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CHINA DAILY

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Trump, Zelensky clash damage is 'hard to repair'

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington and CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels

The very public argument between President of the United States Donald Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky was the "opposite of diplomacy", and the damage it has caused will be "hard to repair", and it remains to be seen whether Washington will stop sending weapons to Kyiv, analysts said.

The heated exchange flared up in the Oval Office in the White House on Friday over differing visions of how to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict. European leaders reacted by overwhelmingly voicing support for Zelensky, offering near-unanimous backing.

A meeting of European leaders took place in London on Sunday for crisis talks that seek to boost security cooperation and support for Ukraine.

The meeting at the White House on Friday between Trump — who was joined by Vice-President JD Vance — and Zelensky developed into a shouting match while the television cameras rolled.

Trump accused Zelensky of "gambling with World War III" and claimed Ukraine lacked the "cards" to fight Russia, while Vance labeled him disrespectful and ungrateful.

Trump later declared on social media X that Zelensky is "not ready for Peace if America is involved". Zelensky departed the White House less than three hours after he arrived, canceling lunch and a scheduled news conference. A highly anticipated rare earth minerals deal was also not signed.

Public response

Meanwhile, in central Kyiv on Saturday, stunned Ukrainians were still coming to terms with how the talks between the two presidents had gone, according to Euronews. "I'm quite shocked by all of this," said 23-year-old chef Daniel Novak. "But for now, I understand that Zelensky is doing his best, that he is holding on."

Ukrainians, hardened by three years of conflict, rallied around Zelensky but also expressed concern over future US backing for Kyiv. "I doubt that we could stand without American help. They have helped us a lot with weapons and money. Maybe Europe will help us," Kyiv resident Liudmyla Stetskevych, 47, told Reuters. US State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said what many saw as Trump, Vance and Zelensky sparring in public was "diplomacy in action with blunt talk and a clarity that you rarely, rarely see ... part and parcel of what it means to make America great again".

However, not everyone agreed. "Public debates like those are the opposite of diplomacy in action. In my view, the relation had soured before the meeting, which only con-



Top: US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky look away from each other during their meeting in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, the United States, on Friday. SAUL LOEB / AFP Above: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and other Western leaders pose for a family photograph during a summit held at Lancaster House in central London on Sunday. JUSTIN TALLIS / AFP

firmed that fact," Stanley Renshon, a political scientist at the City University of New York, said on Saturday.

"The relation will not improve but continue as it now is," Renshon told China Daily. "All that is left to watch for now is the ongoing charade."

Cal Jillson, a political scientist and historian at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, said that inviting reporters and cameras into the Oval Office and then dressing down a "beleaguered wartime ally" was not diplomacy.

"The damage created by such a public break will be hard to repair. Trump will require more access to

Ukrainian minerals; he and Vance will require that Zelensky crawl, and he seems unwilling to do that. But pressure on him will build," Jillson said in an email.

Jillson added that one of the things to watch for in the coming weeks would be "how fast and fully the major European states move to fill the intelligence and material gaps left as American assistance declines".

For James M. Lindsay, a senior fellow in US foreign policy and director of Fellowship Affairs at the Council on Foreign Relations, the main thing to watch for is whether

Trump cuts US weapons shipments to Ukraine.

Lindsay said the "acrimonious" meeting with Zelensky that culminated in the Ukrainian president being asked to leave the White House "has no precedent", as heads of government generally do not bicker in front of the cameras.

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VISIONARY PATHWAY | THRIVING OFF THE COAST

Small village embodies Xi's philosophy

Transformation creates vibrant fishing community, reflecting broader strategy

Editor's note: China Daily is presenting the series Visionary Pathway to tell the stories of practices and key initiatives promoted by President Xi Jinping during his tenure in various local regions, exploring their transformative impacts and interpreting the consistent values, thoughts and philosophies upheld by the president.

By KE RONGYI, HU MEIDONG and XU WEI in Dongshan county, Fujian

A brisk dawn wind carried a salty tang across Aojiao village as fishing boats glided in with the tide, their cabins loaded with crab, squids and the occasional grouper.

Along the shoreline, 59-year-old fisherman Shen Zhiqun was busy unloading fresh catches with his son, after nights spent navigating the shimmering expanse of the sea.

Shen's fishing vessel is outfitted with state-of-the-art fishing technologies, and the development of cold chain systems has allowed his catches to reach markets far beyond the coastal village — thanks in part to e-commerce platforms.

However, he said that his 40 years of experience in fishing remained the key to guaranteeing a bumper harvest from each of his fishing trips.

"To me, fishing in the ocean is like going through college. It requires experience, learning from the older generation and taking lessons from the sea," he said.

Nestled at the southeastern tip of Dongshan county, Aojiao has undergone a dramatic transformation, from a small village to a vibrant fishing community, over the past two decades — a change that captured national attention when President Xi Jinping visited in October last year.

It was Xi's second trip to the coastal hamlet, and came 23 years after his first visit in 2001, when he served as the province's governor.

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Online See more by scanning the code.

ROBOTICS REVOLUTION LEADS INNOVATION IN HEBEI

From intelligent mining to firefighting, machines find favor across industries

By ZHANG YU in Tangshan, Hebei zhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Welcome to the restaurant of the future. In an eatery in Tangshan, Hebei province, a staff member taps on a screen to confirm the order — *mauxrou* — and then places the preprepared ingredients of eggs, pork, and wood-ear mushrooms into their designated slots. A robot chef gets to work swiftly and silently and within a couple of minutes, a steaming plate of the classic stir-fry is ready.

"This is the future of dining, where technology meets tradition in the most delicious way," said Wang Chengyong, general manager of Gaoshan Hebei Intelligent



Technology Co, the seller of the robotic chefs.

The robots are capable of preparing over a thousand recipes from eight major Chinese cuisines as well as regional specialties, Wang said.

After tasting the *mauxrou* — pork fried with black wood-ear mushrooms, cucumber and scrambled eggs — a diner at the restaurant commented: "It tastes great. I can't even tell it was cooked by a robot. The only thing is, it's a bit too salty for me."

See Region, page 2

Africa can learn from China's poverty alleviation efforts

China's poverty alleviation efforts are grounded in the principle of "serving people", as well as upholding and carrying forward the governing philosophy of the older generation of national leaders. The battle against poverty has demonstrated the determination of the Communist Party of China to put the interests and concerns of the people first. Lifting people out of poverty and allowing them to live a good life are the cornerstones of social stability and development.

China's poverty alleviation efforts are comprehensive and multidimensional, addressing various aspects such as subsistence allowance, medical security, education, housing and entrepreneurship. The country has also strengthened supervision to ensure the smooth and effective implementation of poverty alleviation efforts. The targeted policies have proved to be effective, enabling a large number of people to embark on the road to

prosperity. People living in poverty have had their lives transformed by better living conditions and better quality of life covering food, clothing, housing, transportation, education and healthcare.

Under the strong leadership of the CPC, China has mobilized the entire society, particularly capable large enterprises, to actively participate in poverty alleviation actions and fulfill their social responsibilities, while ambitious young people have returned to their hometowns to contribute toward local development. In addition, various innovative policies and programs have been implemented, resulting in successful cases and rich experience.

All these are worthwhile lessons for developing countries, and also valuable models to demonstrate how developed countries can assist developing countries. It should be noted that China has created a miracle — its poverty reduction efforts

have enabled one-fifth of the world's population to achieve stable and prosperous lives, contributing to global stability and peace, and setting a tangible example for poverty alleviation efforts worldwide.

There is a Chinese saying that goes: "If you want to get rich, build roads first." Across China, I have seen the government build roads in impoverished mountainous areas. This has helped villagers travel more conveniently and provided them with a bigger market for their agricultural products. African countries can learn from such cases to improve the infrastructure in rural areas to reduce poverty.

I have also seen many Chinese companies playing a role in poverty alleviation efforts such as some large supermarkets providing supportive market channels to receive high-quality fruits, vegetables, meat and other products from poor areas. In Conghua, Guangdong province, local residents have seen their

incomes rise by combining tourism and agriculture.

These practical cases are inspiring and not difficult to implement. For African countries such as Morocco, the characteristic industries in remote areas such as beekeeping and medicinal herbs are worth developing through supportive policies from the local government. These can include subsidies to villagers or encouraging local enterprises to provide wider market channels so that villagers can earn more and improve their quality of life.

African countries can also give full play to the role of nongovernmental organizations. The Africa-China Cooperation Association for Development is an example. The association has played an active role in poverty alleviation. In the past five years, it has launched a number of initiatives, such as providing Chinese companies with practical instruction and support to establish high-standard industrial

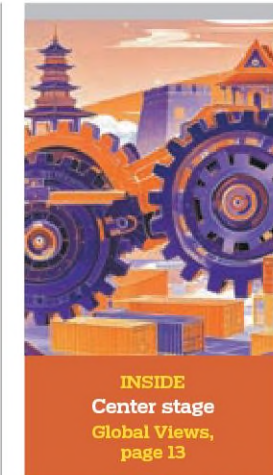
WORLD WATCH

By Nasser Bouchiba

bases in Africa in cooperation with the leading local companies in order to address multiple daunting challenges such as water scarcity or energy shortage. The association is actively exploring new paths to combine the public demand for poverty reduction with effective business models to achieve long-term development.

Furthermore, African countries can organize scholars to conduct extensive research on China's representative cases of poverty reduction, and carry out innovative practices suited to their own national conditions, while addressing funding challenges through international aid.

