicine and space observation," Dong said.

"The SECUF is just the first step. We start with lab research, but the superconductors, quantum chips and laser devices developed here will eventually transform industries and daily life," said Zhou Rui, head of the facility's High Magnetic Field Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Experimental Station.

The facility allows scientists to freely combine extreme conditions, such as specific magnetic fields and temperatures, to test material properties.

"Researchers worldwide can collaborate here, share samples and spark new ideas, fostering a world-class scientific environment," Zhou said.

Fang Biling contributed to this story.

Joint project



Men work at a construction site for a petrochemical and fine chemical base project, a collaboration between Saudi Arabian Oil Co (Saudi Aramco) and Chinese enterprises, in support of the revitalization of Northeast China in Panjin, Liaoning province, on Wednesday. ZHAO ZHENMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

34 new species discovered in Wuyishan National Park

By CHINA DAILY

A three-year biological survey in Wuyishan National Park, a UNESCO natural and cultural heritage site in southeastern China, has yielded the discovery of 34 new species, including plants, insects and fungi, experts said.

The park, located in the subtropical region spanning Fujian and Jiangxi provinces, provides a diverse range of environments suitable for wildlife and plants.

The baseline survey, launched in

April 2021, covered more than 100,000 hectares of the park's Fujian section. In addition to the 34 new species, 10 species were newly recorded in China.

The survey focused on various ecosystems and biological groups, including higher plants, terrestrial vertebrates, amphibians, aquatic organisms, insects and microorganisms, said Cai Bin, an engineer from the park's scientific research and monitoring center.

More than 100 experts and scholars from over 20 universities and

research institutes participated.

One of the key discoveries was the Wuyi forest frog, Wu Yanqing, a deputy researcher from the College of Life and Environmental Science at Wenzhou University in Zhejiang province, found the new amphibian.

"The identification of this new vertebrate species was unexpected, as many domestic and international experts had previously visited the area for specimen collection in the last century, leading to the publication of many model animals," Wu said.

After noticing subtle differences in the frog's appearance compared to other forest frogs, Wu's discovery was confirmed through DNA molecular identification in the lab.

"Due to the high altitudes and geographical isolation, amphibious reptiles evolve more rapidly during the process of species differentiation," Wu explained. "Advancements in scientific research and monitoring have also played a crucial role in this discovery."

Among the 34 new species, 14 are types of flies. Li Meilin, a doctoral



Aspiring models

Models stroll on the catwalk during a casting event kicked off in the 798 Art Zone in Beijing on Tuesday for the upcoming China Fashion Week. Both newcomers and experienced international supermodels participated in the selection process. The fashion week will run from March 21 to 28.

CAI YANG / XINHUA

DPP condemned for barring academic exchange programs

Moves by Taiwan authorities deprive students of rights, mainland official says

By ZHANG YI

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A Chinese mainland spokeswoman on Wednesday condemned Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party authorities for banning academic exchanges and cooperation with mainland universities, citing excuses of "protecting young people from being targeted by the united front."

"The claim was nonsense and utterly absurd," Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said at a news conference in Beijing. She added that the move deprives students of their educational rights and serves the DPP's separatist agenda.

The island's education authority announced last week that cooperation or exchanges with universities affiliated with the United Front

Work Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee will be prohibited. Additionally, Taiwan high schools are forbidden from encouraging or assisting students in pursuing studies at these institutions.

According to Taiwan media report, degrees earned from three mainland universities — Huaqiao University in Xiamen, Fujian province, Jinan University in Guangdong province and Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College — will no longer be recognized in Taiwan. There are currently over 2,000 Taiwan students studying at the universities.

Zhu said that both Huaqiao University and Jinan University are renowned universities on the mainland that have nurtured numerous outstanding students over the years, including those from Hong Kong,

Macao and Taiwan, and have made significant contributions to strengthening connections between the mainland and these regions.

She welcomed Taiwan students to participate in admissions examinations for the two universities, encouraging them to enroll in mainland universities.

"The united front work is about bringing people together, fostering consensus, gathering wisdom and building strength," Zhu said.

Eric Chu Li-luan, chairman of Taiwan's opposition Kuomintang, recently criticized the DPP for engaging in confrontational actions. He expressed hope for normal academic student exchanges to occur between Taiwan and the mainland.

Zhu also condemned Chiu Chui-cheng, head of the island's "mainland affairs council", for his recent statement about amending Taiwan's regulations to warn Taiwan residents of the risks involved in applying for various documents, including

residence permits, on the mainland.

"The purpose is to threaten and intimidate the people of Taiwan, disrupting and undermining the interactions and exchanges between people on both sides of the Strait," Zhu said, which would pose a serious challenge to cross-Strait relations.

In response to recent reports that a number of individuals, including Taiwan actor Darren Wang, may face criminal liability for allegedly evading military service in Taiwan, Zhu didn't comment on individual cases, but said the DPP authorities are bound to face opposition from the public.

Zhu said it is worth pondering the fact that the DPP authorities stubbornly adhere to "Taiwan independence", and have purchased a large number of so-called advanced weapons to incite confrontation across the Strait.

"They attempt to turn Taiwan into a 'powder keg', which only turns Taiwan residents into cannon fodder," she added.

Underwater data center deployed off Hainan coast

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou

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A groundbreaking underwater intelligent computing cluster has been deployed off the coast of Hainan province, representing a significant advancement in data center technology. The facility, powered by the equivalent of approximately 30,000 high-end gaming PCs, is capable of performing a year's worth of standard computer computations in a single second.

The cluster features an intelligent assistant powered by DeepSeek technology, enabling roughly 7,000 simultaneous intelligent conversations per second. A newly submerged data module, an 18-meter-long pressure vessel housing over 400 high-performance servers, was recently added to the operational underwater data center, forming the larger underwater intelligent computing cluster. The module connects to customer data terminals through nearby onshore stations.

Beijing Highlander Digital Technology Co, the cluster's builder, has secured contracts with 10 enterprises for applications ranging from large-scale artificial intelligence model training and inference to industrial

simulations, game development and marine scientific research. The data center has been operating smoothly since its commercial launch, the company confirmed.

The innovative cluster is designed to be environmentally friendly, low-carbon and cost-effective. By housing servers in pressure vessels on the ocean floor, the system uses natural seawater flow for cooling and integrates with green energy sources such as offshore wind power, contributing to carbon neutrality.

China has mandated that large-scale data centers achieve a power usage effectiveness threshold of 1.4 or lower. Hainan's underwater cluster surpasses traditional data centers with a power usage effectiveness of 1.1, over 30 percent more energy efficient, according to the builder.

The cluster minimizes land usage by deploying equipment on the seabed and leverages natural and technological conditions to enhance reliability and streamline maintenance. Its modular design allows for deployment within 90 days from factory installation and testing. Located within 100 kilometers of coastlines where over half the global population and GDP are concentrated, the cluster aims to provide low latency



A new data module of the underwater intelligent computing cluster is deployed off the coast of Hainan on Feb 18. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and high-quality digital services.

Hainan Power Grid Co has provided tailored power supply solutions to support the cluster's operations.

"The total installed electricity capacity for the three phases of the cluster is 24,000 kilovolt-amperes," said Han Fuding, customer manager of the marketing department at the Lingshui power supply branch of Hainan Power Grid Co.

The Hainan underwater data center, a pioneering commercial underwater data center project, was launched in late March 2023. In addition to data storage, the facility functions as an undersea "super-computer", capable of processing over 4 million high-definition photos in 30 seconds, equivalent to the concurrent operation of 60,000 traditional computers.

protection from the College of Plant Protection at China Agricultural University in Beijing, discovered nine new species of *Empididae*, also known as dance flies.

"Dance flies are named for their unique light and agile flight patterns, which resemble dancing," Li said.

"These flies are harmless to humans and do not spread diseases," the doctoral student added. "They feed on pests and pollinate flowers."

Li emphasized that dance flies require specific environmental conditions to survive and reproduce, including adequate soil, plant coverage, water and biodiversity.

"Wuyishan National Park pro-

vides an ideal habitat for these sensitive species," Li said.

Wu noted, "The park's well-preserved environment is key to the discovery of new species. Some species may have existed for millions of years but went extinct before we could document them due to environmental pollution or habitat disruption."

The baseline survey deepens the understanding of Wuyishan National Park's wildlife and enhances the park's conservation and management capabilities. The park plans to install an integrated monitoring system to further safeguard its natural resources, Cai said.

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

CHINA



Visitors admire Chinese peonies at a park in Luoyang, Henan province, on April 22. LI AN / XINHUA

Study finds cities choosing similar official flowers

By CHEN LIANG

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Though many mightn't know the official flower of their city, educated guesses might go as follows: In northern China, the Chinese rose flower or syringa. In southern China, azalea, bougainvillea or camellia. Chances are these guesses would be correct.

A recent study of the official flowers and trees chosen by cities across the mainland has revealed many are opting for similar choices.

For instance, out of 270 cities that have designated a city flower, 57 chose the Chinese rose. Similarly, among 256 cities that selected a city tree, 58 chose the camphor tree.

Published in *People and Nature*, the study, "The homogenization of China's city flowers and city trees", by researchers from the College of Life and Environmental Sciences at Minzu University of China, provided a comprehensive analysis of the current state of city flowers and trees across the country.

City flowers and trees serve as unique symbols that represent the cultural and ecological identity of modern cities, said Long Chunlin, the study's corresponding author, in an interview with *China Daily*. These plants are not just ornamental, but also play a crucial role in enhancing urban environments and promoting local green industries. "China is one of the world's most biodiverse countries," Long said. "Yet, we found that the current choices of city flowers and trees do not fully reflect this extraordinary richness."

According to the study, Long said, 270 cities on the Chinese mainland have designated city flowers, with 51 cities choosing two species. Meanwhile, 256 cities have selected city trees, with 30 cities opting for dual species.

Cities without designated flowers or trees are primarily located in western China, suggesting a correlation between economic

Selections for representative flora don't reflect country's rich biodiversity

development, population size and the selection of these botanical symbols.

"City flowers and trees not only represent a city's unique cultural landscape and spiritual character but also embody the harmony between humans and nature," Long said. "They deepen people's love for nature and their hometowns, promote green industries, and enhance urban ecological environments, reputation and competitiveness."

He gave the example of the Bauhinia flower. Also known as the Hong Kong orchid tree, it was designated as the city flower of Hong Kong in 1965. Hong Kong has issued several themed stamps featuring the flower, and its image is prominently displayed on Hong Kong currency.

In 1997, when Hong Kong returned to the motherland, the Bauhinia flower stood out among other symbols such as the dragon and the Pearl of the Orient, becoming the emblem on the Hong Kong regional flag.

Popular choices

The study revealed that the most popular city flowers include the Chinese rose, azalea, osmanthus, common crape myrtle, bougainvillea, lotus, camellias, chrysanthemum, rose and lilac.

Among them, the Chinese rose flower is the most widely adopted, chosen by 57 cities. Azalea and osmanthus follow, selected by 21 and 20 cities, respectively.

These choices exhibit a "spatial clustering pattern", Long said, with northern cities favoring the Chinese rose and syringa, cities in Central China preferring osmanthus, common crape myrtle and lotus, and southern cities leaning toward azalea, bougainvillea and camellia.

Although over 75 plant species have been selected as city flowers, he said, the top 10 most popular flowers account for two-thirds



Red silk cotton tree is the city flower of Guangzhou in Guangdong province. GUO CHENG / XINHUA

of cities that have designated a city flower.

Similarly, the most common city trees include the camphor tree, pagoda tree, ginkgo, osmanthus, weeping willow, cedar, flame tree, southern magnolia, London plane tree and Chinese pine.

Camphor trees lead the list, chosen by 58 cities, followed by pagoda trees (44 cities) and ginkgo (20 cities). Northern cities favor the pagoda tree, weeping willow and cedar, while central and southern cities prefer southern magnolia, ginkgo, camphor tree and flame tree.

Similar to city flowers, over 94 species have been selected as city trees, but the choices are concentrated on a few species. The top 10 most popular trees account for 60.5 percent of all cities that have designated a city tree.

Long emphasized that city flowers and trees should reflect local biodiversity and cultural heritage, rather than relying on a narrow range of species.

The study found that cultural significance (52.6 percent) and aesthetic value (44.8 percent) were the primary reasons for selecting city flowers, while aesthetic value (39.1 percent) and cultural significance (33.2 percent) dominate city tree choices.

However, a significant portion of cities — 20.4 percent for flowers and 26.6 percent for trees — could not provide clear reasons for their selections, indicating a lack of thoughtful consideration.

Future selections

To address the issue of homogenization, the researchers offered several recommendations for cities yet to designate city flowers and trees.

Long suggested the selection be based on local biodiversity and ecological conditions, favoring native species.

"Some cities choose exotic species that do not suit the local environment," he said.

For instance, Western azalea, while beautiful and easy to acquire, is an introduced cultivar and not suitable as a city flower.

"Similarly, cosmos flower, mistakenly called 'Gesang flower' — a flower popular in Tibetan folklore — is actually an invasive species originating from Mesoamerica," he said.

He also emphasized respecting local cultural traditions and the collective memory associated with specific plants. For example, Luoyang is historically known for Chinese peony cultivation, making it an appropriate city flower.

"However, plants like the plum blossom, which hold special cultural significance across many regions in China, should not

be universally selected as city flowers," he added.

The study also emphasized the importance of public participation and expert input in the selection process. Beyond consulting cultural, landscaping and artistic communities, cities should seek advice from biodiversity experts and involve residents to ensure the chosen species resonate with the communities.

The researchers' distribution maps of city flowers and trees reveal a clear divide along the Hu Line, reflecting China's uneven socio-economic development.

Also known as the Heihe-Tengchong Line, the Hu Line is an imaginary line drawn by Chinese geographer Hu Huanong in 1935. It stretches diagonally across China from the city of Heihe, in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, to the city of Tengchong in the southwestern province of Yunnan. The significance of the Hu Line lies in its demarcation of the population distribution in China.

East of the Hu Line, the land is more densely populated and includes major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou in Guangdong province. This eastern region contains about 94 percent of China's population, despite covering only around 43 percent of the country's land area. In contrast, the vast region west of the Hu Line, which includes the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, is sparsely populated, accounting for only about 6 percent of the population but covering 57 percent of the land area.

Most of the cities without city flowers and trees are west of the Hu Line.

"Only when a city reaches a certain level of economic development do its residents begin to prioritize quality-of-life considerations, such as selecting city flowers and trees," Long explained. "This makes our research particularly valuable, as many Chinese cities have yet to make their choices and can make better choices."