The author is president of Africa-China Cooperation Association for Development, in Morocco. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



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Residents perform a dragon dance at a square in Yuxian county of Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, on Feb 1. MA SHENGLI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Region: Fostering cutting-edge growth



From page 1

"Next time, we can adjust the seasoning," Wang promised, adding that the amount of seasoning dispensed can be customized to suit individual tastes.

"This is more convenient, faster and reassuring than ordering takeout," said Wang, adding that these robots will not only be used in restaurants in the future, but can also be helpful in public places like vending machines.

The cooking robot is just one of the many kinds of robots being manufactured or used in Tangshan. In the city's Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone, there are 200 robot-related companies in operation, making it the most concentrated area for the robotics industry in the northern province.

"We have established a robot industry cluster, integrating research and development, production and services into one cohesive unit," said Dong Xuezhong, director of the Management Committee of the Tangshan Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone.

Multiple applications

According to Dong, the robots produced in Tangshan are of various types and are widely used across multiple domains. There are industrial robots, specialized robots and service robots, among others, all playing a significant role in the domestic market.

For example, CITIC HIC Kaicheng Intelligence Equipment Co can produce over 50 varieties of robots that are widely used in more than 30 industries, including intelligent mining, petrochemicals and emergency rescue. The company has been in the top tier of China's special robotics industry for several consecutive years.

"The robots we produce can replace or assist humans in high-risk environments, significantly enhancing safety and efficiency," said Wang Zhijiang, head of the company's publicity department.

Wang added that in emergency situations, their robots can enter dangerous areas to perform tasks like firefighting and search-and-rescue operations, reducing the possibility of casualties. "They can also operate in complex mining environments, conducting underground exploration and



Left: Members of the diplomatic corps select products at a Spring Festival event in Langfang, Hebei, on Jan 23. Right: A visitor samples a drink at the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei time-honored brands exhibition in Shijiazhuang, Hebei, on Nov 30. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

inspection tasks to ensure the safety of miners," he said.

"The robot is a generalized concept, referring to mechanical devices or artificial intelligence systems capable of autonomously performing tasks," said Yang Shengwei, general manager of Hebei Glassix Intelligent Technologies Co, an AI company from Beijing.

It was Hebei's sound industrial chains that attracted Yang's company to set up shop in Tangshan. In March 2023, the Beijing-based Glassix registered a company in Tangshan, translating and applying the capital's research achievements in the neighboring city, which is about 150 kilometers southeast of downtown Beijing.

"Our business has a high degree of integration with many industries in Tangshan, such as the steel sector. Moreover, the robot industry ecosystem here is relatively complete with sound supporting facilities and policies, which is beneficial for our development," Yang said.

Shared factory

According to Yang, their AI metallurgical visual inspection systems have been applied in multiple production bases of HBIS Group Co in Tangshan, a leading iron and steel manufacturer headquartered in Shijiazhuang, the province's capital city.

"It has successfully helped the company achieve real-time surface quality inspection and contour measurement of steel at high

temperatures, greatly improving the efficiency of quality inspections," he said.

"Some of the systems' standardized modules were manufactured in a local shared manufacturing factory in Tangshan, thus truly integrating R&D in Beijing and transformation in Hebei," Yang said.

The shared factory is the Robotic Shared Intelligent Manufacturing Factory, a unique entity in the province, which provides full life-cycle services for enterprises, including technology, equipment, logistics and after-sales support.

"It offers services such as prototype trial production, custom parts machining, and initial product manufacturing for robot companies, universities and research institutes, helping small and medium-sized enterprises improve efficiency and reduce costs," said Wang Mengzhao, who is in charge of the shared factory, which was initiated and is operated by Tangshan Baichuan Intelligent Machine Co.

According to Wang, the shared factory has been a boon for cutting-edge research achievements because it consolidates all the processes required post-R&D, including procurement and processing.

"These are precisely the elements that can assist universities and research institutions in transforming their research results, thereby driving collaborative innovation in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region," Wang said.

He added that the shared factory itself is

an innovation, with a key focus on translating innovative research outcomes into practical applications.

"It plays a crucial role in fostering a more vibrant innovation ecosystem for collaborative development in the region, rather than solely aiming for revenue generation," he said.

Since the factory was established last year, 12 universities and research institutes from Beijing and Tianjin, including Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, have collaborated with the shared factory to translate their research achievements.

"Collaborative innovation is a crucial driving force for leading high-quality regional development," Wang said.

Economic integration

Since 2014, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei have grown under a major regional strategy — the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. The region, along with the Yangtze River Delta and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, is one of the three major driving forces leading the nation's high-quality development.

"Economic integration is the core of regional integrated development, while industrial collaboration constitutes the substantive content," said Luo Jing, a researcher with the Hebei Macroeconomic Research Institute.

She added that the significant development disparities within the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region are primarily due to

misalignments and disconnections in industrial development.

"Accelerating industrial synergy in the region is of great significance for promoting the efficient allocation and free flow of regional factors, fostering complementary advantages, enhancing the overall strength of the industrial chain in the region, and jointly building a world-class advanced manufacturing cluster," she said.

According to the Hebei Development and Reform Commission, the industrial connections within the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region are becoming increasingly close.

Currently, six key industrial chains are being jointly developed — hydrogen energy, new energy and intelligent connected vehicles, biopharmaceuticals, cybersecurity and industrial internet, high-end industrial equipment, and robotics.

Among them, robotics, and new energy and intelligent connected vehicles are led by Hebei based on its solid industrial foundation.

Hebei's contract turnover for absorbing technology from Beijing and Tianjin in 2024 increased by 34.8 percent year-on-year, according to the commission.

"One of the achievements of Hebei's vigorous promotion of collaborative innovation in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is that the province's overall capacity to absorb and transform scientific and technological achievements from Beijing and Tianjin has continued to rise," the shared manufacturing factory's leader Wang Mengzhao said.

This is consistent with the strategic requirements.

A large number of top-tier universities and high-end research talent in the region provide a solid foundation and strong capabilities for innovation. Central authorities underlined that it is essential to strengthen collaborative innovation and industrial cooperation, as well as establish new models of industry-academia-research collaboration, to enhance efficiency and proportion of scientific and technological achievements in the region.

Hebei has collaborated with universities, research institutions and key enterprises in Beijing and Tianjin to jointly establish a number of industrial innovation consortiums and innovation platforms.



From left: Workers assemble and adjust welding robots at a workshop of Tangshan Kaiyuan Autowelding System Co in Tangshan, Hebei. ZHAO JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY A Panasonic Welding Systems (Tangshan) Co technician assembles and adjusts welding robots in Tangshan. ZHAO LIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY Primary school students take part in a physical education program in Langfang, that highlights scholastic achievements. WANG XIAO / XINHUA Rescuers undergo training with firefighting robots in Tangshan. ZHAO JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang

Fresh from farm factory to Beijing plates

Thirty-year-old Beijing resident Liu Yijun swears by the quality of fruits and vegetables that she procures from a plantation in Shijiazhuang, Hebei.

"During the Chinese New Year holiday, I bought several boxes of cherry tomatoes from Shijiazhuang. Some were given as gifts to my friends, and some were sent to my hometown for my family to eat," said Liu, who is a regular customer of Xinxing Cathy (Hebei) Agronomic Ecology Co's plantation in Shijiazhuang's Luquan district.

Liu places her orders online, and the fresh produce is delivered to her home in Beijing. "I saw online that their planting technology is very advanced, and the tomatoes have a rich flavor, reminiscent of the taste from my childhood," Liu said.

Since the implementation of the coordinated development strategy for the Beijing-

Tianjin-Hebei region 11 years ago, Hebei is now fully leveraging its geographical advantage of being surrounded by Beijing and Tianjin to accelerate its own development.

There are many examples to illustrate this point, not least of which is the fact that more than 40 percent of the vegetables on the dining tables of Beijing residents are from Hebei.

The cherry tomatoes Liu likes are one of many products sold under the label of Hebei Jingcai, or Hebei Clean Vegetables, that are transported every day to Beijing in large quantities.

According to the Hebei Provincial Department of Commerce, Hebei Jingcai covers vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs and aquatic products that are selected, cleaned, cut and



An inspector monitors plants at a greenhouse of Xinxing Cathy (Hebei) Agronomic Ecology Co's plantation in Shijiazhuang in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

packaged according to food quality standards. It is a trademark of quality for fresh agricultural products from Hebei that undergo basic processing before being sold.

In 2024, agricultural products from Hebei accounted for 42.5 percent of the Beijing market, a year-on-year increase of 0.7 percent, statistics from the department showed.

"Hebei Jingcai being sold in Beijing is an important step in the process of implementing the strategy of coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. Other than promoting our development, it also ensures a steady supply of fresh products for the Beijing market and reduces household waste at the source," said Liu Zhangwen, chairman of Hebei Jingcai Co, which came into existence at the end of last year.

He added that products sold under the Hebei Jingcai trademark have their inedible parts removed for recycling, which enhances value addition and the quality of the products. It also cuts down urban household waste by about 20 percent.

According to Liu, the purpose of establishing the company was to integrate upstream and downstream resources of the industrialized chain, provide systematic solutions for more enterprises to expand sales channels and achieve scale production, as well as help enterprises reduce logistics and operating costs.

A total of 85 companies in Hebei have obtained the right to use the Hebei Jingcai trademark. "This model not only provides high-quality agricultural products to the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region but also injects new momentum into upgrading Hebei's agriculture, and high-quality economic development of the province," he said.

TOP NEWS

Chinese firms expand footprint overseas

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Cargo ships carrying steel products are heading toward African ports from Zhangjiagang Port in China's Jiangsu province, and canned beans from Yancheng, Jiangsu, are reaching the dining tables of Middle Eastern families, as Chinese enterprises continue to expand their businesses overseas, according to Nanjing Customs.

Chinese companies nationwide, not just enterprises in Jiangsu, are revving up their efforts to expand their footprint overseas and strengthen international cooperation.

In the two weeks following the Spring Festival holiday, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade said it arranged eight groups of Chinese entrepreneurs to travel abroad for economic and trade activities.

Representatives from more than 200 companies visited Kazakhstan, Germany, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the Beijing-based council said on Friday.

"During the visits, the willingness

of foreign companies to cooperate with China exceeded our expectations, and 33 cooperation intent agreements were reached, covering sectors such as finance, energy, infrastructure, automobile manufacturing and the digital economy," said Yang Fan, a spokeswoman for the CCPIT.

"This has fully demonstrated the strong desire and broad prospects for pragmatic cooperation between Chinese and foreign business communities," she said.

The more difficult the times, the more determined the global business community is to work together and achieve win-win cooperation, Yang said, noting that this is the greatest certainty that balances uncertain factors in global economic growth.

In mid-February, a delegation of Chinese entrepreneurs visited Kazakhstan and achieved better-than-expected results. During the two-day visit, representatives of enterprises from China and Kazakhstan signed eight cooperation agreements, including an energy strategic cooperation agreement and an agricultural products import and export agreement.

The visit was aimed at deepening trade, investment, and industrial and supply chain cooperation between China and Kazakhstan and further consolidating the permanent comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, the CCPIT said.

Chinese entrepreneurs were also welcomed in other countries, and Chinese and foreign business communities engaged in enthusiastic talks.

In South Africa, the country's Deputy President Paul Mashatile met with a Chinese business delegation in person, while in Germany, the management teams of major multinational corporations, such as Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Bosch, held in-depth talks with Chinese entrepreneurs, Yang said.

In the UAE, officials from government departments and major business associations actively engaged in dialogues with Chinese entrepreneurs, she added.

In the past few years, Chinese enterprises have shown strong willingness to promote industrial and supply chain cooperation with their foreign counterparts.

Last year, the CCPIT organized a total of 2,249 business groups to visit 102 countries and regions, which means on average six Chinese delegations went abroad for business talks each day.

Jiangsu Kanghui New Material Technology, an affiliate of Hengdi Group, which focuses on the full production chain in oil refining, petrochemicals, polyester new materials and textiles, is a leading company in producing wide polyester films. A variety of polyester film products have rolled off its production line for exports.

In particular, the company has been actively expanding its business in emerging markets such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, according to Nanjing Customs.

"Last year, our products exported to ASEAN countries enjoyed preferential tariffs and received an exemption of 8.47 million yuan (\$1.16 million), thanks to the China-ASEAN free trade agreement," said Zhang Liping, director of import and export at Jiangsu Kanghui New Material Technology.

"With preferential tariffs, our products have become more competitive in overseas markets. In 2024, the company's export value in the ASEAN market reached \$24 million," Zhang added.

Diplomacy in focus amid challenges

China assumes a distinctive role as a key supporter of global peace and development

By CAO DESHENG
caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

With the two sessions, China's biggest annual political event, set to start on Tuesday, global attention will be riveted on the country's diplomatic maneuvers amid an increasingly divided world and mounting economic and security challenges globally.

Acting as a window for the world to observe China's policy direction, governance model and long-term vision, the sessions of the National People's Congress, the top legislature, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the top political advisory body, gather thousands of lawmakers and political advisers to chart the nation's future course of action for its all-around development.

While the world anticipates this year's agenda, discussions are already heating up on key issues such as China's economic trajectory and the fine-tuning of its diplomacy to adapt to the rapid evolution of the international environment.

Amid growing instability and uncertainty in the world, the expectations are high for China, the world's second-largest economy and a major country, to play its role as an anchor of stability and growth to promote global peace, security and cooperation.

Addressing the 61st Munich Security Conference on Feb 14, Foreign Minister Wang Yi called for building an equal and orderly multipolar world, saying that China will be a factor of certainty in this multipolar system and strive to be a steadfast constructive force in a changing world.

Azhar Azam, a current affairs commentator and geopolitical affairs analyst, said that Wang's statement reiterated China's commitment to promoting a multipolar world, offering insights into how common challenges should be tackled.

China's intention is to develop broad international cooperation and combat real challenges such as conflicts, economic regression and climate change that threaten international stability and the very existence of mankind, Azam added.

The Global Cooperation Barometer 2025, jointly released by the World Economic Forum and McKinsey & Company in January, reveals that political and geopolitical turmoil has seriously affected the models of multilateral cooperation.

Warwick Powell, adjunct professor at Queensland University of Technology and senior fellow at Beijing Taihe Institute, said that in contrast with the US, which advocates unilateralism and zero-sum game, China's idea of multipolarity does not revolve around "great power rivalry", but rather emphasizes the need to curate shared commitments to collective security and other common interests.

Observers said that China underscores true multilateralism and rallies Global South nations in improving the global governance system with United Nations at the center, and its foreign policy on dealing with major countries, especially the US, will be among the highlights that will attract international attention.

Xin Ping, a Beijing-based international affairs commentator, said there have been widely shared concerns among Chinese people and in China's academic circles that the new US administration could adopt a more wide-ranging containment strategy against China.

China has gained substantial experience in navigating its relations with the US through difficult times, and it will continue to navigate the China-US ties with resilience and confidence, as it did before, Xin said.

China and the US could be partners in addressing common global challenges such as artificial intelligence, Xin said, adding that it is important to rise above bilateral issues and focus on broader shared goals for mankind, ultimately working together toward a better future.

Since the start of the year, President Xi Jinping held a series of head-of-state diplomacy activities, setting the tone for the country's diplomatic efforts. These included a telephone conversation with US President Donald Trump, a video meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and a phone conversation with European Council President Antonio Costa.

Amid severe global challenges related to peace, development, security and governance, the major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, led by Xi, is demonstrating China's distinctive role as a key supporter of global peace and development, analysts said.

Chill thrill

A group of 2,461 cold-water swimmers gather on Saturday in Most lake in northwest Czech Republic, successfully breaking the Guinness World Record for the largest gathering for a polar bear dip. The previous record was established by 1,799 swimmers in Poland.

DAVID W. CERNY / REUTERS



Success: Key factors underpin prosperity

From page 1

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, praised the village's evolution over the past 23 years and conveyed an optimistic tone about an even brighter future for rural areas and a more vibrant life for farmers.

The village's transformation has been widely seen as a validation of Xi's vision for diversifying the nation's food supply and broadening the channels of income for rural residents.

Aojiao, dubbed the nation's most beautiful fishing village, now boasts 88 registered steel-hulled fishing boats and a total of 603 smaller fishing vessels, pushing its annual marine output value past 330 million yuan (\$45.3 million) in 2023. Furthermore, the development of aquaculture, e-commerce and rural tourism has broadened the channels of income for village residents, whose average annual disposable income has reached 58,000 yuan.

During his visit last year, Xi fondly recalled that during his first trip to Aojiao in 2001, he already foresaw the village's enormous potential.

"When I was working in Fujian, I noticed that our island communities held tremendous promise. That's when I proposed leveraging both the mountains and the sea — using mountain resources if you live by the mountains, and using the sea if you live by the sea," he said.

Liang Caiyi, an analyst with the Fujian Academy of Social Sciences, noted that Aojiao's success story has proved correct the long-standing emphasis from Xi that rural areas should tailor their development strategies to local resources.

"A consistent governance philosophy underlies both the president's vision of leveraging the mountains and the sea and the all-encompassing approach to food," she said.

Growth drivers

During his tenure in Fujian, Xi championed an all-encompassing approach to food, underscoring the development of under-forest economies — ecologically sustainable activity that relies on forests and woodlands — and marine aquaculture. The approach sought to adapt development strategies to local conditions and transform Fujian's mountains and maritime assets into drivers of growth.

Shen Ruidong, deputy Party secretary of Aojiao village, said the community has acted on this vision over the past two decades and striven to harness the ocean's abundance to boost public well-being.

A pivotal moment in the village's transformation came with the modernization of its fishing fleet, Shen said.

In the early 2000s, fishermen navigated rough waters in small wooden trawlers, and the prospects of deep-sea fishing or aquaculture seemed distant.

Confronted with challenges such as dwindling fish stocks, village officials worked tirelessly to secure bank loans that enabled local fishermen to purchase larger, steel-hulled vessels to replace the wooden trawlers.

These modern vessels — equipped with GPS navigation, hydraulic winches and refrigeration facilities — allow crews to stay at sea for 10 to 15 days at a stretch, venturing farther offshore and significantly cutting costs while boosting profits.

Another key factor that underpinned the village's prosperity was

the gradual pivot to the construction of modern sea farms to bolster the aquacultural sector.

Guo Handong, 57, had to switch from the building of wooden boats to the farming of abalone with the upgrading of the village's fishing vessels in 2010.