By TAN YINGZI

and DENG RUI in Chongqing

Wu Tiangen, a 31-year-old weight-loss expert from Wuhan, Hubei province, attracted nationwide recently by winning four championships and two runner-up titles at a national fitness and bodybuilding competition in Jiangmen, Guangdong province.

Wu's achievement as an amateur competitor is remarkable because he prepared for the competition in a mere 42 days — utilizing his limited spare time to work out during early mornings and late evenings while juggling his rigorous duties as a busy surgeon. Impressively, he shed 24 kilograms, reducing his BMI from 29.4 to below 15 — meeting the competition's requirement.

The DWOWS Championship, a prestigious flagship national bodybuilding event hosted by a sports development company in Guangdong from Jan 11 to 12, drew 470 contestants aged 17 to 46, primarily fitness industry professionals and sports experts, according to the organizing committee.

However, Wu stood out with a striking debut in the fierce competition, showcasing muscles in full form, defined contours, sculpted layers as well as smooth lines.

"Competitive sports are all about pushing your limits," Wu said.

To prepare for the competition, Wu would rise at 6 am each day, engage in one hour of aerobic exercise at the gym, and then head to work. In the evenings after work, he would undergo high-intensity strength training under the guidance of a coach, focusing on sculpting specific muscle groups.

Doctor finds prescription for top performance



From left: Wu Tiangen (second from right) poses with other winners and a representative of the organizers at the DWOWS Championship in Jiangmen, Guangdong province. Wu poses with a medal he won at the event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Not only did he impart positive energy, he also fostered an inspiring image for our entire team and the gym community," said Shi Fan, Wu's fitness and bodybuilding coach.

Shi, a 30-year-old professor at the school of physical education at Hubei University, also made history by securing the overall championship at the 2024 IFBB World Fit Model Championships held in Lithuania in October. She became the first fitness model from China to claim the women's category title.

Shi highlighted Wu's impressive stage presence characterized by a cool and seam-

less performance, sharply contrasting with his friendly and warm offstage persona.

"Given the changing aesthetic standards and the prevalence of online livestreaming, bodybuilding and fitness have shifted toward widespread popularity and mainstream acceptance," she said.

But Wu does not recommend his example as a daily weight loss method for the public. Wu, born in Qianjiang, Hubei, has been a sports enthusiast since childhood. He began practicing taekwondo in kindergarten and has since become a skilled martial artist, holding a third-degree black belt

in the World Taekwondo Federation. Additionally, he has a strong interest in mixed martial arts. Wu later joined his hospital's basketball team and started to engage in fitness activities in 2011.

Wu, an expert in weight loss and metabolism at Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University, emphasized that his primary motivation for joining the competition was to promote a healthy lifestyle through scientifically proven fitness and weight management strategies. He believes that physical fitness and medical practice yield similar outcomes.

"Physical fitness involves sculpting one's own body, while being a doctor entails tailoring the most suitable solutions for patients and refining their health," he said.

The doctor advocates a balanced blend of exercise and nutrition as the key to achieving sustainable results, drawing from his extensive experience in aiding over 100 individuals in successful weight loss through dietary adjustments.

For instance, he suggests controlling the first meal, incorporating two minutes of exercise before bedtime, increasing water intake, mastering food label reading and commencing the day with a proper stair-climbing routine on an empty stomach.

"Maintaining long-term consistency through tracking progress is an effective method. With the right approach, weight loss can be as simple as breathing," Wu added. "It's not just about personal success but also a sense of duty and professional fulfillment."

Toward the end of last year, Wu took the lead in founding a mind-body exercise and combat association at his hospital, guiding his peers in engaging in physical activities.

"Witnessing Tiangen's achievement is truly inspiring. I aspire to follow suit and commit to regular exercise," said Li Zhen, a colleague of Wu.

Wu said he is preparing for another national fitness and bodybuilding competition to be held in Wuhan in May, and is confident in his performance due to the additional time allocated for scientific training.

Contact the writers at dengrui@chinadaily.com.cn

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

In this weekly feature China Daily gives voice to Asia and its people. The stories presented come mainly from the Asia News Network (ANN), of which China Daily is among its 20 leading titles.



A whale breaches next to a small boat in the Indian Ocean, 3 kilometers from the Reunion Island's western coast in 2017. ARNAUD LECHAPELAYS / SOLENT NEWS

Marine mammals call Southeast Asia's waters home

SEA SENTINELS

Many people living in Southeast Asia often think they have to visit Australia, the United States or Japan to see whales, but such marine mammals can also be found in the waters in the region.

Marine mammals have been sighted across Southeast Asia, one of the world's marine biodiversity hot spots with more than 3,000 species of fish and 600 types of corals.

Marcus Chua, who studies mammals at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore, or NUS, said the presence of marine mammals shows that local habitats are able to support a population of large predators, or, in the case of the dugong, large herbivores.

Louisa Ponnampalam, the co-founder of Malaysian marine mammal research and conservation group MareCet, added: "The significance of losing (marine mammals) would mean that their habitats can no longer support them."

"We should be really concerned about our own future should we ever lose them, because it means the sea around us is no longer healthy, and we humans rely so much on the sea for so many things, whether we realize it or not," Ponnampalam said.

Found off the coasts of the Philippines and Thailand between October and January in search of warmer waters for mating and reproduction, humpback whales can grow up to 18.3 meters in length and weigh up to 36,280 kilograms, or the approximate mass of three to five buses.

Once hunted to the brink of extinction, their numbers have

gradually recovered, thanks to conservation efforts.

Another marine mammal species, sperm whales, categorized as being vulnerable to extinction, can grow up to 18 meters, with the largest brain of any animal. A whale's brain is five times the size of a human brain, weighing up to 9 kg, six times heavier than a human's.

Though generally spotted off Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Cambodia between April and July for feeding, mating and molting (the process of whales to exfoliate their skin), the carcass of a sperm whale was beached along Jurong Island in Singapore in 2015.

Nicknamed "Jubi Lee", it was found with its spine broken in several places, likely from a ship strike. Its skeleton now hangs in the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.

Additionally, an increase in sightings of Bryde's whales in Southeast Asia were reported lately, with three spotted in Thai waters in November. Also found off Indonesia and Brunei, they are among the few whale species that prefer warmer waters above 15 C. Hence, they are also known as tropical whales.

In 1994, the carcass of a false killer whale surfaced on the coast along Tuas in Singapore, and was mistaken for a shark by two men who discovered it while hunting for crabs. Its species was later correctly identified by Underwater World Singapore.

Irrawaddy dolphins can be found in estuaries and the coastal waters of Vietnam, Indonesia, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Growing and weighing up to 2.7 meters and 130 kg, they feed on bony fish and fish eggs. These



Villagers look at a dead sperm whale that was stranded at Yeh Malet beach in Klungkung, Indonesia, on April 5. DICKY BISINGLASI / AFP

endangered dolphins herd fish into their hunting area by squirting streams of water that reach up to 1.5 meters.

The only porpoise to lack a dorsal fin, the Indo-Pacific finless porpoise can be spotted in estuaries and shallow coastal waters around Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

Despite resembling whales, dolphins and porpoises, dugongs are believed to be more closely related to elephants. These herbivores are typically sighted in estuaries and shallow coastal waters around Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Dugongs are commonly known as "sea cows", due to their herbivorous diet, with adult dugongs consuming up to 30 kg of seagrass daily, said Sirius Ng, a PhD student studying

marine mammals at the NUS.

As they are found in only areas rich in seagrass, it indicates that the area of water is still able to support the existence of the meadows, which in turn supports these species' ability to continue existing in an area, said Ponnampalam.

According to Ng, studies have shown the germination of seagrass seeds speeds up once it has passed through the dugong's digestive system, and they are later deposited onto the seabed when it defecates.

Vulnerable to collisions

With a very limited lung capacity, these gentle giants typically spend no longer than three minutes underwater. This makes them vulnerable to collisions with vessels and the accidental consumption of floating

marine debris when they surface to breathe.

Marine litter, including plastic packaging and ropes, as well as discarded or lost fishing gear such as nets, lines and traps, can cause significant harm to sea animals.

Ingesting marine debris may lead to gastrointestinal tract damage, while animals that get entangled in plastic pollution may get injured and starve to death — or be left at the mercy of predators. Animals like dolphins, whales and porpoises that need to regularly surface for air may drown due to entanglement.

Dolphins, whales, sharks, turtles and other species have also inadvertently gotten caught during commercial fishing operations such as trawling and drift netting. Entrapment in nets and lines, and accidental capture, can result in injury and death of the bycatch.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, it is estimated more than 500,000 marine mammals are incidentally captured each year on a global scale.

Ship strikes pose a major threat to marine life as well, with a global average of 30 whales, dolphins and porpoises getting killed each year after being hit by ships.

The risk of ship strikes is high in the waters around Singapore, including the Strait of Malacca, which are some of the busiest in the world, Chua said. He said this risk can be mitigated with the enforcement of vessel speed limits in whale collision hot spots.

Maritime traffic also contributes to underwater noise pollution.

Sound travels much faster and

further underwater than in air. With most marine animals relying on sound for communication, and feeding and navigation, loud noises from shipping, military sonar, industrial activities or underwater explosions distress and disorientate them.

Underwater noise pollution can also cause hearing loss in marine mammals and alter their acoustic behavior, but is currently not legally recognized as an official threat to marine life in Southeast Asia, Ponnampalam said.

Coastal development, including land reclamation and dredging, has also been proving to be an increasing threat to marine life, as it can fragment marine mammals' habitats, into smaller, isolated areas.

"There is so much research that could and should be done, if only we, the community of Southeast Asian researchers, had more resources to do so," said Ponnampalam.

Potential areas of research include bioacoustic research to investigate how underwater noise pollution impacts marine mammals, genetic research to identify movement patterns and the genetic diversity of marine mammal populations in the region, as well as how resilient they are to disturbances.

She added that it is also important to learn about socio-cultural interactions and the value of marine mammals in Southeast Asia within local communities and conduct ecological research to learn more about marine mammals' distribution, population abundance, habitat use and behavior.

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE

5,300 people remain displaced after last year's volcano eruptions in Indonesia



Schoolchildren run during the eruption of Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki in East Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, on Nov 7. ARNOLD WELIANTO / AFP

More than 5,300 residents of Indonesia's East Flores Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, remain displaced following the massive eruptions of Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki in November last year, as the volcano continues to exhibit heightened activity.

According to the East Flores Disaster Mitigation Agency, or BPBD, 2,186 evacuees are sheltered in four temporary camps in Titehena district, some 25 kilometers from the mountain.

The remaining 3,118 evacuees are staying with relatives in various areas across East Flores.

Avelina Manggota Hallan, head of East Flores BPBD emergency and logistics division, said that all the evacuees come from six villages situated 4 to 5 km from the volcano's crater: Nobo, Dulipali, Klantanlo,

Nawokote, Hokeng Jaya and Boru.

"These villages fall within the dangerous exclusion zone and are at risk of being affected by a potential eruption of Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki," she said.

Avelina added that around 200 displaced residents were relocated to temporary housing in Konga village, also in Titehena district, in January. The remaining evacuees will also be moved to transitional housing once the second phase of construction is completed.

The disaster mitigation authorities of Indonesia plan to build approximately 440 temporary homes for about 2,000 families displaced by Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki's eruptions last year.

The first phase of construction, which included about 200 temporary houses, was completed on Jan

23. Each shelter is designed to accommodate five families and is equipped with showers, toilets, electricity, and a communal kitchen.

Acting East Flores Regent Sulastri H I Rasyid stated on Feb 19 that the remaining temporary housing is expected to be finished within the next one to two months.

The central government is currently building around 2,700 permanent homes for residents affected by the Lewotobi Laki-Laki eruptions, with plans to complete the construction by April.

At least 10 people died after Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki erupted near midnight on Nov 3. Fiery lava and rocks struck nearby settlements about 4 km from the crater, burning homes and causing significant damage.

Images shared by authorities

showed that the evening sky over the volcano turned red because of the eruption. Footage showed some wooden houses on fire and mask-wearing residents being rescued as thick volcanic ash covered roads and buildings.

Authorities established a 7 km exclusion zone around the crater and expanded it to 9 km just days later for safety reasons.

The November eruption forced more than 13,000 people to evacuate to temporary shelters.

Following a period of relatively low activity, Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki has seen a significant increase in volcanic earthquakes over the past week.

The heightened volcanic activity led authorities to once again increase the alert level to the highest of a four-tiered system on Feb 12.

Officials also expanded the exclusion zone from 5 to 6 km and warned the public about a heightened risk of lahars — a dangerous flow of mud and debris from the volcano.

Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki observation post head Herman Yosef S Mboro reported that on Feb 19, the volcano experienced three burst tremors and two distant tectonic earthquakes from midnight to 6 am.

"We also observed weakly pressured crater smoke, white in color, with moderate to thick intensity, rising 100 to 200 meters above the crater summit," he said.

The East Flores administration declared a state of emergency on Feb 13, which will remain in effect for the next six months.

THE JAKARTA POST, INDONESIA

WORLD

No nuclear talks under pressure, Iran FM says

TEHERAN — Iran's refusal to negotiate over its nuclear program under extreme pressure and its recent military exercises, while engaging in diplomacy, indicate the country's determined and diverse approaches to safeguarding its national interests.

The country will not yield to external pressure or sanctions, emphasized Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in a Tuesday meeting with his visiting Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in Teheran.

"Negotiations under pressure, threats and sanctions are meaningless," Xinhua quoted Araghchi as saying.

At a joint news conference after their meeting, Araghchi said Iran will not agree to hold negotiations on its nuclear program as long as the "maximum pressure" campaign of the United States continues against Iran.

Iran has engaged in "close consultations" with Moscow on reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, he said. The US unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA signed in 2015 by Iran and world powers, claiming it failed to curtail Iran's missile program and regional influence.

Teheran is determined to strengthen interactions with Moscow, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said when meeting with Lavrov on Tuesday evening, according to MEHR.

"Iran and Russia have similar views on regional issues and are pursuing the strengthening of their regional and international cooperation within the framework of their own interactions and within the framework of regional and international organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the

Eurasian Economic Union, and BRICS," Pezeshkian said.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei on Wednesday condemned fresh US sanctions targeting vessels, individuals, and entities allegedly involved in Iran's crude oil trade.

Iran has been conducting military exercises recently. During an exercise on Tuesday, the Iranian Air Force successfully deployed advanced drone models Mohajer-6 and Kaman-12 to execute a range of complex missions, MEHR reported.

'Decisive' response

Any Israeli threat against Iran's interests will receive a "decisive" response from Iranian armed forces, Gholam-Ali Rashid, commander of Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, warned on Monday in southeastern Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province. He was reacting to recent threats issued to Teheran by Israeli officials, including against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Rashid added that Israel has been making miscalculations about Iran due to its lack of knowledge about the country and has been trying to deceive the US, Europe and West Asia by running an "incorrect" narrative about Iran's power over the last four months.

Addressing the 17th Cultural Festival of Ali Akbar at the Summit Hall of the Ministry of Defense in Teheran on Tuesday, Aziz Nasirzadeh, minister of defense, said that Iran is ready to give a strong and decisive response to any threat or mistake committed by the enemy, IRNA reported.

Mike Gu in Hong Kong contributed to this story.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian (right), speaks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Teheran on Tuesday.
IRANIAN PRESIDENCY OFFICE VIA AP



Palestinians struggle with the harsh winter conditions in tents they set up in demolished houses in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, on Monday. ASHRAF AMRA / ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

Deal reached on swap of hostages, prisoners

Israel-Hamas pact raises hopes of cease-fire holding until further talks

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
jan@chinadaily.com

The deal for the release of four slain Israeli hostages in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners between the Palestinian militant group Hamas and Israel raised hopes that the multiphase agreement could hold for further negotiations until at least the six-week deadline of the first phase.

Both sides confirmed the latest development through media reports on Wednesday. However, Israel warned that if no further hostages were released by March 8, the cease-fire could end, highlighting the fragility of the truce.

A Hamas leadership delegation concluded its visit to Cairo, where it met with Egyptian officials, Xinhua News Agency reported, citing a Hamas statement. Discussions were held on the implementation of the cease-fire agreement, the exchange of prisoners, and the prospects for the second phase of negotiations.

Israel was expected to release more than 600 Palestinian detainees on Saturday after Hamas freed six hostages earlier in the day.

But in a statement published on Sunday, the Israeli Prime Minister's office said that in light of Hamas' "repeated violations", including "the ceremonies that humiliate our hostages" and the "cynical exploitation of our hosta-

ges for propaganda purposes", it had been decided that the "release of terrorists" would be delayed "until the release of the next hostages has been assured, and without the humiliating ceremonies".

Horrible tragedy

At a United Nations Security Council meeting on Wednesday, rescued Israeli hostage Noa Argamani appealed to the international community to put an end to "this terrible tragedy".

Without immediate action, Argamani said, many more innocent people will be killed, "including my partner Avinatan Or". Until Avinatan returns, she said, "My heart is in captivity."

Daniel Levy, a former Israeli peace negotiator and president of the policy institute US/Middle East Project, reiterated the importance of security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

"A minute of silence for each of the Bibas children (Israeli hostages) would be appropriate, as would a minute of silence for each of the more than 18,000 Palestinian children murdered in Israel's devastation of Gaza. That silence would extend to over 300 hours," said Levy.

He said the unlawful displacement of Palestinians must not be endorsed or encouraged by any state, including a UNSC member state.

"We know attempts have been made in the past to remove Pales-

tinians. Neither people will be ethnically cleansed nor submitted to genocidal violence," said Levy.

Mustafa Yetim, an associate professor at the International Relations Department at Eskisehir Osmangazi University in Turkey, told China Daily that the latest phase of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been marked by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's assertive policies, strongly backed by the US' aggressive and radical pro-Israel stance.

Yetim said Israel continued to pursue destabilizing and expansionist actions in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, all aimed at weakening emerging regional dynamics and exacerbating divisions.

Moreover, he said, the US regional policy, narrowly focused on economic gains, has further amplified tensions.

"The already fragile negotiations between Israel and Hamas face significant challenges, and the risk of renewed conflict remains high," said Yetim.

Sami al-Arian, the director of the Center for Islam and Global Affairs at Istanbul Zaim University, said in an interview with Al Jazeera that throughout the first phase of the cease-fire deal, Netanyahu had been trying to find a justification to "resume his genocidal war".

But the Israeli leader has not been given the "green light" by the US, prompting him to go through with the rest of the deal, and allow the handover of 620 Palestinian prisoners.

Power back in Chilean homes after rare blackout

SANTIAGO — Chilean authorities said they restored power to most homes on Wednesday, hours after a massive, rare blackout caused transport chaos in the capital and forced the nation's president to declare a state of emergency and a curfew across much of the country.

Chile's worst blackout in well over a decade struck on Tuesday afternoon, leaving millions without power.

President Gabriel Boric blamed private companies that manage the grid for the system's failure.

"This is outrageous! The daily life of millions of Chileans can't be impacted like this by companies that don't do their job," Boric said in a statement.

Early on Wednesday, "90 percent of (electricity) consumption was restored" to homes, the power system's operator said in a statement.

According to the Senapred disaster response agency, the outage affected an area stretching all the way from Arica in the northern part of the long, narrow South American country to Los Lagos in the south—an area home to over 90 percent of Chile's 20 million people.

The blackout disrupted transport in the capital Santiago, where thousands were evacuated from the metro and people jostled to board overflowing buses.

President Boric activated "a state of emergency due to a catastrophe" and announced a curfew until 6 am on Wednesday.

Sabotage ruled out

Interior Minister Carolina Toha ruled out sabotage as the reason for the power loss, which began at 3:16 pm in the middle of the Southern Hemisphere summer.

"There is no reason to assume that this is an attack," she said on Tuesday, telling reporters it was more likely "a failure in the system's operation".

The metro company, which transports 2.3 million passengers every day, said workers were deployed to all stations "to support safe evacuations."

Out-of-service traffic lights caused major gridlocks, with some people having to walk for hours under the hot sun to reach their homes.

Shops and offices closed early. The Chilevision broadcaster showed a video of people trapped on a mechanical ride several meters high at an amusement park in Santiago before being rescued.

An AFP photographer saw firefighters rescue a distraught elderly woman who had been trapped inside an elevator.

The country's hospital system and prisons were operating on emergency generators.

Boric flew over the capital by helicopter to assess the situation.

Chile boasts one of the best power networks in South America and has not had a blackout this big in about 15 years.

In 2010, damage to a power plant in southern Chile plunged hundreds of thousands of people into darkness for several hours.

That outage happened a month after a massive 8.8-magnitude earthquake killed more than 500 people and rocked the national power grid.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Musk's new ultimatum sparks fresh confusion among workers

WASHINGTON — Federal workers faced fresh uncertainty about their futures on Tuesday after Elon Musk gave them "another chance" to respond to his ultimatum that they justify their jobs or risk termination, contradicting guidance from some officials that the request was voluntary.

The confusing back-and-forth has rippled through the federal bureaucracy, with some agencies instructing workers to comply and others not. It has become a test of how much power Musk wields over the government's operations as he pursues an unprecedented cost-

cutting campaign with US President Donald Trump's backing.

Twenty-one workers resigned from his so-called Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, in protest on Tuesday, saying they refused to aid the downsizing effort.

"We will not use our skills as technologists to compromise core government systems, jeopardize Americans' sensitive data, or dismantle critical public services," the employees wrote in a resignation posted online.

DOGE did not respond to a request for comment on the resignations.

The workers, who include data sci-

entists, product managers and the division head of IT, were employed in an office known as the United States Digital Service before Musk took it over and renamed it DOGE, after a favorite cryptocurrency.

The resignations added to the drama surrounding Musk's email demand, which was sent to employees across the government asking them to summarize their accomplishments of the past week by Monday. In a post on X, the social media site Musk owns, he asserted that failure to respond would constitute resignation.

With the deadline approaching on

Monday, the Office of Personnel Management, or OPM, the government's human resources arm, told workers they could ignore the email.

Musk, the billionaire CEO of electric vehicle maker Tesla and rocket company SpaceX, was undeterred.

"Subject to the discretion of the president, they will be given another chance. Failure to respond a second time will result in termination," he wrote on X late on Monday without setting a new deadline.

Before the new OPM guidance, Trump said workers who did not respond would be "sort of semi-fired," adding to the uncertainty.

Asked on Tuesday whether the renewed threat would be carried out against non-compliant employees, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump would defer to cabinet secretaries' guidance for their workforces.

Musk was expected to attend Trump's Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, she said.

Musk's downsizing initiative has laid off more than 20,000 workers, with another 75,000 accepting buyouts, and the efforts continued to accelerate on Tuesday.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Kenya beefs up border security after clashes kill 33

LODWAR, Kenya — Kenyan authorities have reinforced security along the border with Ethiopia after 20 Kenyan fishermen and 13 Ethiopians were killed in clashes on Saturday night in the Todonyang border area.

Cabinet Secretary for the Interior and National Administration Onesimus Kipchumba Murkomen, who inspected the restive region on Monday, said the government has taken immediate, short-term and long-term measures to enhance security along the border following the incident.

"We are also improving the welfare of all police reservists while establishing more border posts to better moni-

tor those entering and exiting our country," Murkomen said.

Ladele Hatte, chief administrator of Ethiopia's Dasenech district, confirmed the deaths of 13 Ethiopians in a statement issued late on Monday.

According to Hatte, the attacks were carried out by armed groups from Kenya's Turkana community, which crossed into Ethiopia's Dasenech district. He said three others were critically injured and are receiving intensive medical care.

Hatte said an "organized and armed Turkana militia group infiltrated the Ethiopian border and carried out a series of attacks in various areas along the Dasenech district," causing extensive dam-

age. Local authorities said the violence has displaced thousands of civilians.

The district administrator said the attackers seized six fishing boats, more than 120 fishing nets, and looted property from the local trading community.

On the Kenyan side, officials provided a different account, saying that heavily armed militia raided areas along the Kenya-Ethiopia border near the Omo River. The attackers allegedly opened fire indiscriminately on fishermen, heightening tensions between the two countries.

According to Kenyan officials, Ethiopian militia struck Lotira

and Lopeimukat, two fertile fishing grounds at Lake Turkana, in retaliation for the earlier killing of three Dasenech fishermen by Turkana bandits from Kenya.

As part of Kenya's security measures, Murkomen announced that national police reservists would be deployed to strengthen border security and support security forces in combating militias and criminal activities.

Todonyang, a fertile fishing ground along the Kenya-Ethiopia border, has long been a hot spot for clashes between Kenyan and Ethiopian fishermen.

XINHUA

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BUSINESS

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Public budget revenue seen up 2% this yr

Local governments recently unveiled financial plans, giving more guidance

By WANG KEJU
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China's general public budget revenue is expected to grow at around 2 percent year-on-year in 2025, which analysts said is a prudent goal in the face of both domestic challenges and external uncertainties, after local governments recently unveiled their financial plans.

General public budget revenue is the sum of tax revenue and non-tax revenue.

Despite facing a tight fiscal balancing act, China will resort to a more proactive fiscal policy this year, including raising the fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratio and issuing more government bonds, to steer the economy toward a sustainable, high-quality growth trajectory, they said.

While the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and the Xizang autonomous region stand out with expected year-on-year general public budget revenue growth of about 10 percent, the remaining 29 provincial-level regions on the mainland have set more conservative targets, with growth rates largely concentrated between the 2 percent to 3 percent range.

Guangdong province, the nation's top general public budget revenue generator in 2024, and Shandong province, ranking fifth, both project 3 percent growth in their general public budget revenues. Meanwhile, Jiangsu province, Zhejiang province and Shanghai — ranking second, third and fourth, respectively — have set even more conservative targets of 2 percent.

An analysis of budget plans reveals that China's 31 provincial regions on the mainland have set an average growth target of 2.8 percent for general public budget revenue in 2025, marking a decline of 1.6 percentage points compared to last year's target average, said Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities.

Over the past decade, China's national fiscal revenue growth targets have consistently been slightly lower than those set by local governments, with the difference typically within 1 percentage point, Luo said.

This trend is very likely to continue in 2025, as the central government might aim for a modest general public budget revenue growth target of around 2 percent, Luo added.

China's fiscal revenue expectations for 2025 are closely tied to the broader economic outlook, as local governments have already set a weighted average GDP growth target of about 5.3 percent for this year.

The widespread caution in fiscal revenue expectations among

localities reflects the complex economic landscape they are navigating, marked by challenges that are weighing on overall revenue generation, said Yang Zhiyong, president of the Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences.

Tepid consumer demand and price pressures have directly impacted tax collection, therefore affecting the taxpaying capacity of businesses and directly dragging down the pace of fiscal revenue growth, Yang said.

The dampened demand in the real estate market, coupled with uncertainties clouding the country's exports due to Washington's trade barriers, have collectively diminished the fiscal revenue-generating capacity of local governments, Yang added.

As China's local governments set modest growth targets in general public budget revenues and await the finalization of their 2025 debt issuance quotas after the upcoming National People's Congress session in March, budget expenditure growth rates disclosed by local authorities are generally low, with some provinces even reporting declines in spending growth.

"The initial local fiscal spending budgets were based on only a portion of the debt quotas provided up front by the Ministry of Finance," Luo said.

However, as the fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratio is expected to be widened and local government special-purpose bond ceilings raised in March, local governments will have more fiscal firepower to boost consumption, scale up investment and anchor market expectations, Luo added.

KPMG China said in late December that the country's fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratio is poised to hit a record high of 4 percent for this year.

Meanwhile, the new quota for local government special bonds in 2025, according to Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank, is expected to reach 4.5 trillion yuan (\$618.57 billion).

A large number of major infrastructure projects and key initiatives are set to commence construction this year, leading to continued high demand for new funding. Moreover, local governments are facing the pressing task of replacing existing hidden debt, recouping idle landholdings and acquiring existing commercial housing for public rental housing purposes, Wen said.

Policymakers aim to create a virtuous cycle where enhanced spending efficiency and effectiveness lead to stronger economic growth, which in turn generates greater tax and revenue collection capacity for the government, Wen added.

Intelligent strawberry production



Employees manage a high-tech strawberry production plant at an agricultural industrial park in Hohhot, capital of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Wednesday. The park focuses on the development of intelligent agriculture, ensuring plants grow under precise controls. DING GENHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shares rally on investor AI optimism

By ZHOU LANXU
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Chinese mainland and Hong Kong shares jumped on Wednesday as investors are optimistic that an AI boom will lift the nation's economic growth, analysts said.

The Shanghai Composite Index, an A-share market benchmark, gained 1.02 percent to close at 3380.21 points, snapping a two-day decline.