However, a powerful typhoon disrupted his operations years later by causing a power failure, rupturing pipes and causing oxygen levels in the water tanks to plummet — resulting in the loss of nearly half of his stock.

With help from authorities and aquaculture experts, Guo was able to rebuild his farm and deploy modern technology to monitor water quality, manage disease outbreaks, and better protect equipment from severe weather conditions.

Today, Guo's farm, one of 128 of its kind in Aojiao, boasts 122 tanks — nearly twice its previous capacity — and operates on an internet-of-things system that allows him to regulate oxygen levels with a tap on his phone, producing thousands of abalones each year with a smaller team.

The pivoting from wild catch to aquaculture in Aojiao epitomized the nation's broader shift in the fishing sector. Nationwide, 82 percent of China's aquatic products were produced through aquaculture in 2024, with the nation's aquacultural sector now accounting for nearly 60 percent of global aquaculture output.

Green drive

Environmental restoration has also been central to the village's renewal, as enhanced measures to treat waste and sewage from aquaculture operations, households and fishing vessels bolstered the local ecology.

Aojiao was once confronted with growing pollution from the quick development of coastal aquaculture, as some farmers erected makeshift structures along the shore, with trash and wastewater discharged directly into the sea, said Shen Ruidong, the village official.

To tackle these issues, local authorities launched a baywide ecological cleanup, creating no-aquaculture as well as permitted zones, and guiding farmers to designated areas.

They also encouraged upgrading from wooden rafts and foam buoys to eco-friendly plastic net pens and floats, improving the marine environment and restoring orderly offshore operations.

The gradual improvement in ecology and environment has paved the way for the development of rural tourism, allowing Lin Hubin, a military veteran, to set up a homestay while selling seafood on a livestreaming platform.

Lin said the homestay was flooded with bookings during summer and holiday periods, as tourists arrived to experience the seaside lifestyle and fishing practices.

Meanwhile, the improvement in water quality has also significantly improved the quality of produce from aquaculture farms, which pump water from deep in the sea to raise the produce, farmers said.

Cai Yanzhong, head of the bureau of agriculture and rural affairs in Dongshan county, said: "By leveraging its unique geographical assets and cultivating distinctive local industries, Aojiao has built a diverse economic foundation that includes marine capture and aquaculture, advanced seafood processing, e-commerce and rural tourism."

Contact the writers at
arwei@chinadaily.com.cn

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2600,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

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usa.chinadaily.com.cn

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WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900

San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA / TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M5N 6B8

Tel: 416-461-5706

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Ukraine: European leaders voice support for Zelensky

From page 1

The researcher said in a note posted right after Friday's meeting that although Trump said that he might reduce US military aid to Ukraine once in office, that has yet to happen.

"Ukraine's ability to hold off Russia depends on maintaining the flow of US weapons. Everything changes if that stops," Lindsay wrote.

"Europe cannot make up the short-

fall. So while the rhetorical fireworks between Trump (and Vance) and Zelensky grab the headlines — Trump himself said that today's meeting made for 'great television' — deeds matter more than words," he added.

World reacts

In a show of unity, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa posted

identical messages on X right after the row.

"Be strong, be brave, be fearless. You are never alone ... We will continue working with you for a just and lasting peace," they wrote.

Outgoing German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his likely successor Friedrich Merz, French President Emmanuel Macron, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and some two doz-

en other European leaders also sent messages of support.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said: "Today, it became clear that the free world needs a new leader. It's up to us Europeans to take this challenge."

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was one of the few who sided with Trump. "Strong men make peace, weak men make war," Orban said on X.

Orban and Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico sent a letter on Satur-

day to European Council President Costa, calling for the EU to engage in direct ceasefire talks with Russia.

A day after the spat, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer warmly welcomed Zelensky in London, reiterating his support for Kyiv.

During their meeting at Downing Street on Saturday, Starmer said Ukraine has "full backing across the United Kingdom". He stressed Britain's "unwavering determination" to achieve lasting peace.

Britain and Ukraine have agreed on a loan of 2.26 billion pounds (\$2.35 billion) to support Ukraine's defense

capabilities, according to Ukrainian Finance Minister Serhiy Marchenko.

The Friday spat also made headlines across Europe.

"We just saw the end of our relationship with Trump," the cover of Germany's Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung claimed.

"Trump humiliated Zelensky," Spain's newspaper El Pais wrote.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at
huanxinzhao@chinadailyusa.com.

CHINA

Fight against movie piracy bearing fruit

Behind box office records, joint action breaks up black market bootlegging

By CAO YIN
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

While this year's Spring Festival box office broke records and was the source of a major boost in consumer spending nationwide, authorities also made gains in their campaign against film piracy. Since the latest campaign launched in January, more than 40 people have been detained on suspicion of unauthorized filming, pirating recordings and illegal distribution of this year's Spring Festival blockbusters, according to official data released Sunday.

The campaign is being carried out by the National Copyright Administration, the China Film Administration, the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. It aims to crack down on piracy in the film industry and raise public awareness of copyright protection.

By Feb 20, authorities had removed nearly 2.3 million web links that infringed on the copyrights of recent box office hits. They also banned or restricted 4,116 online accounts for repeatedly violating copyright laws, officials said.

In Jinhua, Zhejiang province, police detained 11 people suspected of setting up websites and apps to distribute pirated copies of blockbusters such as *Ne Zha 2* and *Creation of the Gods II: Demon Force* for profit. The suspects earned more than 14 million yuan (\$1.9 million) combined, according to the National Copyright Administration.

Police in Anhui province cracked a similar case, detaining 10 suspects and seizing more than 12 million yuan in illicit gains, officials said.

With the animated film *Ne Zha 2* now ranked seventh on the all-time global box office chart,

“Whether it is unauthorized recording or selling pirated copies, both acts violate film copyrights.”

Lai Chunlei, lawyer at Beijing Huazi Law Firm

authorities have also targeted unauthorized commercial use of its characters.

Police in Chongqing detained five people after discovering they allegedly reproduced and sold unauthorized copies of *Ne Zha 2* and other animated films. Officials said the suspects raked in more than 5.3 million yuan.

“Movies are the result of the hard work of creators. Piracy and illegal broadcasting are like cancer in the film industry, severely hindering its healthy development,” said Lai Chunlei, a lawyer at Beijing Huazi Law Firm. “As viewers, we must firmly reject pirated films, and if we encounter anyone selling or distributing them, we should report it to the authorities immediately.”

China's Criminal Law states that individuals who pirate films for profit can be sentenced to up to three years in prison and fined. If the illegal proceeds are substantial or the offense is deemed severe, the maximum sentence is seven years.

“Whether it is unauthorized recording or selling pirated copies, both acts violate film copyrights,” Lai said. “Violators of both crimes must be strictly punished to maintain order in the film market.”



Table tennis champion Fan Zhendong (right) plays local player Wong Chun-ting with giant paddles in a fun match at the opening of Kai Tak Sports Park in Hong Kong on Saturday. ZHU WEI / XINHUA

Kai Tak Sports Park opens to fanfare

By LI LEI in Hong Kong
lilei@chinadailyhk.com

Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu hailed the opening of the largest sports and cultural venue, Kai Tak Sports Park, on Saturday, calling it a symbol of the city's progress and ambition.

“A century ago, this area was the site of Hong Kong's first successful test flight of a biplane, which ultimately led to the establishment of Kai Tak Airport,” Lee said at the ceremony marking the opening of the HK\$32-billion (\$4.1 billion) facility, referring to the former airport that closed in 1998. “Today, that same location has been turned into Kai Tak Sports Park, creating a new hub for sports, culture and the arts, and propelling the city to new and greater heights again.”

The 28-hectare park features the region's largest retractable roof and a versatile lawn system, allowing it to accommodate large-scale events under various weather conditions.

“From today, we believe stars from around the globe will consider performing at Kai Tak Sports Park and making it a hallmark of success, as the venue promises an enthusiastic and international fan base,” Lee said.

The grand opening included a one-and-a-half-hour gala at the

park's 50,000-seat Kai Tak Stadium, showcasing performances from local athletes and entertainers. The event was broadcast on four local television channels.

The performances were organized into four segments highlighting the city's role in sports and cultural exchanges. Captivating dance routines, impressive violin solos and powerful vocals from local singers Joey Yung and MC Cheung wowed the audience.

The ceremony also featured an exciting fencing exhibition match between retired Hong Kong epee fencer Vivian Kong Man-wai and local action star Donnie Yen Chitan. National team table tennis champion Fan Zhendong played a fun exhibition match with oversized paddles against local athlete Wong Chun-ting.

A badminton showcase highlighted the skills of retired national team players Lin Dan and Cai Yun, alongside local celebrities. They signed badminton shuttlecocks to be given away as souvenirs, eliciting enthusiastic cheers from the audience.

While officials had previously announced that they were unable to arrange a highly anticipated reunion performance by the “Four Heavenly Kings” — referring to Cantopop stars Andy Lau Tak-wah, Jacky Cheung Hok-yau, Leon Lai Ming and Aaron Kwok Fu-shing —

due to scheduling difficulties, Andy Lau made a surprise appearance on stage, reminiscing about his youth spent near the former airport.

More than 33,000 people attended the event, including lawmakers, district councilors, community leaders, SAR government officials, members of the public and mentees from the Strive and Rise Program, a government initiative designed to support young people from less-privileged households.

John Sharkey, chief executive of Kai Tak Sports Park, expressed confidence that the facility will attract more large-scale international events to Hong Kong.

“We plan to leverage the park's state-of-the-art facilities to support the HKSAR government's vision of establishing the city as an international sports hub,” Sharkey said.

Li Siyu was among the 8,500 people who snapped up general sale tickets last week. She traveled all the way from Beijing for the event at Kai Tak Stadium.

“It's very spacious, with a broad view, and the atmosphere here is lively,” she said.

The 28-year-old described the stadium as vibrant and praised the well-executed performances, highlighting the incredibly smooth transitions. She plans to continue following the sporting and entertainment events at the venue.

Scientists reveal new evidence of oceans on Mars

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
in Guangzhou
zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn

A team of Chinese and foreign scientists has discovered underground sedimentary layers on Mars that appear to have been shaped by oceanic activity, providing new evidence that water once existed at the planet's middle to low latitudes.

The findings, published on Tuesday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, were led by Li Jianhui, a doctoral student at Guangzhou University, and Professor Liu Hai. Their paper, titled “Ancient Ocean Coastal Deposits Imaged on Mars”, details the discovery of multilayered, inclined sedimentary structures at depths of 10 to 35 meters beneath the surface.

The data was collected by China's Zhurong rover, which landed in the southern part of Utopia Planitia in Mars' northern hemisphere in 2021 as part of the Tianwen 1 mission.

The rover is equipped with a dual-frequency ground-penetrating radar system designed to detect underground structures and potential water-ice deposits, according to Guangzhou University.

“These geological features are highly similar to coastal sedimentary deposits on Earth, providing the most direct underground evidence to date for the existence of ancient oceans in Mars' middle to low latitudes,” the university said in a news release.

The discovery extends the evidence of water beyond Mars' polar regions to areas that could be more suitable for human activities, the researchers said.

“If an ocean once existed on Mars, climate change may have caused a large amount of water to be stored as underground ice, raising the possibility that future Mars bases could have ample water resources,” the release said.

Compared with the polar regions, the light and temperature conditions in the planet's middle to low latitudes are more suitable for human habitation.

If future explorers can access groundwater in these ancient oceanic regions, it could significantly lower the costs of building and maintaining Mars bases, the researchers said.

The study also suggested that ancient marine sediment on Mars preserves a historical record of the planet's climate shifts. Analyzing these layers could help scientists understand how Mars transitioned from a warm, humid environment to a cold, dry one — and offer insight into how humans might one day modify the Martian environment for long-term habitation.

Mars has long been a primary target for human interplanetary exploration due to its geological features, seasonal variations and circadian rhythms, which are similar to those on Earth.

“The existence of Martian water resources has always been a controversial topic,” the release said. “However, over the past few decades, human exploration of Mars has achieved many milestones.”

The research team included scientists from Guangzhou University, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Tongji University, Pennsylvania State University and the University of California, Berkeley and other institutions. Liu, along with Professor Michael Manga from UC Berkeley and Fang Guangyong of the Aerospace Information Research Institute at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, were corresponding authors of the study.

The research was supported by the China National Space Administration, the team behind China's first Mars exploration mission, Tianwen 1, and was funded by the National Natural Science Foundation of China and the Guangdong Basic and Applied Basic Research Foundation.

Study uncovers mystery behind birth of planetary-mass objects

By YAN DONGJIE
yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

For over two decades, astronomers have been perplexed by the existence of planetary-mass objects, or PMOs, celestial bodies with planetary masses but not bound to any star. A recent study published in Science Advances may have cracked the code, revealing these cosmic orphans are born from violent collisions between newborn stars.

An international team led by the Shanghai Astronomical Observatory found that PMOs are likely formed in crowded stellar nurseries such as the Trapezium Cluster in

the Orion constellation. This discovery not only solves a long-standing mystery but could also lead to a rewrite of cosmic classification rules.

Previously, two theories attempted to explain the origins of PMOs. The “Failed Stars” hypothesis suggested that PMOs could form directly from collapsing molecular clouds, but their small size prevented nuclear fusion. The other, the “Exiled Planets” hypothesis, proposed that PMOs were gas giants ejected from host stars through gravitational slingshots.

However, new evidence from NASA's James Webb Space Tele-

scope contradicted both theories. The telescope observed hundreds of PMOs in the Trapezium Cluster, a far greater number than predicted by the “Failed Star” theory. Additionally, 9 percent of these PMOs existed as binary or triplet systems, which is unlikely for exiled planets. Many also hosted expansive gas disks up to 200 astronomical units wide, structures that indicate formation independent of any star. A single astronomical unit stretches almost 150 million kilometers.

Lead researcher Deng Hongping from the Shanghai Astronomical Observatory said: “PMOs are neither stunted stars nor runaway

planets. They're products of cosmic chaos.”

The team focused on dense stellar nurseries such as the Trapezium Cluster, where thousands of new stars reside within 10 light-years of each other. Each star is surrounded by a circumstellar disk — a rotating ring of gas and dust where planets are born.

Using supercomputer-powered simulations, the team modeled the process. When two young stars pass close to each other at specific speeds and distances, gravitational forces stretch their circumstellar disks, creating elongated, high-density tidal bridges. These bridges

then collapse under their own gravity, forming independent PMOs, with some even emerging as paired binary systems.

“The Trapezium Cluster is the ultimate PMO factory — its crowded, fast-moving stars maximize collisions,” Deng said.

China's Earth 2.0 space telescope, expected to be put into operation in 2028, will employ microlensing, a technique predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity, to detect invisible objects like PMOs through the gravitational warping of light.

“As data pours in, we may soon map these cosmic orphans across our home galaxy,” Deng said.

‘Puppy Mountain’ in Hubei province creates social media buzz

By LIU KUN in Wuhan
and CHEN MEILING

A mountain in Hubei province has become an internet sensation, with its unique karst landscape resembling a puppy lying on its stomach, drawing millions of views on social media platforms.

“Puppy Mountain”, located in Zigui county in Yichang, along the Yangtze River, was first captured in a photo by a Shanghai designer surnamed Guo. While hiking on the Jiuwanxi Bridge during the Spring Festival holiday, Guo noticed the mountain's outline while reviewing his photos and shared his discovery on Chinese lifestyle-sharing platform Xiaohongshu.

The image quickly went viral, gaining 123,000 likes within 10 days. Netizens were struck by the resemblance, comparing the photo to real dogs and noting the “curvature of the forehead and the mouth” as well as its “baring its teeth”.

The mountain has also garnered

international attention. Japan's Abema News reported that many tourists have flocked to the area, surprised to have missed the adorable feature during previous visits.

The Associated Press reported that many people traveled to Yichang to see the mountain for themselves, with some even bringing their dogs for photo opportunities. Sky News and the BBC in the United Kingdom and CBS News from the United States also covered the story.

On Chinese microblogging platform Sina Weibo, topics about “Puppy Mountain” have drawn millions of views.

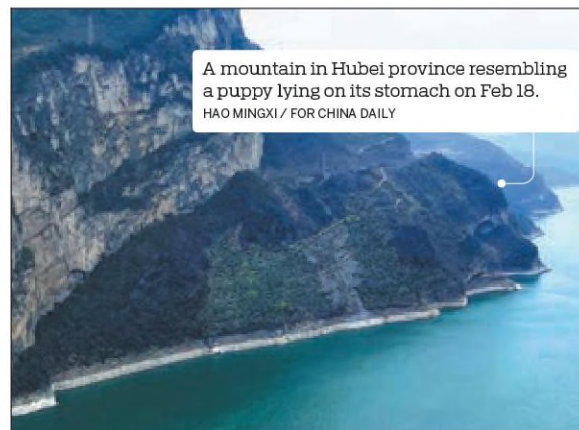
While the internet marvels at the mountain, local authorities have issued a warning. The area is remote and steep and not yet developed as an official scenic site. Visitors are advised to view and take photos from a distance at the observation platform on the opposite bank, known as the “Ox Liver and Horse Lung” Gorge, named after

two naturally hanging yellow-brown stalactites on the steep cliffs of the northern bank of the river.

Li Zhongdong, a geological tourism expert, said “Puppy Mountain” was formed by karst processes, creating a karst landform. He explained that figurative rock formations are common natural landscapes, pointing to examples such as Elephant Trunk Hill in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and the “Monkey Gazing at the Sea” scene at Huangshan Mountain in Anhui province.

“The puppy's eyes, the area between the eyebrows and the corners of its mouth may be the entrance of a karst cave,” Li said. “The white section between its forehead and nose might be a cliff formed by a collapse, while the appearance of its ears is primarily a visual effect created by vegetation coverage.”

Li encouraged people to appreciate the beauty of nature and use their eyes to discover distinctive scenery.



A mountain in Hubei province resembling a puppy lying on its stomach on Feb 18.
HAO MINGXI / FOR CHINA DAILY

“Beauty can be found everywhere,” he said.

“Puppy Mountain” has sparked a wave of similar discoveries online, with users sharing photos of mountains resembling a cat or bear, an

island looking like a whale, and porridge, cloud and hook shapes resembling a dog's head.

Contact the writers at
chenmeiling@chinadaily.com.cn

VISUAL

Drilling platform captures, stores carbon

Offshore rig takes steps to address environmental sustainability

By EDMOND TANG
in Hong Kong
photo@chinadailyhk.com

In the heart of the South China Sea, about 200 kilometers southwest of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, lies the Enping 15-1 oil drilling platform, Asia's largest offshore oil drilling platform in terms of size.