Tech shares, especially semiconductor firms, were among the best performers, with the STAR 50 Index, which tracks Shanghai's sci-tech innovation board, climbing 2.17 percent to close at 1126.82 points.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index surged 3.27 percent to 23787.93 points, while the Hang Seng Tech Index soared 4.47 percent to 5953.79 points, a three-year high.

Chinese mainland stocks have been on a tear this year, continuing their strong performance that began later in 2024, said Kristina Hooper, chief global market strategist at Invesco, a global investment management company.

Hooper said the rally was initially driven by stimulus from Chinese policymakers and has lately been largely spurred by excitement around DeepSeek's AI advances.

"Chinese stocks have had attractive valuations for years, but the appearance of these important catalysts has made the difference. Chinese stocks, especially Chinese tech stocks, could have a long runway," Hooper said.

On Wednesday, the National Financial Regulatory Administration and the National Development and Reform Commission held a symposium on the pilot program for equity investment

by financial asset investment companies.

Emphasizing the importance of expanding the pilot program for bolstering technological innovation and serving private enterprises, the meeting said the goal is to mobilize more social capital to support technology-driven enterprises.

The NFRA also said that it will ease the qualifications for offshore financial institutions to hold stakes in onshore insurance companies.

Effective March, the requirement that Hong Kong and Macao financial institutions must have total assets of no less than \$2 billion as of the end of the most recent year to hold stakes in mainland insurance companies, will no longer be enforced.

Ouyang Shijia contributed to this story.

Distributed renewables help power security

By ZHENG XIN
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China's efforts to develop and utilize distributed renewable energy in rural areas will further enhance their energy security while promoting the use of clean power across the country, according to industry experts.

According to the "No 1 central document" for 2025 that outlines priorities to deepen rural reforms and solid steps to advance all-around rural revitalization, the government will further step up the development of distributed renewable energy to ensure sufficient power supply in these regions.

Distributed solar power refers to small-scale solar energy systems that generate electricity locally, typically on rooftops or land around homes, businesses or communities. Unlike traditional power plants that generate electricity centrally and transmit it over long distances, distributed solar allows users to produce their own power, which is especially beneficial for rural areas where extending the power grid can be costly.

The government will also further strengthen and enhance rural power supply security, encouraging the construction of public charging and battery-swapping facilities where conditions permit, according to the document, which was released on Sunday.

As the first policy statement put out by China's central authorities each year, the document is seen as



Electricians on their way to check power facilities at a vegetable plantation in Wuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

HE HUAWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

an indicator of policy priorities.

Zhong Baoshen, chairman of Longi Green Energy Technology Co Ltd, a key player in the photovoltaic sector, said distributed solar power has become an attractive option for many rural communities, replacing expensive and inefficient traditional fuels.

Rural areas, especially those far away from the grid, often face challenges with respect to energy access. Extending the grid to these areas can be expensive and logistically challenging, he said.

"Distributed solar systems, however, can provide a decentralized solution, allowing homes to generate their own power independently of the central grid. It has the potential to revolutionize the energy landscape in China's rural regions, saving costs while boosting local economic growth."

Industry experts believe solar energy, with no fuel expenses and low maintenance costs, has been developing rapidly in China's villages over the past few years and is expected to become a game-changer in China's rural regions.

By enhancing rural power supply infrastructure, the initiative ensures stable and reliable electric-

ity access, reducing power shortages and improving living conditions for rural communities, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

"Reducing reliance on traditional fossil fuels is crucial for supporting agriculture, small businesses and local industries, driving economic growth," he said.

According to a recent guideline released by the State Council, green development will cover urban and rural areas comprehensively by 2035, with an increased reduction in carbon emissions.

Distributed photovoltaic generation has become a key driver of energy transition in China, the country's top energy authority said.

As China continues to drive its energy transition, distributed photovoltaic generation is emerging as a key contributor to the country's renewable energy efforts.

The sector generated around 346.2 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity last year, accounting for 41 percent of the nation's total PV output, according to data released by the National Energy Administration.

High-tech zones leading AI, new energy forward

By MA SI
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China's national high-tech industrial development zones, the backbone of the country's forward-looking technology sector, are stepping up the push to cultivate emerging sectors such as humanoid robots, quantum information, new energy storage and synthetic biology, the country's top industry regulator said on Wednesday.

The comments came as enterprises in China's national high-tech industrial development zones contribute around 50 percent of the nation's research and development expenditure and invention patents. Meanwhile, the zones have become critical hubs for artificial intelligence development, hosting 60 percent of China's listed AI-related companies and 50 percent of AI unicorns, or startups valued at \$1 billion or more, said the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Yao Jun, head of the MIIT planning department, said that by integrating technological innovation with industrial transformation, China's national high-tech zones aim to build world-class high-tech parks and innovation hubs, positioning themselves as pioneers in innovation-driven development and high-quality growth.

19.3 trillion yuan

combined GDP of the high-tech zones in 2024

In 2024, high-tech zones have demonstrated remarkable progress in fostering innovation and economic development, contributing significantly to the nation's technological advancement and industrial transformation. The combined GDP of these zones reached 19.3 trillion yuan (\$2.67 trillion), marking a year-on-year increase of 7.6 percent.

Additionally, the zones have attracted significant foreign investment, with newly registered foreign enterprises increasing by 24.6 percent year-on-year in 2024, and the zones accounted for about 40 percent of the nation's actual use of total foreign investment.

"By releasing AI application scenario lists and organizing industry-academia collaborative events, high-tech zones have actively promoted the application of AI tech, including AI large language models in key sectors," said Wu Jiaxi, deputy head of the planning department at the MIIT.

Companies have also established innovation centers for humanoid intelligent robots and developed on-chip brain-computer interface intelligent interaction systems in these national high-tech zones, the MIIT added.

Zhou Guangyong, deputy director of the Wuhan East Lake High-Tech Development Zone in Hubei province, said the optoelectronic information sector in the zone surpassed 600 billion yuan in revenue last year. The zone has focused on advancing core technologies, establishing world-class innovation platforms, and fostering industrial clusters in integrated circuits and optical communications.

Industrial clusters refer to an industrial grouping formed by a large number of companies and institutions in proximity that carry out mutual cooperation and exchanges. It is considered to be an advanced form of industrial division of labor and agglomeration development, and is part of China's push to pursue high-quality development of manufacturing, experts said.

According to the MIIT, China's high-tech zones continue to play a pivotal role in driving innovation, attracting global talent and fostering economic growth, positioning the nation as a global leader in high-tech industries.

Briefly

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 6 pips to 7.1732 against the US dollar on Wednesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the inter-bank market each business day.

PBOC conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 548.7 billion yuan (\$76.49 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.5 percent on Wednesday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system at an adequate level, the People's Bank of China said. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Cutting-edge features help C909 fly even higher

Uniqueness, new energy, speed features set apart homegrown planes

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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With China mass producing home-grown aircraft such as the C919 and C909, ushering in a series-development stage, a new era has started for the nation's commercial aircraft development featuring uniqueness, new energy and speed qualities, said an official at Commercial Aircraft Corp of China.

"The domestically made passenger aircraft represents the industry's depth, breadth and bright future," said Chen Yong, chief engineer of COMAC, during an annual forum held by Fudan University's School of Management on Feb 16.

According to Chen, who is also the chief designer of China's regional C909 jet, the aircraft is designed and tested by China in accordance with the highest and latest international standards.

The jet was formerly known as the ARJ21, or Advanced Regional Jet for the 21st Century.

As a pioneer of made-in-China passenger jet technology, Chen has led his team to achieve historic accomplishments since 2003. The team developed China's first regional airliner from scratch.

Over the years, Chen has played a role as the key architect in spearheading the aircraft's upgrade and series development. "We've made



A C909 aircraft performs a flight demonstration during an airshow in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, in November. CHEN HUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

the 'triple jump' in developing the C909, which is a technological breakthrough, commercial breakthrough and ecological breakthrough," Chen said.

Since its maiden commercial flight on June 28, 2016, the C909 series has delivered 160 aircraft as of the end of January. A total of 644 flight routes, both domestic

and international, have been operated, and 580,000 hours of safe flights were conducted, delivering nearly 20 million passenger trips, according to its manufacturer COMAC.

"The C909 has secured its dominance in China's regional aircraft market by accounting for 70 percent of the market share in terms of

volume. Up to 60 percent of the world's similar aircraft models delivered last year were C909s," said Chen. Such achievements were made with a strong focus on safety, including airworthiness safety and flight safety, as well as an unwavering pursuit to strike a balance between safety and economy, according to Chen.

"Stalling and ice formation are the two greatest challenges to overcome in our path to achieving airworthiness safety, and we have conducted more than 8,200 stalling test flights," said Chen.

"And to ensure flight safety, we have consistently made innovative developments and designs, including quiet and dark cockpits

"The domestically made passenger aircraft represents the industry's depth, breadth and bright future."

Chen Yong, chief engineer of Commercial Aircraft Corp of China

and intelligent piloting instrument systems for pilots," Chen added.

As the development of the C909 heads toward scale and series production, Chen said the research and development team has put a particular focus on adapting to the latest technologies and industrial upgrades.

He said the future of passenger aircraft development will follow three mega trends — developing variant models, adopting clean and low carbon emission energies, as well as exploiting supersonic aircraft.

The C909 is currently the regional jet with the most variants including business jets, cargo planes, medical aircraft, rescue command aircraft and firefighting models among others, according to public information.

COMAC has built C909 production lines with an annual production capacity of 50 aircraft, and the company said there are 770 aircraft in pending orders.

SaaS firm Kingdee opens regional HQ in Qatar

By HAN JINGYAN
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Kingdee, a Chinese software as a service (SaaS) company serving over 7.4 million customers worldwide, has opened a regional headquarters in Qatar, intending to widen its footprint in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Commenting on the launch ceremony in Qatar on Tuesday, Robert Xu, chairman and CEO of Kingdee, said: "Today marks a pivotal moment in the global expansion plans of Kingdee ... Kingdee plans to leverage Qatar as a bridgehead for expanding our footprint into the markets of the Middle East and North Africa, driving the digital transformation of local enterprises and supporting Qatar to achieve its 'Qatar National Vision 2030'."

"We are confident in our ability to deliver professional enterprise digital solutions to Qatar and the regional market," Xu added.

The move is believed to have been facilitated through support from the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), the sovereign

"The establishment of their regional headquarters in Qatar marks a significant milestone in our ongoing efforts to attract leading global technology companies to our region."

Sheikh Ali Alwaleed Al-Thani, CEO of Invest Qatar

wealth fund of Qatar; Invest Qatar, its investment promotion agency, as well as Qatar Free Zones Authority (QFZ).

Founded in 1993, Kingdee, whose solutions are used in 172 countries and regions worldwide, is listed on the main board in Hong Kong. Kingdee SaaS solutions support 42 languages and serve over 1,000

customers in achieving overseas digital operations.

In December 2023, Kingdee and the QIA announced an agreement wherein QIA would invest around \$200 million in Kingdee.

Mohammed Saif Al-Sowaidi, CEO of QIA, said: "QIA has been an investor in Kingdee since 2023 and recognizes the company's expertise in enterprise digitalization and cloud services in China. We are confident that Kingdee will succeed in their expansion and will bring a valuable offering to the Middle East market."

"We are delighted to welcome Kingdee to Qatar. The establishment of their regional headquarters in Qatar marks a significant milestone in our ongoing efforts to attract leading global technology companies to our region," said Sheikh Ali Alwaleed Al-Thani, CEO of Invest Qatar.

"We look forward to working closely with Kingdee, QIA, and QFZ to drive forward our shared vision of economic growth and technological advancement, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy," he added.

Commenting on the strategic move, Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Faisal Al-Thani, CEO of QFZ, said: "Kingdee's decision to establish its regional headquarters in our free zones reaffirms Qatar's position as a leading hub for digital innovation. This partnership, developed through the joint efforts of QIA, Invest Qatar and QFZ, reflects our collective drive to achieve Qatar's Third National Development Strategy — the final wave of the Qatar National Vision 2030."

"By integrating Kingdee's expertise into our technology ecosystem, we will accelerate digital transformation and strengthen Qatar's role as a gateway for next-generation solutions to drive economic diversification and sustainable growth," he added.

He noted that QFZ would provide Kingdee with a strategic platform to strengthen its regional presence, cultivate high-impact collaborations and contribute to the evolution of enterprise digitalization.

By leveraging its industry expertise and the management models of China's leading enterprises, Xu



Representatives from Kingdee group and Qatar pose for photographs during the launch ceremony of Kingdee's Qatar headquarters on Tuesday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

stressed that Kingdee can provide end-to-end digital solutions encompassing financial management, supply chain optimization, and production operations to local businesses in markets participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

"The establishment of Kingdee Qatar represents a strategic milestone in Kingdee's commitment to delivering localized services from Qatar Free Zones to global clients," he said.

"Guided by the principle of 'think globally, operate locally', the company will synergize regional business acumen with technological strengths, integrating AI-driven digital technologies and management expertise to provide comprehensive one-stop solutions," Xu said.

He further said this move will accelerate the development of the Middle East's software and internet industries through technological empowerment.



PUBLIC INTEREST AD: 0135

COMMENT

Editorials

Politicizing trade with sanctions is blinkered, futile and self-harming

The imposition of unilateral sanctions has never been a reasonable and viable tool to settle disputes or conflicts. Instead, used for political purposes, they only serve to aggravate the situation and do a disservice to the sound development of trade relations.

Yet, for some economies, sanctions have become a tool ready to hand as a DIY make-do for want of a more considered policy option. The European Union, Canada and the United Kingdom made this knee-jerk choice when they announced sanctions against individuals and entities, which they claim have supported the Russian military.

The EU announced that it has added 53 new entities to the list of those that it has identified as supporting the Russian military-industrial complex or engaged in sanctions circumvention, including 25 from China. Canada and the UK also imposed new sanctions against a number of entities and individuals including some from China.

Such unilateral sanctions are not in the least reasonable or warranted. Is there any reason for China and its neighbor Russia to stop doing business just because of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine?

China has always upheld a just and objective position on the Ukraine crisis and worked for its political settlement. It has never provided lethal weapons to any party of the conflict and it exercises strict export control over dual-use articles. The scope and measures of China's export controls over drones are the most stringent worldwide. As a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, China carries out normal economic and trade cooperation with Russia as it does with other countries, and this is "beyond reproach".