This state-of-the-art facility not only plays a crucial role in China's energy production but also houses the country's first offshore carbon capture and storage demonstration project. It stands as a testament to human ingenuity, combining resource extraction with environmental sustainability.

Enping 15-1 is strategically located in the Pearl River Mouth Basin, an area rich in hydrocarbon resources. The platform operates in waters about 80 meters deep and is designed to withstand harsh marine conditions, including strong winds and high waves. With a handling capacity of over 30,000 barrels of oil per day, it significantly contributes to China's oil supply, helping to meet the growing energy demand of the nation.

Since its commissioning, hundreds of engineers and technicians have worked tirelessly on the platform, facing the challenges of offshore operations. The drilling activities involve advanced technology and meticulous planning to ensure safety and efficiency. The platform is equipped with cutting-edge drilling rigs that allow for precise operations at great depths, enhancing both productivity and environmental protection.

What sets Enping 15-1 apart is its commitment to addressing climate change through innovative carbon capture technologies. The project aims to capture carbon dioxide emissions from industrial processes and inject them into geological formations beneath the seabed. This initiative not only reduces greenhouse gas emissions but also demonstrates China's dedication to sustainable development and energy transition.

The significance of Enping 15-1 extends beyond energy production. It represents a major step in China's efforts to explore and develop offshore resources while simultaneously protecting the marine environment. The platform employs real-time monitoring systems to assess the ecological impact of its operations, ensuring minimal disruption to marine life.



The Enping 15-1 offshore oil production platform is located about 200 kilometers southwest of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in the South China Sea. PHOTOS BY EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY



From left: The platform operates around the clock, 24 hours a day. Technicians inspect components of China's first offshore carbon capture and storage demonstration project at the rear deck of the platform.



A helicopter lands on a massive deck of the Enping 15-1 offshore oil production platform.



An offshore oil worker checks a crude oil sample.



From left: A technician conducts daily monitoring to ensure the safe operation of the platform. The platform stands about 160 meters tall, weighs over 30,000 metric tons, and houses around 600 sets of equipment and systems, making it twice the size of a typical offshore platform. During their off-duty hours, workers play table tennis in the recreation room on the platform.

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

CHINA'S LOW-CARBON JOURNEY



Left: A Blue Circle worker loads old fishnets into the back of a truck in Taizhou, Zhejiang province, in October 2023. LIN GUANGYAO / XINHUA



Center: A display of items made from recycled materials in the Blue Circle project. TANG TAO / XINHUA



Right: Yang Shuwen (right) and fellow volunteers sort plastic bottles for the Blue Circle project in Changtu, Zhejiang province, in January. LI SHANGYI / CHINA DAILY

By LI SHANGYI
in Zhoushan, Zhejiang
lishangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

Fishing community pulls plastic from its waters

Hu Songsu of Changtu town in Zhejiang leads charge to change old ways and foster environmentally friendly practices

A fisherman's wife from a small seafaring community in Changtu town of Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, has become the unlikely catalyst for an environmental campaign that has changed local habits and created a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future for the residents.

For years, ocean plastics had hindered the fishermen in Changtu, polluting the waters and spoiling catches.

In 2020, Hu Songsu, a 60-year-old local and wife of a fisherman, had finally had enough and struck out on her quest to change minds and attitudes and clean up the waters around the island of 13,000 people.

Five years on, as a fisherman docks his trawler and steps off holding a net full of plastic bottles, Hu deftly takes it off his hands and captures an image of the bottles via a dedicated app, which records the time and location details such as longitude and latitude.

Born and raised by the sea, Hu has been involved with fishing in some way her entire life.

"My father and my husband are both fishermen," she said. "Our town has no other industry, and people here rely on fishing for a living."

"Decades ago, we could easily fish not far from shore, but those days are long gone," she said.

With increasing ocean pollution, water quality around the island declined, and fish numbers dwindled, impacting local fishermen's income.

"Around 2020, I had the idea to collect plastic waste from the sea," Hu said. "I called on other fishermen's wives to join me and urged the fishermen to collect plastics while out at sea."

These women, known as *yusao* (fishermen's wives) in Chinese, have traditionally handled fishing safety, and resolved disputes among fishermen. Today, they've taken up the mantle as volunteers dedicated to protecting the marine environment as well.

Hu said that some of the ocean plastic came from the fishermen themselves who live and work for extended periods at sea as they lack the space to store their garbage, and so she set about encouraging them to change their ways and find a better solution.

"We called on the fishermen to store garbage on the boat, collect floating plastics and bring them back to shore to reduce pollution," Hu said.

Once the plastic waste reaches land, it can be recycled, she said.

Thanks to the collective efforts of these women and fishermen, in the past five years, a total of over 110,000 plastic bottles have been collected from the local waters. Over



The vessel *Zheling Yuxiu 00001* bears a slogan vowing to restore oceans to their "former glory" as part of the Blue Circle project. Boats in the project store waste onboard during voyages and dispose of it after returning to port to avoid polluting the ocean. HUANG XIAO / XINHUA



80,000 old boat batteries have also been collected.

The drive initiated by Hu has gone on to be included in China's Blue Circle environmental initiative, which won the 2023 Champions of the Earth award, the United Nations' most prestigious environmental recognition.

However, Hu's journey on Changtu Island was a challenge from the start. According to Hu, the most difficult part was changing the deeply ingrained habits of the fishermen.

"Awareness was not fostered overnight," she said. "Initially, it was hard to convince them to bring plastic waste back to land."

"Life at sea is already difficult, and asking fishermen to collect garbage in addition to their daily work was a tough sell," she said.

But Hu and her fellow *yusao* volunteers didn't give up. They patrolled the harbor daily, and whenever a boat pulled in, they would board it to educate the fishermen.

"We taught them how to bring plastic garbage back and explained how reducing plastic pollution would improve local fish and crab populations," said Hu.

Over time, their tireless efforts gradually began to pay off. They successfully signed agreements with fishing boat owners to ensure the proper classification of ocean waste. Today, fishermen are eager to collect plastic waste and transport it to shore. At its peak, 71 boats were taking part in plastic waste collection on the island, according to Hu.

A group chat with over 400 members, including both fishermen and volunteers, now coordinates the recycling of plastic waste. "It has become routine for those fishermen," Hu said, as her phone rang with notifications from fishermen bringing in their newly collected plastics.

Yu Le'an, a 35-year-old who has been fishing for more than a decade, has been in charge of collecting garbage on the boat for the past four years.

"Ocean waste also increases our costs. Plastic and metal debris caught in the fishing nets damage them and take time to remove," Yu said. "We also want to reduce the waste."

"Plus, when we sell the collected plastics for recycling, we earn a little extra money for beverages and vegetables during our trips," he added.

Yu and his fellow fishermen have dedicated space on their boats for waste collection, as they often spend one to two months at sea. "We sometimes use fishing nets to transport the waste to the land," he said.

Fei Haiping, a 58-year-old fisherman with over 20 years of experience, has been an advocate of this cleaner approach when out at sea for years. "The sea looked bad with all the bottles floating around," he said.

Over the past decade, Fei has encouraged his fellow fishermen to keep garbage on board instead of tossing it into the water. "We are able to collect 100 to 200 plastic bottles during a single trip," he said.

Once back on shore, bags of collected plastics are brought to a building near the coast, where a group of women classify the plastic bottles based on colors and shapes.

Inside the building, colorful blocks of compressed plastic bottles pile up to the ceiling, with each block weighing around 35 kilograms. These sorted bottles will be shipped to recycling facilities, where they will be transformed into plastic pellets for a second life.

One of the women working there is Yang Shuwen, a 60-year-old local *yusao*. "These bottles are recycled into materials for clothing and stationery, which I think is very meaningful," she said. "My husband also knows where the plastics they collect end up."

Yang and the other women in their red volunteer vests work tirelessly in front of the building, sweating under the sun, sorting bottles suitable for recycling. According to Yang, they can sort 10 35-kg blocks of plastic bottles each day.

Working eight hours a day, four to five days a week, these women earn from 1,500 to 2,000 yuan (\$206 to \$275) per month for their efforts.

The money comes from the sale of plastics to manufacturing companies, according to Hu.

"To be honest, the work is far from pleasant. We are here because we've volunteered to protect the marine environment," Hu said. "At the end of the day, we are dealing with garbage every day, and it gets smelly in the summer. Plus, we also need to follow strict classification requirements to ensure the waste is properly sorted for recycling."

In 2022, their volunteering work was officially included in the Little Blue House project, a joint effort to recycle ocean plastic in Zhejiang province, which involved collaboration among volunteers, fishermen, businesses and government agencies. This project has also been established in coastal Zhejiang cities such as Ningbo and Taizhou, where dozens of Little Blue Houses operate under the same recycling mechanism.

Hu's team now cooperates with Zhejiang VisionBlue Technology Co to recycle collected ocean plastics.

"Thanks to the establishment of the Little Blue House, collected plastics can be sold to enterprises at higher prices, and the process of recycling plastics has become more streamlined," Hu said.

Plastic bottles now fetch 10 yuan per kilogram from recycling companies, which sustains the operation of the Little Blue House and provides income for workers like Yang. The above-market price paid for the plastic is passed on further down the production chain.

"We also use the money to buy work clothes for fishermen who participate, as they don't gain much from collecting garbage," Hu said.