China has lodged serious protests against the illegal unilateral sanctions as there are no grounds for disrupting or affecting the normal exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and Russian businesses. It will take necessary measures to safeguard Chinese companies' lawful rights and interests.

It is wishful thinking for Canada, the EU and the UK to believe they can employ coercive means such as economic sanctions to exert pressure on China in the hope that the latter will change its stance to be in line with theirs. Given the fact that Washington is engaged in direct negotiations with Russia for peaceful settlement of the conflict, the EU, the UK and Canada doubling down on their economic coercion targeting Russia and continued commitment to provide military assistance to Ukraine will only prolong the conflict.

This is a far cry from what China has been doing for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. China does not do anything to add fuel to the flames. It is hopeful imagining that China would jump on the bandwagon of the EU, the UK and Canada to isolate Russia economically. It is not in the interest of China, and neither is it in the interest of global economic development and world peace.

For the settlement of the hostilities between Russia and Ukraine, or at least a ceasefire between the two countries, the EU, the UK and Canada should think twice about their actions that will only protract the conflict.

China attaches importance to the development of relations with the EU. China and the EU are each other's second-largest trading partner. The trade volume between both parties amounted to more than 5 trillion yuan (\$689 billion) in 2024. But that does not mean that China will accept the unilateral sanctions the EU has imposed against Chinese companies.

China is also the second-largest trade partner of Canada and an important trade partner of the UK. The trade relations between the two countries and China are important for both economies. China remains committed to the development of sound trade relations with them. It is a mistake for them to politicize trade relations with China. China will certainly take countermeasures against the unilateral sanctions on its companies, which will undoubtedly do a disservice to the development of trade ties with them.

The sanctions being implemented by the Western economies are politically motivated and undermine the principles of international law. China believes that a solution to the Ukraine crisis and the establishment of a balanced, effective, and sustainable European security framework should be reached through dialogue, cooperation and consensus among all relevant parties, rather than through prejudiced punitive sanctions.

The rationality and constructiveness of its position have been validated by the recent momentum that has been generated that may herald an end to the conflict.

Carrying forward momentum of ties

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and New Zealand in 1972, no matter how the international and regional situation has changed, the relationship has always maintained a healthy development momentum and it has been a steady certainty in a fast-changing world.

The two countries are both important members of the Asia-Pacific region with strong economic complementarity and no historical grievances or conflicts of fundamental interests.

That they regard each other as an opportunity and partner, rather than a challenge or threat, was reinforced by the meeting between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister of New Zealand Christopher Luxon in Lima, Peru, in November, in which the two leaders provided strategic guidance for the two countries to continue promoting sound and steady relations.

And during Premier Li Qiang's visit to New Zealand in June, the two sides reached broad common understandings on deepening practical cooperation to ensure their comprehensive strategic partnership produces more tangible benefits for the two peoples.

The series of high-level contacts are continuing with New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters paying a three-day visit to China, which started on Tuesday. There is huge potential to be tapped in bilateral economic and trade cooperation, and it is anticipated that his talks with his hosts will help advance the implementation of the common understanding reached between the leaders of the two countries and consolidate the sound trajectory of their relations.

A veteran politician, this is Peters' sixth official visit to China since his first in 1997 as deputy prime minister and treasurer. He is well-acquainted with China's development path as well as the close connections between that and the development of the Asia-Pacific region. The friendly familiarity between the two countries and peoples has been conducive to Wellington remaining removed from the China-targeted geopolitical games and cliques of some countries in the region under the guidance of Washington.

This year marks the 11th anniversary of the establishment of their comprehensive strategic partnership. As Vice-President Han Zheng said during his meeting with Peters in Beijing on Wednesday, China is willing to work with New Zealand to adhere to the correct direction, strengthen confidence in cooperation, enhance mutual understanding, promote the sustained, healthy and stable development of the comprehensive strategic partnership, and make more contributions to peace, stability, development and prosperity of the two countries and the region.

The wide-ranging, in-depth discussions between Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Peters are expected to highlight the two sides' shared willingness to step up strategic communication on bilateral relations and international and regional issues of mutual interest, enhance mutual understanding, and deepen their exchanges and cooperation.

China is also willing to strengthen coordination and cooperation with New Zealand, and to work with it in multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation mechanism and the World Trade Organization to uphold the freedom and openness of regional trade.

It is the freedom and openness of regional trade that has significantly enhanced the well-being of people of both countries and the region at large. It is well worth cherishing.

Cai Meng

THE USE OF AN ALLY



Opinion Line

Tariffs, protectionism mere excuses, won't bring jobs, industry back to US

With Donald Trump back in the White House, the United States continues to use "return of manufacturing" as an excuse to justify tariffs and protectionism, as if international competition alone is to blame for the decline of its "rust belt" and the declining living standards of its ordinary people.

Without fundamental changes to environmental protection issues, labor price and other factors that led to the relocation of industry from the US, can the US revitalize its manufacturing through a trade war? Not to mention that the anticipated return of manufacturing also faces a host of obstacles.

First, the US needs to massively upgrade its infrastructure. Whether it is electricity, water, railways and roads, the US currently does not have the founda-

tion for a large-scale return of manufacturing. Such infrastructure not only requires huge investments, but also takes a considerably long time developing. Given the financial resources and construction efficiency, it is almost impossible for the US to accomplish this task.

Second, the US economy is dominated by the tertiary sector, with services accounting for more than 80 percent of its GDP. That means its industrial structure is seriously divorced from manufacturing. To promote the return of manufacturing the US must carry out large-scale industrial restructuring, but how can changes that do not conform to the law of capital multiplication be achieved?

Third, to bring back manufacturing, enterprises must reduce costs, which

requires a weak dollar policy. However, in order to attract international capital to finance its current account deficit, curb domestic inflation, and consolidate the dollar's international status, a strong dollar policy is needed. When these two are in conflict, the US will undoubtedly opt for a strong dollar policy, the cornerstone of its hegemony.

The US' claim that it imposes tariffs and engages in trade protection to prevent workers from other countries taking away jobs of its domestic workers is only a political pretext. Raising tariffs will not only fail to promote the return of manufacturing, but also increase the costs for American consumers and push up inflation in the US.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Cutting through ice for climate change mystery

A Sino-Russian scientific research team has conducted borehole camera operations to get a complete temperature profile of the interior of a 545-meter-thick glacier that they drilled into during China's earlier 40th Antarctic expedition, from Nov 2023 to April 2024.

Now, in the 41st expedition, which began last November and will be on till May, China has acquired key parameters such as borehole temperature, inclination, and changes in borehole diameter, using a new type of independently developed technology to study the drilled hole.

The importance of these results for research in climate change cannot be overestimated. The Antarctic ice sheet, which can trigger a global sea level rise of 70 meters should it melt, is the largest potential factor affecting future sea level

changes. However, there is considerable uncertainty regarding how exactly the melting Antarctic ice sheet contributes to sea level changes, because of our insufficient understanding of the evolution of the ice sheet in the past.

The East Antarctic Ice Sheet accounts for a high percentage of the world's ice and can significantly impact global climate change. Its internal ice layers, like pages of a history book, record information about past climate changes. By analyzing its core, scientists can understand changes in temperatures in the past, precipitation, atmospheric composition, and other climatic factors, thereby constructing climate evolution models and, more importantly, comprehending future climate change trends.

In the 2000s, the Chinese team conduct-

ed studies to note fluctuations on the surface of the interior ice sheet at Grove Mountains since the Pliocene Epoch. The Larsemann Hills region surveyed by the Sino-Russian joint team abuts the Princess Elizabeth Land ice sheet, and understanding its subglacial geological environment is crucial to understanding the dynamic evolution mechanisms and mass balance characteristics of the Princess Elizabeth Land terminal ice sheet, representing an important step in uncovering the evolutionary laws of the East Antarctic Ice Sheet.

The research team also recovered about 7 cubic meters of drilling fluid from the hole. If someday mankind learns enough about the laws governing climate change to be able to curb it, the contribution of Chinese teams should not be forgotten.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Allies have little enthusiasm for escalated chip war

Former commerce secretary Gina Raimondo once called the United States' attempts to prevent China from accessing US-sourced advanced semiconductors and related manufacturing equipment a "fool's errand". Her remark, made not long before she left office, showed she saw clearly that it was a Sisyphean task.

That explains why, despite the huge amounts of work the previous administration did in that regard until even the last week of it being in office, its chip war has basically failed to check China's development in the field, and almost all parties involved, which are under US coercion, oppose the US' campaign.

Yet the Trump administration is seeking to persist with that endeavor as it is reportedly drawing up even tougher versions of the US' semiconductor curbs and pressuring key allies to escalate their restrictions on China's chip industry in a bid to limit China's technological prowess.

Administration officials recently met with their Japanese and Dutch counterparts to discuss restricting Tokyo Electron and

ASML engineers from maintaining semiconductor equipment in China.

But the question is whether the US' allies are still willing to follow the US' instructions, since their "cooperation" with the former US administration, which attached strategic significance to strengthening the alliance against China and Russia, could only be called half-hearted. The US can't compensate foreign companies for their economic losses if they give up the Chinese market as required. Not to mention the harm they would suffer as a result of China's foreseeable retaliatory measures.

If the Trump administration cannot resolve the practical concerns of the US allies, it will be more difficult for it to win their continuing cooperation in the chip war against China under the flag of "value diplomacy". The administration's about-face in foreign and trade policies has left almost all its allies and partners high and dry on the Ukraine crisis and on their economic relations with the US, shattering the "values" that they thought the US shared with them.

That the Dutch foreign trade ministry and Japanese ministry of economy, trade and industry declined to comment when asked about the latest contact with the Trump teams, a sharp contrast with their

we-are-in responses to the former US administration's cajoling, is a further evidence of their shared hesitation.

The Trump administration should bear in mind many US allies and partners started repairing ties with China the moment Trump was elected president in November. And the shock waves the administration has caused in the past month or so since it took office have proved the foresight of the adjustment of their China policy.

The Trump administration should value the common understanding it reached with Beijing that the start of its tenure should represent a new beginning for the relationship between the two countries. If it continues to pour old wine into a new bottle, hollowing out the potential of bilateral cooperation and engagement, any mutual trust between the two sides will soon dissipate, pushing the relationship back into the previous lose-lose model.

As the Chinese Foreign Ministry responded via a spokesperson on the US' latest move to escalate its chip war against China, politicizing and weaponizing economic, trade and technological issues only hinder the development of the global semiconductor industry and will ultimately harm the US as well as others.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Otton Solis

Why Chinese economy can navigate headwinds

Assuming that the measures US President Donald Trump has taken in the first few weeks in office reflect a new and sustainable path for the United States, instead of whims, will they have an impact on China's economic prospects?

Before addressing this question, we should analyze the structural strengths of China, "structural" in this case being those strengths that do not depend on external factors. There are at least six such structural factors in China's favor.

First, the large size of China's domestic market guarantees low average production costs and, therefore, relatively low prices of its high-tech and heavy industrial goods and economies of scale. Hence, whether or not China has access to external markets, its enterprises can produce at competitive prices even in the most complex and large-scale sectors.

Second, according to the World Bank, the savings-to-GDP ratio of China (over 44 percent) is much higher than those in most Western economies (about 18 percent in the US) and the world average (27 percent). This creates for China a large margin to increase consumption without endangering macroeconomic stability. In the face of trade conflicts, this might help mitigate the impact of declining exports on China's GDP.

Third, China has invested in high-quality education, which has helped create a very productive and adaptable labor force. An educated population can better comprehend budget constraints, the value of forfeiting short-term aspirations for long-term national strategic objectives, and the broad set of contesting factors that ought to be contemplated when drawing development policies, all of which feeds into high levels of social cohesion, a critical factor in determining the investment ratio and GDP growth.

Fourth, since ancient times China has cultivated an appetite for knowledge and technological solutions to production problems. China invented gunpowder, mechanical clocks, the compass, printing and paper, among other things. After the launch of reform and opening-up in 1978, substantive budget allocations for research and development have strengthened the quest for science, enabling the country to compete with the West in several cutting-edge fields.

Fifth, in terms of sustaining economic growth, China's political system has strengths that are not found in Western economies. The Chinese leadership is pragmatic when choosing and implementing economic policies. For instance, "what matters is that the cat catches mice, no matter black or white". Therefore, the leadership can and is



The US administration seems to have embarked on a crusade to make enemies out of friends and friends out of countries deeply discredited before the US' Western allies.

willing to pick from a whole array of fiscal and monetary tools and use them to achieve its goals. Besides, China's political system warrants not only social stability but also the continuity of the objectives, strategies and policies, all of which encourage private capital to invest and take risks

in long-term ventures.

Finally, starting in 1840 through 1945, China endured attacks and invasions by Western powers and some neighbors. These more than 100 years of aggression, known in Chinese narrative as "the century of humiliation", are very much instilled into the Chinese psyche, affording a need for unity, self-protection and national strength, which call for hard work, sacrifice, entrepreneurship and social cohesion. This not only facilitated the work of the Communist Party of China, which played a key role in bringing to an end that "humiliation", but has also positively contributed to the competitiveness of the economy.

The West might choose to intensify its animosity toward China, ignited chiefly by economic fears, with tariff wars aimed at halting its progress, thus ignoring that China's structural-historical factors ensure the country's progress with its own dynamics and self-sustainability. True, some sources estimate China exports-to-GDP ratio amounts to nearly 18 percent. But if tariffs reduced its exports to 14.4 percent of GDP, though a very unlikely event, domestic consumption can easily offset it by a corre-

sponding reduction in the savings-to-GDP ratio of 3.6 percentage points, bringing the savings-to-GDP ratio to about 41 percent, still much higher than the West's average savings rate. In such a scenario, the impact of tariffs on China's GDP would be minimal, if any, while consumption and the quality of life in China would improve.

Moreover, the new US administration's measures have, unintentionally, become a key factor in strengthening "team China". The US administration seems to have embarked on a crusade to make enemies out of friends and friends out of countries deeply discredited before the US' Western allies. Cuts in the budget of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) might prove right those who consider American capitalism highly predatory and might cause havoc in many countries and groups of people that benefited from US aid.

The revival of the outdated 19th century Monroe Doctrine ("America for the Americans") and the Manifest Destiny (right of the US to expand its territory) is hurting relations with countries like Denmark, Palestine, some Arab nations, Canada and Panama, and is seen as a warning by the rest of the world. The US administration's mercantilist-protectionist trade practices and threats against US friends and foes alike, stand in the way of legal-bilateral trade treaties, which were promoted, if not imposed, for decades by the very United States itself.

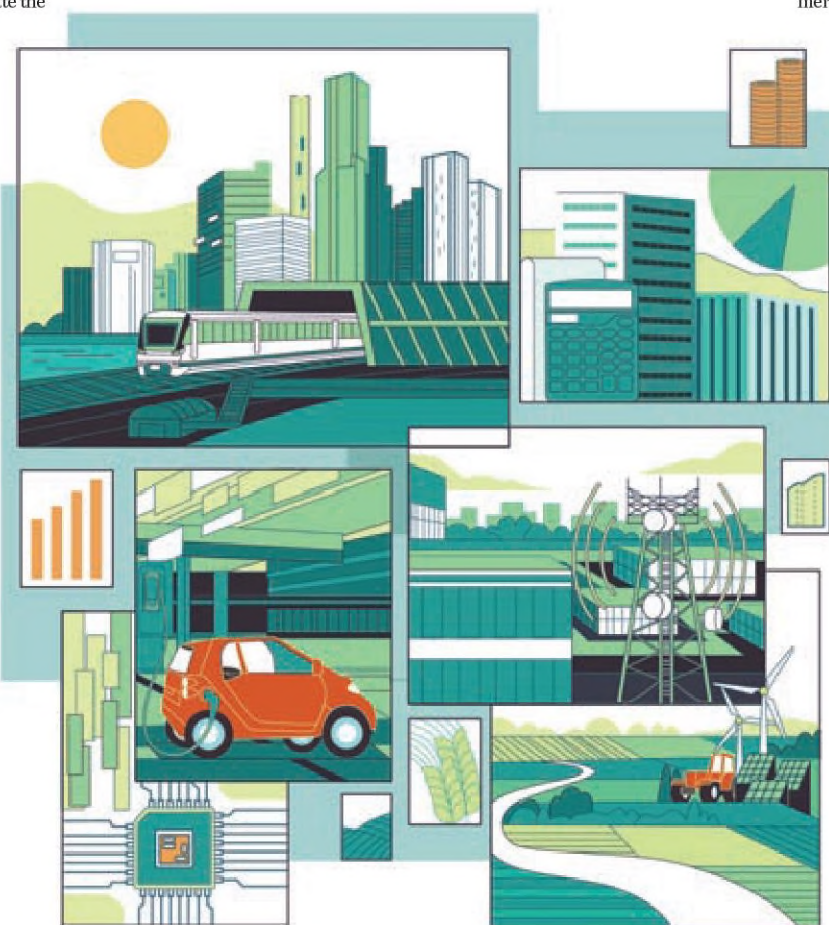
The US linking of tariff threats and sanctions to the US' geopolitical rivalry with China contradicts one of the core propagandistic arguments when, for instance, the Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement was being promoted.

More than just raising eyebrows, the US administration may have forced many people across the world to have second thoughts about the sincerity and real intentions of the administration and to wonder if it is not better to strengthen relations with a trade eager "no-strings-attached" China, away from a mercantilist end-justifies-any-means US.

Therefore, quite beyond the structural positive factors mentioned above, the US administration's announcements and decisions might have improved the prospects for the Chinese economy and its overall standing in the world.

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



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Zhu Feng

US tariff wars have global fallout, united fight needed

Less than a month into his second term, US President Donald Trump launched a new round of trade wars, using tariffs as a weapon to advance the United States' interests. On Feb 1, Trump signed an executive order, imposing 10 percent tariffs on Chinese goods and 25 percent tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods. And on Feb 10, the Trump administration levied 25 percent tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports, without exceptions or exemptions.

The US administration's aggressive trade policy to push forward the "America First" strategy represents a massive increase in the US' protectionist policies, violating the fundamental principles of global trade.

But trade conflicts are not new to Washington. During his first term in office, Trump imposed a barrage of tariffs on Chinese goods on the pretext of safeguarding the US' economic security, which included 25 percent duty on \$50 billion worth of Chinese goods — and later an additional \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods. The two sides agreed to a temporary detente in January 2020 after the signing of the "Phase One" trade agreement. But amid the shifting political tides in Washington, the administration quickly sidelined those commitments. Now, the US' renewed assault on global trade threatens to undermine years of multilateral economic cooperation.

In an era of economic interdependence, free and open trade has fueled global prosperity. Yet Washington has resorted to economic nationalism in a bid to revitalize

manufacturing in the US. The US is one of the world's largest consumers of steel and aluminum, which are required by industries, ranging from automobiles and aerospace to infrastructure. But rather than embracing the efficient global supply chains, the US leadership views import of goods as an economic liability. The previous round of tariffs saw a 27 percent drop in US steel imports and a marginal increase in domestic production — a policy outcome now being repackaged as a job-saving strategy.

Beyond economic calculations, political calculus is at play in the US' strategy. The Rust Belt states — home to the US' declining industrial base — hold the key to winning presidential elections. By branding the imposition of tariffs as a battle for US jobs, the administration seeks to consolidate its support base in those politically crucial swing states. In reality, however, it is marketing protectionism as a populist panacea.

But tariffs are rarely about just economics; they are about leverage, too. The latest round of trade restrictions is a strategic attempt by the US to reshape the distribution of benefits among key trading partners. The administration claims it is correcting the trade imbalance, arguing that past trade policies left the US in a disadvantageous position while its trade partners reaped disproportionate benefits.

Unsurprisingly, Beijing remains the main target. In 2024, the US' total goods and services trade deficit was \$918.4 billion, with both the Chinese mainland and Chi-

na's Taiwan island, the European Union, Mexico, and Vietnam accounting for the majority of the deficit.

Although recent steel and aluminum tariffs did not explicitly single out China, the intent is clear.

Also, the US' underlying strategy extends beyond trade. By targeting China's manufacturing and high-tech industries, the US aims to weaken its global competitiveness. The US uses tariffs both as economic punishment and strategic deterrence. Yet history shows such pressure tactics often backfire. In China's case, tariffs have prompted the country to expedite its industrial upgrading and become more economically resilient. Rather than capitulating to the US, China will double down on innovation-driven economic development, expand its domestic market and pursue a more self-reliant development model.

The repercussions of the US' protectionist crusade will be felt beyond China. Canada and Mexico, integral to North America's supply chains, are also in the US' crosshair. Canada supplies nearly 25 percent of the US' steel and 79 percent of raw aluminum imports while Mexico is a crucial supplier of aluminum alloy and scrap metals. So using tariffs as leverage, the US may seek concessions in border control, energy policy and alignment of regulations.

The European Union, another US tariff target, has been warned that it has to pay higher tariffs on its auto exports — a looming transatlantic trade war is threatening

to weaken the US' alliances and dampen global economic prospects.

The international community cannot endure this wave of protectionism. As such, international institutions, trade blocs and individual countries should uphold free trade not just to shield their economies against US tariffs but also to safeguard the fundamental rules of global trade and ensure the international economic order is not dismantled by nationalist impulses.

For China, the escalating trade conflicts present both challenges and opportunities. While rising tariffs increase short-term pressure, they also accelerate long-needed structural shifts toward high-value manufacturing and greater economic self-sufficiency. By promoting industrial innovation, enhancing domestic consumption and strengthening regional trade ties, China can become not only more resilient but also stronger.

The world has reached a crossroad. Will global trade continue to be conducted based on the principles of cooperation, mutual benefit and shared growth? Or will it succumb to zero-sum games dictated by blind nationalism? The answer lies in fighting the US tariff menace with collective resolve. As Washington raises its tariff walls, the rest of the world must work together to keep the doors of global trade open.

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Mario Cavolo

Natural beauty, history beckon one and all to the northeast

Living in Shenyang, my wife's hometown in Liaoning province, I welcome the Chinese leadership's emphasis on revitalization of the northeast region playing a bigger role in Chinese modernization.

With the Chinese government's structural and policy focus during the past three decades being on developing other key regions of the country, the northeast region fell behind in the pecking order of popularity and economic growth. Yet in the northeast, we find a region of diverse importance; it is a key industrial hub, home to several ethnic groups, rich in many natural resources, such as Shenyang Palace Museum, which was first built in 1625 and paved the history of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Having lived for many years in other parts of the country, including Shanghai, the island province of Hainan and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, I dare to say the down-to-earth soul of the northeast people is very much shaped by the history of the region since 1900 or thereabouts.

When it comes to the idea of desired destinations and development in China, the world



The blend of economic development, history and natural diversity can be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

thinks of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, which are amazing places to visit and even settle down. Only a relatively small number of people realize how much Liaoning province has to offer. For example, the region is known for being the foundation of the German automotive industry in China with several BMW factories, and vibrant ancillary industries which supply auto parts and other equipment. Yet rather than technology, State-owned enterprises' reforms, or modernizing agriculture, I feel there is a need to promote and develop the region's wonderfully unique tourism sector.

After we moved to Shenyang more than seven years ago, I was amazed to make these historic discoveries. But they don't compare with the charm of hopping in your car and embarking on a road trip into the beauty and history of the province's countryside.

Where is the world's longest underground river cavern? It is in Benxi city, just an hour's drive from Shenyang. Another couple of hours drive will take you to the lush landscape and pristine valleys of Laobian River, the crystal clear rivers and farms of Qingshan River of Kuandian county, Dandong city. And further south to the border, you will find the famous Yalu River bridge connecting China with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Shenyang city itself boasts a charming Korean town, a Muslim town, and is home to several international consulates. And a historic hospital that sits on the Zhongshan Square roundabout was originally built by the Japanese after they invaded and occupied Shenyang, which witnessed the painful chapter of China's modern history.

In the heart of the city, the government's urban planners have created a riverside paradise for urban residents and visitors along the Hun River. The urban green space includes more than 20 kilometers of lush green parks, along which you find kayaking, endless bicycle paths, creeks, thoroughbred horse clubs, the city's world-class exhibition center, and the architectural masterpiece, the Shengjing Grand Theater.

All these sites are worth visiting but they don't obscure the region's strategic role in China's electric vehicle revolution, with companies and facilities at the center of some of the world's most important innovations in manufacturing and robotics situated here. The blend of economic development, history and natural diversity can be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

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GLOBAL VIEWS



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

EFE CAN GÜRCAN

Europe at a crossroads

EU's most effective path to strategic autonomy in Trump's second term lies in fostering relationships that reinforce its unity and long-term stability

The return of Donald Trump to the White House has once again sent shock waves through the transatlantic alliance. His threat of a trade war with the European Union, pressure on EU states to increase defense spending, and withdrawal from multilateral institutions such as the United Nations Human Rights Council and the World Health Organization have heightened European anxieties. The United States' potential exit from the World Trade Organization raises further alarm, prompting European leaders to reconsider their security and economic dependencies.

At the Munich Security Conference 2025 from Feb 14 to 16, US Vice-President JD Vance fueled these concerns by accusing the EU of democratic backsliding and asserting that Europe's greatest security threat lies within. These developments have reignited the debate on European "strategic autonomy", an issue that has become more urgent in light of the US' shifting foreign policy priorities.

As a matter of fact, the concept of strategic autonomy in the EU dates back to the post-Cold War period and gained momentum after the 2003 Iraq invasion. However, it became a central theme in 2016 with the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy.

While strategic autonomy has been widely discussed in EU institutions, its definition remains ambiguous. At its core, it signifies Europe's ability to define its values and interests and act upon them. France has been its strongest advocate, incorporating the concept into its White Paper on Defence and National Security as early as 1994. Meanwhile, some policymakers remain skeptical, arguing that strategic autonomy is overly ambitious, financially burdensome, and unrealistic outside a Euro-Atlantic framework.

However, the latest developments in Washington indicate that European leaders can no longer take US security commitments for granted. The persistence of Trump-style policies, even beyond his first presidency, suggests that these shifts in US foreign policy

are "structural" rather than temporary. As a result, strategic autonomy is no longer a "luxury" but a necessity imposed by external geopolitical conditions.

With NATO's credibility increasingly in question, Europe must recognize that reliance on US military backing is no longer a certainty. Trump's return has fundamentally altered transatlantic relations, forcing European leaders to reconsider their long-term security strategy. In this new era of uncertainty, strategic autonomy is not just an aspiration — it is a crucial step toward safeguarding Europe's future.

While strategic autonomy has become a "historical necessity" for Europe, the EU's internal divisions complicate its ability to act decisively. The lingering effects of the Eurozone crisis, the rise of far-right extremism, the refugee crisis, and Brexit have weakened European cohesion, making it difficult to translate the vision of autonomy into concrete policy. However, strengthening cooperation with external partners that support European integration could help mitigate these internal challenges and reinforce the EU's emergence as an independent global actor.

One often-overlooked reality is that China has been one of the most consistent supporters of EU integration and autonomy. This stance is not only normative but also aligns with China's economic interests. The EU is China's second-largest export market, while China is the EU's second-largest trading partner. The Belt and Road Initiative depends significantly on the EU, as Europe represents the final destination for some trade routes. A more unified and economically integrated EU strengthens China's access to stable markets and enhances global trade efficiency.

China has also taken concrete steps to support European economic stability. During the sovereign debt crisis in Europe's southern belt, China demonstrated its commitment by purchasing public debt in Greece, Portugal and Spain, while ramping up its investments in the region. In Central and Eastern Europe, China launched an initiative in 2012 to address infrastructure gaps and stimulate economic development. While often misrepresented as a divisive strategy, China's engagement in these regions actually helps reduce core-periphery dis-

parities within the EU, ultimately strengthening European cohesion. A fragmented EU cannot achieve strategic autonomy and genuine integration, making subregional cooperation with China a valuable complement to broader EU integration efforts.

Conversely, the US has often acted as an obstacle to European integration and autonomy. A recent example is Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, under US influence, pressuring European leaders to ramp up defense spending. Meanwhile, figures such as Elon Musk and JD Vance have sought to interfere in European domestic politics by amplifying far-right narratives and fostering discord. Additionally, despite the EU's lack of explicit geopolitical interests in East Asia, Washington continues to pressure European governments into adopting a containment strategy against China, further compromising European strategic autonomy.

As Chinese President Xi Jinping has emphasized the development of Europe is conducive to promoting world peace and stability. China and the EU, as two of the world's major civilizational forces, share similar normative expectations and a common interest in promoting multilateralism and global governance. If the EU is to advance its strategic autonomy, it must move beyond outdated frameworks of "systemic rivalry", refrain from imposing its own values as a universalizing model, and focus on pragmatic, mutually beneficial cooperation with key partners. Rather than reducing autonomy to military self-sufficiency and protectionism, Europe's most effective path to autonomy and integration lies in fostering relationships that reinforce its unity and long-term stability. By deepening engagement with China — its strongest advocate for integration, the EU can chart a course toward genuine strategic autonomy while maintaining its commitment to multilateralism, global governance, and sustainable development.