Last summer, the county government stepped in with a new online system that rewards fishermen with points for collecting ocean waste, which they can use to purchase items from local supermarkets.

Adapting to this new digital system was a challenge for these volunteers. "We had to learn how to use the camera app and the points system, then teach fishermen how to use it," Hu said.

These efforts are crucial for tracking the origin of plastics, ensuring that they can be sold at a higher price as ocean plastics, a key link in the circular economy emphasizing environmental benefits. The photos, with location details, help trace the plastics from the sea to the shelves.

In addition to ocean plastics collected by fishermen on their trawlers, the Little Blue House also provides opportunities for people with disabilities or the unemployed to collect plastic waste washed up on the shore, contributing to the endeavor while making some money.

"There is less plastic garbage in the sea recently," Yu said. "The quality of crabs has also improved this year."

Little Blue Houses go long way to boosting circular economy

By LI SHANGYI

Numerous plastic waste classification and recycling stations, known as Little Blue Houses, dotting the 6,715-kilometer-long coastline of Zhejiang province in East China, are playing a pivotal role in the fight against marine plastic pollution.

These houses are a core component of the Blue Circle project, China's largest environmental initiative aimed at addressing the pressing issue of marine plastic waste. In 2023, Blue Circle was given the Champions of the Earth award by the United Nations Environment Programme — the UN's highest environmental honor.

After local volunteers sort through recyclable plastic debris at

the Little Blue Houses, the materials are transported to Zhejiang VisionBlue Technology Co, a high-tech company specializing in marine sustainable development. From there, the waste is sent to a recycling facility where it undergoes a series of processes, including crushing, cleaning, melting and granulation.

The journey of each piece of plastic, from coast to factory, is meticulously tracked using internet of things devices and blockchain, ensuring the traceability and transparency of the origin of the plastic. Each batch of marine plastic waste is assigned a unique QR code containing details of the full recycling process from start to finish.

According to UNEP estimates, over 9 million metric tons of plas-

tics enter the oceans annually. Plastic waste ending up in the sea ranges from microplastics to large debris such as bottles and bags, which can take hundreds of years to degrade, threatening the marine ecosystem.

While recycling offers a potential solution to reducing the demand for new plastic production, and thus helping curb emissions from plastic manufacturing, incineration and landfills, it faces challenges in terms of collection logistics and high recycling costs.

"The average price of recycled marine plastic pellets is 1.3 times that of primary plastic pellets. The good quality of marine plastics, coupled with their environmental and social benefits, justifies their premium price," said Chen Yahong,

director of the marine business unit at Zhejiang VisionBlue Technology Co.

"Many clients, including international brands, are willing to pay more for recycled marine plastics, as it aligns with their growing sustainability needs," she said.

Recycled plastics from the Blue Circle project, including PET (polyethylene terephthalate) plastics derived from ocean waste, significantly reduce carbon emissions. The emissions from recycled PET are about a quarter of those associated from virgin PET.

According to Chen, the recycled plastics of the Blue Circle project have helped reduce 3,900 metric tons of carbon emissions.

These recycled materials are repurposed into a variety of prod-

ucts, including clothing, electronics, phone cases, stationery, shopping bags and T-shirts.

Zhu Liyang, president of the China Association of Circular Economy, said: "The Chinese government has placed a strong focus on tackling plastic pollution, implementing comprehensive governance across the entire waste management chain. By recycling discarded plastics and ensuring proper collection, these materials can be reintegrated into the supply chain."

The circular economy is an important path to achieving green transformation, Zhu emphasized. "In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift toward green living and consumption, creating vast opportunities for the development of China's circular economy," he said.



More can be learnt about the ecological benefits of the Blue Circle project by scanning QR codes located across a range of items the project produces. LIN GUANGYAO / XINHUA

WORLD

Israel suspends entry of supplies into Gaza

Truce standoff escalates as enclave gains Ramadan respite following US proposal

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
jan@chinadaily.com

Israel blocked the entry of aid trucks into Gaza on Sunday as a standoff over the truce that has halted fighting for the past six weeks escalated.

"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided that, from this morning, all entry of goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip will be suspended," his office said in a statement.

"Israel will not accept a cease-fire without the release of our hostages. If Hamas persists with its refusal, there will be other consequences."

Hamas slammed the move, calling it a "war crime" and saying it violated the terms of the cease-fire agreement between the two sides, the first 42-day phase of which just drew to a close.

Netanyahu's office said earlier that it had adopted a proposal by United States President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, for an extension of the Ramadan fasting period and end at Passover in mid-April.

The truce would be conditional on Hamas releasing half of the living and dead hostages on the first day, with the remainder released at the

conclusion, if an agreement is reached on a permanent cease-fire.

Hamas said on Sunday that the "decision to suspend humanitarian aid is cheap blackmail, a war crime and a blatant coup against the (cease-fire) agreement."

The group said it is committed to the originally agreed cease-fire that had been scheduled to move into the second phase, with negotiations aimed at a permanent end to the conflict, and it has rejected the idea of a temporary extension to the first phase.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Saturday that the Gaza cease-fire and hostage release deal "must hold".

"At this fragile moment, we must avoid a resumption of hostilities that would deepen the suffering and further destabilize a region that is already perched on a knife's edge," he said, urging that the "humanitarian lifeline open" in his Ramadan message.

Ayman Yousef, a professor of international relations at the Arab American University in Jenin, West Bank, said US and Israeli plans give Israel enough space and time before it finalizes the end of the fighting.



Palestinians gather for a communal iftar, or fast-breaking meal, on the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, amid building rubble in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, on Saturday. AFP

"In the American and Israeli minds, they differentiate between cease-fire and ending of war," Yousef told China Daily. "Ending of war indicates civility of full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, including the Philadelphia Corridor, and the flooding of Gaza with humanitarian assistance."

However, with both Israel and the US led by right-wing governments, they do not believe Hamas should remain a presence in Gaza after the conflict, he said. As a result, they are trying to encircle Hamas and put more pressure on it to accept their proposal, believing the group is not

ready for another round of escalation and fighting, he added.

"People in Gaza are trying to manage their lives during this Ramadan They are trying to accommodate difficult conditions and the lack of basic commodities and lack of basic human needs. Meanwhile, the US is trying to

accommodate Israeli demands and to wish it (would be more) receptive to the idea of ending the war," he said.

Jawaid Iqbal, chairman of the Department of West Asian and North African Studies at Aligarh Muslim University in India, said Gaza has been reduced to rubble and "does not pose a security threat for the foreseeable future".

"Israel intends to keep the Gaza Strip on tenterhooks so that Hamas is unable to declare an outright victory," Iqbal said.

"Israel has got the green signal from the Oval Office to carry on with its military operations in the West Bank. The West Bank has immense strategic value and has hundreds of settlements," he said.

"Netanyahu would like to drag on the first phase of the cease-fire in order to build pressure on Hamas to return the hostages. He is unlikely to restart the Gaza war right away because of tremendous opposition within Israel for such a move."

Washington announced late on Saturday it was boosting its military aid to Israel.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he was using "emergency authorities to expedite the delivery of approximately \$4 billion in military assistance".

Agencies contributed to this story.

Envoy hails 75 years of Sino-Swiss ties

By SHAO XINYING
shaoxinying@chinadaily.com.cn

Switzerland's ambassador to China has said the two nations enjoy "strong and stable relations" as they mark 75 years of diplomatic ties this year.

"The milestones (in history) have led to a broader and more stable relation between Switzerland and China," Ambassador Juerg Burri said.

As early as Jan 17, 1950, Switzerland recognized the newly established People's Republic of China, becoming one of the first European nations to do so.

On Sept 14 of that year, the two nations formally established diplomatic ties.

Burri highlighted the key events that followed: a trade agreement in 1974, the pioneering Sino-Swiss joint venture in 1980, the Schindler China Elevator — the first Sino-foreign joint industrial manufacturer in China — and the Innovative Strategic Partnership established in 2016, which now encompasses about 30 dialogues in various fields.

This early diplomatic recognition has laid a foundation of trust, he said. "I believe the diplomatic relations between Switzerland and China remain dynamic. I believe this anniversary is an invitation to appreciate what we have and that also we ride this momentum and carry it into the future."

Such momentum is reflected in continuing talks since September to upgrade the China-Switzerland Free Trade Agreement. Signed in 2013 and effective a year later, it was the first such deal between China and

an economy in continental Europe.

"The best sign of strong economic relations is that Switzerland has a very large number of companies in China — more than 1,000 — and China has a considerable number of companies in Switzerland," Burri said.

Chinese firms such as Huawei and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China operate in Switzerland, where last year, automaker BYD tapped Switzerland's Emil Frey Group as its distributor. Meanwhile, Swiss brands such as Nestle, ABB and Roche Pharmaceuticals are household names in China.

"The free trade agreement serves to promote business between our two nations," Burri said, adding that "constant contacts" between the negotiating teams are driving progress, expecting an updated deal that benefits both sides.

Bilateral trade volume reached \$62.7 billion last year, according to China's General Administration of Customs. Currently, Switzerland is China's sixth-largest trading partner in Europe, and China is Switzerland's largest trading partner in Asia.

Mutual benefits

During a forum hosted by the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China last week, Burri said Swiss firms are not just earning revenues in China; they are bringing in management expertise and technological knowledge, and at the same time, learning from China.

"China speed" has become a buzzword in the world of business," he told the forum, adding that the speed that China applies to customer service and marketing is "nothing comparable" in the world.