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ONG TEE KEAT

Headwinds and tailwinds

China and ASEAN must navigate the challenges to their relations while seizing the opportunities of the partnership

Relations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are viewed as one of the most successful models of multilateral cooperation and regional economic integration across the Asia-Pacific region, if not the world.

To Beijing, the bilateral relations showcase its neighborhood diplomacy rooted in the spirit of amity, sincerity, symbiosis and inclusiveness. From the perspective of the 10-member bloc, China has not only been its largest trading partner since 2009, but also the trailblazer in promoting regional connectivity, alongside addressing the development finance gap through the mammoth Belt and Road Initiative.

Indeed, the bloc has the most number of mechanisms of cooperation with China, accounting for almost 20 percent of the total collaborative frameworks that ASEAN has with its 11 official dialogue partners. In short, the multi-dimensionality of its relations marks the China-ASEAN comprehensive strategic partnership.

In contrast, the recent tariff threats of Donald Trump against all economies that have a trade surplus with the United States are casting a long shadow on the ASEAN-US comprehensive strategic partnership.

Under the previous Joe Biden administration, the US had its trade-in-goods deficit with the bloc continuously on the rise — growing from \$199.9 billion in 2022 to \$204.1 billion in 2023, and subsequently soaring to \$227.7 billion in 2024. This will likely give the Trump administration a good excuse to weaponize tariffs against ASEAN, given that the US is the largest source of cumulative foreign direct investment in ASEAN, with its total stock reaching nearly \$480 billion in 2023 — almost double the combined US investments in China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. In early 2024, the US surpassed China to become the largest export market for ASEAN products, with 15 percent of ASEAN's exports destined for the US.

In addition, leading economies in the bloc, such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam, which embrace "BRICS Plus", either as a full-fledged member or a partner nation, may risk being hit with a 100 percent tariff threat if they insist on pursuing local currency trade payment settlements — a move to ditch the greenback that is set to court retaliation from the

Trump administration. It won't come as a surprise if ASEAN were therefore to be cowed into accepting certain trade-offs at the expense of its relations with China.

ASEAN, currently the fourth-largest trading partner of the US, is known to be the world's fastest growing trade area with a sizeable GDP of \$3.6 trillion, alongside being viewed as a linchpin in the US "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

Amid the prevailing hype on sustainable economic development, the region's thriving digital economy is projected to have a vast potential of \$1 trillion by 2030. Both the US and China, being comprehensive strategic partners of ASEAN, are set to scramble for the coveted turf to harness the huge market potential.

As the region is on the threshold of embarking on sustainable development, the China-initiated Global Development Initiative makes a perfect vehicle to foster a new dimension of ASEAN-China cooperation in sustainable development. This goes far beyond mere trade as intended in the Free Trade Agreement.

As this aligns with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, projects implemented under the Global Development Initiative framework are presumably more receptive to the host countries which might be caught in the entanglement of Sino-US geopolitical competition.

In this respect, noting that climate governance is taking a back seat on Trump's agenda, sustainable development will thus provide China with a window of opportunity to advance its Global Development Initiative in the Global South, notably in Southeast Asia.

Although ASEAN's development priorities have never been homogeneous, the region's quest for external assistance in mitigating common challenges such as poverty, climate change, food insecurity, cross-border crime and development finance remains real and increasingly pronounced. Individual ASEAN member states such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam took the liberty to embrace "BRICS Plus" mainly to leverage the vast collective resources of the Global South, of which China is the key driving force.

In this context, China is not short of tools to facilitate the mitigation of insecurities confronting the region. It's time for China to prove the worth and relevance of the Global Security Initiative in addressing the non-conventional security concerns of its largest trading partner.

Given that these concerns may vary across the bloc, China should endeavor to do so in the form of multilaterals under the broad framework of the China-ASEAN cooperation mechanism, and not necessarily adhere to full participation of all member states at one go.

Of the various collaborative frameworks between the Southeast Asian bloc and the second-largest economy in the world, the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area remains the institutional cornerstone of their economic and trade relations. The substantial conclusion of the ASEAN-China FTA version 3.0 late last year witnessed the progression of the FTA upgrade with the inclusion of consumer protection and competition provisions, alongside significance attached to new drivers for sustainable economic growth in electronic commerce and green technology.

As the bilateral trade figures are all set to breach the \$1-trillion mark, there has been a growing positive trend of promoting Track 2 diplomacy which encourages people-to-people engagement. China is flexing its tourism muscles astutely. Not only does it serve as a tool of soft power in its neighborhood diplomacy outreach, but more conspicuously it helps catalyze the post-COVID-19 economic recovery within the region.

While China-ASEAN relations are heading for a promising prospect with more non-economic pillars coming into play, existing unresolved issues cannot be taken for granted. The long-outstanding issue of overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea shouldn't be left as an elephant in the room.

While China and ASEAN are expediting the negotiations on the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea, perhaps it's equally crucial for China to reach out to the respective claimant states for bilateral engagement on the disputes. After all, not all ASEAN member states are involved and the complexities of disputes vary from case to case.

All in all, it's in the long term interest of China-ASEAN relations to have the disputes resolved as soon as possible. The inconclusiveness of the territorial disputes impedes the constructive building of mutual trust, leaving rifts for external forces to drive wedges in.

The author is president of the Belt and Road Initiative Caucus for Asia Pacific. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE



An ancient edition of *The Four Books*, with annotations by scholars, is displayed in an exhibition hall of the National Museum of Classic Books, from which puzzle-solving game players can uncover clues. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ancient books hold many clues

Museum exhibition launches first interactive puzzle-solving game, attracting more visitors to understand classic texts

In an exhibition hall of the National Museum of Classic Books, located within Beijing's National Library of China, real-time puzzle game players use guidebooks while checking passages in ancient classic books, and searching for clues to solve the game.

Feng Wanwen, a player of the immersive, interactive puzzle-solving game *Ancient Book Restorer - Hundred Cities Book*, scanned a QR code on the guidebook to receive missions to find the hidden "truth" on the game's WeChat mini-program. The game is won by completing puzzles with clues hidden in exhibits, such as oracle bones, bamboo and wooden slips, stone inscriptions and rare ancient books.

The museum launched the exhibition in September 2024 as part of celebrations for the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the National Museum of Classic Books founded by the national library.

Entry to both the exhibition and interactive gaming is free.

Hiding the first clues, a version of *Shan Hai Jing* (Classic of Mountains and Seas) published in 1180 during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) is the book's earliest edition found to date. Players need to have a specific understanding of the distance between mountains, and then find the answer to the first puzzle using a specially designed "ruler". The "ruler" is made of paper with the mountains' information printed on it. Players will find the answer once it's folded.

Feng says she enjoyed the process of using the "ruler".

"Players must understand the text of *Shan Hai Jing* and fold the ruler the right way to get the answer," she says.

Among the 83 exhibits, more than 20 provide clues to the game. As the game's storyline goes on, the players need to read, understand, and analyze the text of ancient books and use ancient maps.

Dai Ying, the founder of Puzzle Master,



Players must comprehend the texts and pictures to solve the puzzles, including from the books *Ben Cao Gang Mu* (left), or Compendium of Materia Medica, *Shan Hai Jing* (right), or *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, and guidebooks (center) for players.



a puzzle game design team, says the principle of the game is to encourage players to read the text of the ancient books on display and use that knowledge to complete the puzzle.

"The game produces a real connection between the players and the exhibits. They become 'co-creators' of the exhibition's inno-

vation, helping transition the educational functions of the museum," says Dai.

Players can resolve the game on the museum's WeChat account and choose the single-role or three-role versions. They will act as ancient classic book protectors trying to find answers to puzzles with a good understanding of the hidden

clues and achieve their goal of protecting the ancient books.

In the single-role version, the mission is to investigate a mysterious situation in the exhibition hall at midnight — the ancient book *Shan Hai Jing* turns its own pages.

If players choose the three-role version, a three-person group is necessary. Each

player follows different parts of the storyline and completes different puzzles. Cooperation and competition will happen. Because a saboteur is hidden in the group, betrayals and cheating will shock the players. If the saboteur wins the game in the three-role version, players will have to face the "consequences" of failing to protect the ancient books.

After the single-role version was launched in November 2024 and the three-role version on Jan 23, the game has quickly become popular among puzzle enthusiasts and traditional culture fans. By late January, about 1,000 players participated in the game. Chen Weiwei, from the exhibition department of the National Library of China, reveals that the reservation quotas regularly sold out in one minute.

Feng tried many times to make a reservation and finally played the game with a friend three weeks after its launch. The two young women walked around the exhibition hall, talked about the storyline in low voices, and browsed the pages of the ancient books that provided clues. They spent more than an hour completing the game. The answer to the final puzzle revealed a deeply touching motto that encourages the inheriting of ancient classics.

The game is a subprogram of the originally designed IP *Shanhai*, a virtual community for the protection and restoration of ancient books, which was named after the classic *Shan Hai Jing* and initiated by the museum in 2019.

"We developed the *Shanhai* IP and created a series of puzzle-based activities, hoping to introduce similar activities alongside major exhibitions in the future," says Gu Heng, director of the exhibition department at the National Library of China.

Xing Yu contributed to this story.

CHINA DAILY



Players participate in the puzzle-solving game in the National Museum of Classic Books' exhibition hall located in Beijing's National Library of China.

Family maintains closeness even when living afar



Share your unique perspective on China

This is your chance to get published! "My China Moments" — an international collection of essays, videos and visual works compiled by China Daily — is now open for submissions. The initiative seeks diverse stories and insights from foreigners in China.

Written articles, videos and other visual works in English can be submitted for consideration.

Selected pieces will be published, with attribution, on platforms such as the China Daily website and China Daily app along with

digital platforms and social media accounts.

A number of articles will also be published, with attribution, in China Daily.

Culturally themed gifts will be offered and contributors may be invited to attend offline events organized by China Daily.

Scan the QR code for submission details.



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My parents and my family have shaped my perception of so many aspects of life: from history to culture, from food to interpersonal relationships. Growing up, I believe it is only fair that children return this favor. For example, I have been able to open the doors to this great country, China, to my friends and family.

Because they have supported me in every step of my education, I have always shared my knowledge with them after each of my university classes. At night, during dinner, I used to always tell them about new information I learned about Chinese history, philosophy, literature, and even modern society. Therefore, my parents had the chance to know China through my eyes, and they became more interested in the Middle Kingdom.

However, back when I was attending university in Italy, I was also getting to know China through the lens of my teachers, having not yet been there myself. Finally, in 2019, when I first went to Beijing to attend university, I was able to tell my family about my own perception of China, about its wonders, its

amazing food, and the kindness of its people.

I discovered that the land of the Sinites was actually very different from what I had imagined and from what I was told in the West — much better in so many aspects. The more I knew, the more I shared with my family, and their appreciation toward my new home grew.

So, they started planning a trip to visit me. Even my grandparents wanted to come. This dream came true in the spring of 2024, when I greeted my family at the airport in Beijing with the biggest smile.

Although I had given my detailed

insights, my grandparents wanted to organize the trip all by themselves, by reading books and brochures, and even navigating online. My grandpa called me every night, saying that he found a new neighbor in Beijing and that he wanted to see a new scenic spot that he definitely did not want to miss out on. He was very meticulous because he cared a lot about this trip.

When they arrived, my grandparents were impressed by the infrastructure and facilities — they had never seen anything so modern and efficient. I still remember the train ride we took from the airport to the



Francesca Garfagnoli with her dad and grandparents at the Bund, Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

center of Beijing, during which they were speechless, caught up in a world so different from theirs and, yet, so mesmerizing.

This two-week trip was full of surprises for them. For instance, they did not expect to find the food so savory and exquisite; they were impressed by the variety and richness of Chinese cuisine and how different ingredients could combine to create such an

interesting harmony of flavors. I introduced them to all the regional differences, such as Yunnan, Xinjiang, Guangdong, and Shanxi cuisines.

They appreciated the deep culture, attention to detail, and sense of order and cleanliness they encountered throughout the city. They visited many famous attractions, such as the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven and so many more — the harmony between ancient traditions and modern life truly captivated them. They were amazed by how well every historical site was preserved, reflecting the respect and care of people deeply connected to their history.

But the part that they loved the most was discovering my life here in China. I brought them to my work and showed them my office, apartment and all the small shops and restaurants I visit daily. They were delighted by each small aspect and every little detail of my day-to-day existence. They were finally able to understand my life choice and, although they will always miss me and hope I will be as close to them as possible, they were pleased that I chose China as my home.

The author, Francesca Garfagnoli, is an editor with a background in literature and culture. She studied at the Capital Normal University in Beijing and has been working in the city for the past two years.

SPORTS

SOCCER

Chelsea up to 4th after routing Saints

The Blues end a three-match losing run by beating a team destined to go down

LONDON — Enzo Maresca admitted he was relieved after Chelsea climbed to fourth place in the Premier League with a 4-0 rout of woeful Southampton on Tuesday.

Maresca's side got back on track after three successive defeats with a dominant display at Stamford Bridge.

Christopher Nkunku put the Blues ahead and Pedro Neto doubled their lead before Levi Colwill bagged the third just before the break.

Marc Cucurella capped Chelsea's biggest league win since thrashing Southampton 5-1 in December.

Pointed questions were being asked about Maresca after Chelsea was beaten at Aston Villa on Saturday, a limp performance that followed successive defeats to Brighton in the Premier League and FA Cup.

"We all needed that. We were in a bad run in terms of results. The performance was always there, maybe except against Brighton. We are happy," Maresca said.

"This month and half has been when I have pushed players even more to believe in the process.

"It's normal to go through some bad moments. It's about how we react and how we continue to believe in what we do. The players are fantastic and worked hard every day."

Underlining the growing frustration at Chelsea, over a hundred fans gathered outside the Bridge to protest against Todd Boehly's ownership group before kickoff, chanting "we want our Chelsea back" and singing former owner Roman Abramovich's name.

But Maresca had insisted he was "more sure" than ever that Chelsea



Chelsea's English defender Tosin Adarabioyo (left) fights for the ball with Southampton's Nigerian striker Paul Onuachu during the English Premier League match at Stamford Bridge in London on Tuesday. AFP

was on the right track, and his team repaid his belief with a convincing result, albeit against a moribund team rooted to the foot of the table.

Chelsea's third league win in 11 matches revived its bid to qualify for the Champions League for the first

time since 2022.

"In this moment, we have five, six, seven important injuries. We started the season very good for a long period. Then with injuries, especially to our box striker, we tried different solutions," Maresca said.

"We tried with Neto as a number nine last week. He was good then and tonight as well.

"We expect more from Nkunku. But at the same time, we try to understand him.

"He is not a number nine and not

a winger. He is an attacking midfielder. The problem is that sometimes we need to find the balance."

Southampton has a meager nine points from 27 matches, with 11 goals conceded in its last three league games.

No wonder boss Ivan Juric branded its season a "disaster" this week.

With last year's promotion a distant memory, Southampton looks set to replicate the 2022-23 campaign, when it was relegated after finishing bottom.

Rampant Chelsea

Chelsea took the lead in the 24th minute when Tosin Adarabioyo headed a corner towards the far post, where Nkunku netted with a brave stooping header that sent him crashing into Saints keeper Aaron Ramsdale.

The French forward celebrated his 14th goal this season in trademark fashion by blowing a blue balloon.

Chelsea put the result beyond doubt with a blistering spell before halftime.

In the 36th minute, Nkunku's pass gave Neto a clear sight of goal and he drilled a clinical finish past Ramsdale for his fifth goal this term.

Neto turned provider in the 44th minute as his freekick was perfectly placed for Colwill to take advantage of Southampton's sloppy marking with a thumping header that gave Ramsdale no chance.

The only intrigue in the second half was whether Cole Palmer would end his goal drought.

The England forward hasn't scored since Jan 14 and Chelsea's leading scorer this season wore a rueful smile when he blazed over to extend his barren run to seven games.

Cucurella ensured the scoreline reflected Chelsea's superiority when he slotted home from Tyrrique George's 78th minute pass.

AFP

Amorim: United must avoid recruitment mistakes of the past

Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim believes avoiding the kind of expensive mistakes the club has made in the transfer market is the key to halting the English giant's decline.

The Portuguese coach has been unable to turn around United's miserable season since taking charge in November, with the Red Devils sitting 15th in the Premier League.

That is despite spending over 600 million pounds (\$760 million) in just over two years on new players under his predecessor Erik ten Hag.

Amorim had limited funds to work with in the January transfer window.

Danish defender Patrick Dorgu was his only signing as budgets at Old Trafford have been slashed across the board.

The club announced Monday that it expects up to 200 fresh redundancies as part of a "transformation plan" to improve stability.

Amorim admitted on Tuesday that those losing their jobs had paid the price for the club's lack of on-field success in recent years and put poor recruitment at the heart of the problem.

"It's easy for me to be here and say all the pretty stuff — we have to improve," said Amorim.

"The recruitment I think is crucial, we need to improve the team. We need to perform better, we need to be in Europe and not in our position during the season."

However, the former Sporting Lisbon boss conceded that actions speak louder than words and he has to convince both supporters and colleagues that he can turn United's fortunes around.

"They are paying the price for our lack of success and I cannot say anything now that is going to convince the fans and all the staff that we are going to do it," he added.

"We have an idea. For me as a

coach, we need to be a better team and to recruit better and don't make a lot of mistakes in that department."

The 100-million-pound outlay on misfiring strikers Rasmus Hojlund and Joshua Zirkzee is just one example of where United has failed to get value for money.

Hojlund has only found the net twice in the Premier League this season, with his last goal in any competition coming against Viktoria Plzen back on Dec 12.

Amorim, though, said the Danish international needs to be provided with better service.

"I think it's clear, we as a team, we are not helping Rasmus," said Amorim. "We don't create a lot of chances.

"I think Rasmus has a lot of potential. If we improve the way we play the game, he will have more opportunities to score. He came here very young and, when you are very young, to be the number nine and play all the time sometimes is hard.

"He has the ability, he has already shown that here, but I think it's more a team thing than a Rasmus thing."



AFP Ruben Amorim

Messi fined over confrontation

Major League Soccer fined Inter Miami captain Lionel Messi an undisclosed amount on Tuesday for placing his hand on a New York City FC assistant coach's neck.

The incident happened during Saturday's 2-2 draw.

Messi was leaving the pitch following the full-time whistle after receiving a yellow card for a verbal exchange with referee Alexis Da Silva. The reigning league MVP had some words with New York assistant coach Mehdi Ballouchy and covered his mouth as two Miami assistants intervened. Messi started to walk away, then turned back toward Ballouchy. He put his right hand on the back of Ballouchy's neck and squeezed hard enough that it appeared to stun him.

The league also fined Inter Miami forward Luis Suarez an undisclosed amount for violating the hands to the face/head/neck of an opponent policy in a separate incident in that match. He grabbed New York defender Birk Risa by the back of the neck during a skirmish following the halftime whistle.

Chicago Fire midfielder Brian Gutierrez was suspended one match and fined an undisclosed amount for knocking down Columbus' Yevhen Cheberko with a high elbow to the head in 4-2 season-opening loss on Saturday.

AGENCIES

Atletico holds Barca in 'crazy' 8-goal cup semi

BARCELONA — Atletico Madrid conceded a two-goal lead then fought back from two down in a wild 4-4 draw with Barcelona in a Copa del Rey semifinal first-leg thriller on Tuesday.

After Diego Simeone's side scored twice in the opening six minutes through Julian Alvarez and Antoine Griezmann, Barca raced through the gears in a high-octane performance.

The superb Pedri pulled one back with Pau Cubarsi, Inigo Martinez and Robert Lewandowski going on to score for the Catalan giant.

Marcos Llorente netted for Atletico before Alexander Sorloth struck in the 93rd minute to leave the tie perfectly poised ahead of the second leg at the Metropolitan stadium on April 2.

"It's a terrible result when you go 4-2 up... you have to be more careful, these are things we have to learn," Pedri told Movistar.

"Today we started badly but I'll focus on how the team reacted. "When we got in front we have to be calmer... it will be a difficult (second leg) but we will go there to try and win."

Simeone hailed his team's grit, with his substitutes playing a key role as it has been the case so many times this season.

"We had an enormous competitive spirit," said the Atletico coach. "The changes freshened up the



Inigo Martinez celebrates scoring Barcelona's third goal with Jules Kounde during a Spanish Cup semifinal first-leg match against Atletico Madrid in Barcelona on Tuesday. REUTERS

team, it wasn't an easy game to play, and I love the spirit the lads showed..."

"The team began to feel more comfortable as the minutes passed." Hansi Flick left Barca's top goalscorer Lewandowski out of the starting lineup, with Ferran Torres taking his place in a false nine role.

Simeone picked a strong side despite his side's extremely tricky fixture list, with this the first of three matches against Barca and a Champions League last 16 tie against Real Madrid on the horizon.

Atletico took the lead inside the first minute, with Alvarez pouncing at the back post after Griezmann's cross was flicked on.

Atletico doubled its lead in the sixth minute when Jules Kounde gave the ball away and Alvarez produced a stunning pass to release Griezmann.

The French forward was being pressured by Alejandro Balde but cleverly worked room for a shot, which Wojciech Szczesny got a hand to but could not keep out.

After Atletico's opening salvo,

Barcelona dominated the rest of the first half.

Torres should have leveled but his shot was weak and Atletico goalkeeper Juan Musso saved easily.

The La Liga leader hit two goals in two minutes to pull back level, with Kounde setting up Pedri for the first before Cubarsi nodded home from a corner.

Torres spurned another golden chance for Barca's third, rounding Musso but misfiring under pressure from Clement Lenglet, on loan from the Catalans at Atletico.

'Too easy'

Szczesny saved well from Griezmann at the start of the second half, with Barca still largely in control.

Sorloth took a goal disallowed for offside as the visitor sought an equalizer, but instead it was Barca who moved further ahead.

Teenage winger Lamine Yamal created it with a brilliant dribble, blazing past Reinildo Mandava and squaring for substitute Lewandowski to tap home.

Barcelona's performance merited its lead but Llorente's 84th minute strike from the edge of the box opened the door for Sorloth to net late on.

The Norwegian forward grabbed Atletico a last-gasp victory at Barca's Olympic stadium in December in La Liga and he was in the right place at the right time once more to finish from Samuel Lino's cut-back.

"It was crazy, a lot of goals," Atletico's Alvarez summed up the game.

Barcelona coach Flick was pleased with his team's display but not the final score.

"We are really disappointed about the result but the game we played today was really great, I focus more on this," Flick told reporters.

"We have to speak about the goals, it was maybe too easy (for Atletico), but we played against a fantastic team... we dominated for 75 to 80 minutes."

AFP

SPORTS

WINTER SPORTS

VITAL PISTE OF THE PLAN

The competition-level facilities at Beidahu stand at the forefront of the nation's ice and snow sports push



The lingering excitement of the Asian Winter Games in Harbin got a boost, as attention shifted to Beidahu and the 2024-25 FIS Freestyle Skiing Aerials World Cup on Sunday and Monday.

Beijing Winter Olympics champion Xu Mengtao celebrated her return to the Jilin province ski resort by clinching the World Cup title.

"I participated in a competition here eight years ago and won. It makes me incredibly happy to win again," she said, securing victory with an almost perfect jump.

About 400 kilometers away at Yabuli Ski Resort in Heilongjiang province, the snow events of the 9th Asian Winter Games wrapped up just two weeks ago, marking a significant milestone for winter sports in Asia. The Chinese sports delegation achieved a record-breaking haul of 32 gold, 27 silver, and 26 bronze medals.

Both Yabuli and Beidahu symbolize China's commitment to developing professional skiing venues. The two FIS A-level events — the Freestyle Skiing Aerials World Cup and the Freestyle Skiing Moguls World Cup — attracted 200 competitors from countries including China, Germany, Sweden, the United States and Canada.

The competitions featured numerous Olympic champions and world-renowned athletes, delivering an exhilarating experience for spectators.

Athletes such as Qi Guangpu and Xu seamlessly transitioned from the Asian Winter Games to the competitions at Beidahu, demonstrating the strong connection between these major events.

Competitors have praised the pristine natural snow and well-manicured slopes. Mikael Kingsbury, the 2018 Pyeongchang

Winter Olympics champion, reminisced about his early experiences at Beidahu. "It's changed a lot. I came here in 2010, almost 15 years ago. It was much smaller at that time. It was nice, because we had a bit of sun and less wind, which impressed me a lot."

Finnish skier Severi Vierela, the men's dual moguls champion at the FIS Freestyle Skiing World Cup in Beidahu, added, "It's like pure snow, not slushy or anything, so it's good for athletes to get good scores. The snow condition is great, and the weather is similar to Finland. It feels awesome to win my first World Cup title here."

The 2024-25 season at Beidahu has set new records, with an unprecedented lineup of events, including three international competitions, three continental events, eight national competitions, and one provincial event.

"This significant growth enhances the appeal of Beidahu Ski Resort," said Jia Ning, deputy director of the Jilin Provincial Sports Bureau.

On the third day of the Chinese New Year, Beidahu hosted the FIS Snowboard Cross World Cup for the first time. The convergence of high-level sporting events with the festive holiday not only delighted winter sports fans, but also bolstered the local economy. The resort reported a significant increase in visitor numbers and revenue during the event, with a 59.2 percent rise in visitors and a 51 percent increase in revenue.

"We are super excited that, as a global Snowboard Cross World Cup tour, we will also be stopping in this part of Asia. It's also a significant step for Snowboard Cross as a sport," said Uwe Beier, race director of FIS Cross and Snowboard Alpine.

On Feb 2, the resort recorded its



From top: China's freestyle skiing aerials stars Xu Mengtao, Li Tianma and Qi Guangpu in action at the 2024-25 FIS Freestyle Skiing Aerials World Cup in Beidahu, Jilin province. XINHUA



Christopher Lillis from the United States shares a light moment with Chinese athletes on Monday. XINHUA

highest single-day visitor count ever. Over the Chinese New Year holiday, Beidahu welcomed 98,100 visitors, marking a 20 percent increase year-on-year, with revenue reaching 55.2 million yuan (\$7.6 million), up 23.8 percent from the previous year.

Recognized by the FIS as "China's Whistler", Beidahu was established in 1993 and has grown into the largest single ski area in Asia, featuring 74 ski trails, more than 350 professional coaches, and amenities catering to snowboarders of all levels. The resort boasts an area of 275 hectares and a total slope length of 80 km, with multiple lifts ensuring a capacity of up to 31,000 people per hour.

As well as hosting various prestigious events, including the 6th Asian Winter Games and numerous World Cup competitions, Beidahu also served as a training base for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics. The venue's ongoing development reflects a narrative of growth and innovation, encouraging greater participation in winter sports within the local community.

The continuous enhancement of both facilities and services has attracted numerous skiing enthusiasts, bolstering Beidahu's reputation as a premier winter sports destination.

With the goal of engaging 300 million Chinese people in ice and snow sports already surpassed, a growing number of international visitors are coming to experience winter sports in China.

"This is my third year skiing at Beidahu, and the snow quality here is excellent, with warm sunshine and calm winds, making it a truly enjoyable experience. Although it's far from my hometown, there's a sense of familiarity. The resort undergoes changes

every year, which keeps things fresh and exciting for me," said Steve Balno, a skier from Canada.

As of Feb 6, Beidahu Ski Resort had welcomed 819,200 visitors during the 2024-25 snow season, a 45.3 percent increase compared to the same period last year. Tourists generated a total revenue of 413 million yuan (\$56.95 million), marking a 45.7 percent growth year-on-year. "We are on track to achieve our goal of welcoming over one million visitors this ski season," said Yan Shuai, marketing director of Beidahu Ski Resort.

Looking ahead, Jilin province plans to further leverage its unique ice and snow resources to enhance event quality, transforming more competitions into globally celebrated, gold-standard experiences. This effort aims to attract high-level competitions to the province, promoting ice and snow sports as an engaging windfall into China. Additionally, initiatives will continue to encourage youth involvement in winter sports, sustaining public participation.

The development of Beidahu reflects Jilin province's broader progress in the ice and snow sector. "In recent years, Jilin has been actively promoting the high-quality development of its ice and snow industry, turning 'cold resources' into a 'hot effect,'" said Sun Guangzhi, director of the Jilin Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism.

"We are working to build the 'Changbai Snow for All' brand, accelerating the comprehensive development of ice and snow sports, tourism, culture and equipment manufacturing. This approach aims to establish a full-industry, full-chain cold-region ice and snow ecosystem," Sun added.

XINHUA