This exchange is fueled by a shared passion for innovation, with Burri spotlighting key tangible collaborations, including the Multi Spectroscopic Telescope project, a joint initiative between the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne and Tsinghua University in Beijing, and a joint program for energy efficiency in buildings, which merges sustainability with technology.

"Innovation is a very strong priority in Switzerland, and I note that in China as well," he told China Daily.

Tourism is on the upswing, with Switzerland being one of the top destinations for Chinese tourists.

Burri said that following China's recent visa-free policy for Swiss citizens, he has seen a personal surge in visits from Swiss friends and families, alongside a gradual return of students to China.

The 75th anniversary of bilateral ties is also an occasion for cultural connection. Burri underscored a wide array of upcoming Swiss cultural events across China, designed to "delight all the senses". From art exhibitions and music performances to culinary showcases, Switzerland aims to bring its heritage to as many Chinese cities as possible as the two countries mark the China-Switzerland Year of Culture and Tourism this year.

Meanwhile, Burri hinted at parallel efforts by the Chinese embassy in Switzerland, expressing well wishes for their "successful events".

As 2025 unfolds, "I hope that we both put our best effort into understanding each other and that we keep good government-to-government relations, and that we enable our companies to do successful business with each other, between Switzerland and China," he said.

PKK declares cease-fire with Turkiye

ISTANBUL — The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has declared a cease-fire with Turkiye, following the call of its jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan for disarmament and dissolution, local media reported on Saturday.

The PKK Executive Committee announced in a statement that none of its forces would carry out armed actions unless attacked, according to the NTV broadcaster.

"We, as the PKK, fully agree with the content of the mentioned call (of Ocalan) and state that we will comply with and implement its requirements from our side," the statement said.

The group also expressed readiness to convene its congress but emphasized that its success requires Ocalan to "personally lead it", calling for his release from prison.

The PKK urged relevant state authorities to ensure Ocalan's "physical freedom, allowing him to live and work under normal conditions", the group said.

Later on Saturday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed to resume



A member of Turkiye's Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party reads a statement from jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Istanbul on Thursday. OZAN KOSE / AFP

military operations against the PKK if its promises are not fulfilled.

"We will continue our ongoing operations, and if necessary, we will leave no stone unturned and no head on top of a shoulder until we eliminate the last terrorist," he said.

Ocalan on Thursday called on all groups affiliated with the PKK to lay

down their arms and urged the PKK to dissolve itself.

The move came as part of the government's initiative to end the PKK's 40-year-long insurgency against the Turkish state, which has claimed more than 40,000 lives.

XINHUA — AGENCIES

Envoy: Imposing tariffs over fentanyl 'counterproductive'

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington
huanxinzha@chinadailyusa.com

Wielding the "baton of tariffs" on the pretext of the fentanyl issue is counterproductive, said Chinese Ambassador to the United States Xie Feng as the United States plans to impose an additional 10 percent duty on imports from China on Tuesday.

Speaking at the Duke-UNC China Leadership Summit via video link on Friday, Xie said that two-way trade between China and the US last year exceeded \$680 billion, and around 73,000 American companies are investing in China.

"The extensive common interests we share and the vast room for cooperation we enjoy are there for everyone to see. Any attempt to decouple and disrupt supply chains would cause a heavy blow, and any trade war or tariff war would inflict greater injury on oneself than others," said the envoy.

On Thursday, US President Donald Trump announced plans to impose tariffs on Canada and Mexico starting Tuesday, and doubling the 10 percent universal tariff charged on imports from China, citing the fentanyl issue.

The following day, China's Foreign Ministry noted that the US is using

the fentanyl issue "as a pretext to exert tariff pressure and blackmail, acting arbitrarily and showing ingratitude for China's cooperation".

"This approach will not resolve its own concerns, and instead, it will backfire and severely impact dialogue and cooperation between both sides on counternarcotics," spokesperson Lin Jian said.

"Pressure, coercion and threats are not the correct way to engage with China. Mutual respect is a fundamental prerequisite," he said.

Xie also noted that as early as in 2019, China became the first country in the world to officially schedule fentanyl-related substances as a whole class, and the progress in China-US counternarcotics cooperation in recent years has been widely recognized.

He said the shared aspiration of the Chinese and American peoples for a better life is "unstoppable".

"The two sides need to bear in mind the mutually beneficial nature of our bilateral relationship and get more big things done, to the benefit of both our countries and the world," the ambassador said.

Even as the Trump administration cites security and drug-trafficking issues, the economic impact of the

threatened tariffs will ultimately land on American consumers and contribute to inflation, according to researchers.

New research from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, released on Friday, suggests that the new tariffs are projected to increase the prices of everyday retail goods, such as food, beverages and general merchandise, by roughly 0.8 percent to 1.6 percent.

"While higher tariffs create tariff revenue and favor domestic producers, the price consumers must pay to buy imported goods will increase because firms typically pass some portion of the tariff's cost onto consumers," Atlanta Fed researchers Salomé Baslandze, Simon Fuchs, KC Pringle and Michael Dwight Sparks wrote in the paper.

Earlier last month, Trump threatened and then paused new waves of tariffs on Canada and Mexico for a month, but went ahead with additional tariffs on Chinese goods.

Former Treasury secretary Lawrence Summers to deem the move "a self-inflicted wound to the American economy".

"I'd expect inflation over the next three or four months to be higher as a consequence," Summers said in a TV interview on Feb 2.

US, Europe views on Ukraine diverge

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

The diplomatic maneuverings after the sensational clash between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continued on Sunday, with the latter telling reporters he was still open to a minerals deal, while White House officials pressed their views on the talk shows.

Zelensky, speaking after a summit of European leaders in London on Sunday, said he still was "ready to sign" a deal to cede control of as much as 50 percent of Ukraine's rare earth minerals to the United States in exchange for security guarantees, but added, "I just want the Ukrainian position to be heard."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has called for a "once in a generation moment" response to the crisis, met with 18 political leaders on Sunday to support Ukraine.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CBS News on Sunday that it was "impossible to have an economic deal without a peace deal".

Bessent said Zelensky had "thrown off the sequencing" of the minerals and peace deal and chose to "relitigate" discussions in public at the Oval Office on Friday when they should have taken place in private.

"A cease-fire without security

guarantees is dangerous for Ukraine," Zelensky said on social media on Saturday. "We've been fighting for three years, and Ukrainian people need to know that America is on our side."

But Trump has made it clear that he is not looking to take sides to end the three-year conflict, and at Friday's contentious meeting at the White House, he chastised the Ukrainian president for what he called Zelensky's "hatred" of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Mike Waltz, US national security adviser, told CNN on Sunday: "It was not clear Zelensky was going to go to negotiations at all — that he would ever be able to negotiate with Putin and whether he shared our goal of ending this war. ... This was a huge missed opportunity for him and for his country."

Forty-one percent of Republicans see Russia as either "friendly" or an "ally", a CBS News/YouGov poll released Sunday found, as nearly half of Americans view Trump as backing Russia in its war against Ukraine — and the poll was before the dramatic meeting on Friday.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, in an appearance on ABC News on Sunday, said: "The sooner everyone grows up around here and figures out that this is a bad war that's heading in a bad direction ... the more progress we're going to be able to make."

US Senator James Lankford, an Oklahoma Republican, however, in an interview with NBC News, disagreed with calls by some in his party for Zelensky to step down, which he said "would spiral Ukraine into crisis".

Top Democrats in Washington previously criticized Trump's treatment of Zelensky. Senator Jeanne Shaheen, a New Hampshire Democrat and a ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, criticized Trump's and Vance's "behavior" and said in a statement, "Ukrainians have strong bipartisan support for their fight in Congress and Ukrainian flags continue to hang across our communities in the United States."

Starmer is looking to rally Europe to Ukraine's defense.

"Not every nation will feel able to contribute, but that can't mean that we sit back," he said. "Instead, those willing will intensify planning now with real urgency. The UK is prepared to back this with boots on the ground and planes in the air, together with others."

Of Starmer's proposal, Clint Russell, a podcaster in Miami, wrote to 236,000 followers on X: "Good luck with that. I'm out. The US should leave the UN and NATO and let these idiots fight. They have lost their minds."

Agencies contributed to this story.

BUSINESS

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Proactive moves afoot to revive economy

Policymakers expected to prioritize stabilizing growth, boosting buying appetites as key tasks

By OUYANG SHIJIA
and ZHOU LANXU

China's policymakers will enhance countercyclical adjustments and take more steps to boost consumption, as the broader economy still faces pressing challenges from lackluster domestic demand and uncertainties from the external environment, economists said.

Their comments have come at a time when the market is eagerly awaiting proactive moves to revive the economy at the annual meetings of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies, or two sessions.

Wang Tao, chief China economist at UBS Investment Bank, said her team expects the two sessions to follow the policy stances of the Central Economic Work Conference held in December and again set a GDP growth target of "around 5 percent" to anchor expectations.

Wang said policymakers are likely to prioritize "stabilizing growth" as the central task and emphasize boosting domestic demand through more supportive macro policies, with "reviving household consumption" being listed as a top task.

Wang said her team expects the government to announce a higher headline budget deficit of around 4 percent of GDP and larger ultra-long-term special central government bond issuance of 2 trillion yuan (\$275.3 billion) to support the trade-in program of consumer goods, corporate equipment upgrades and long-term projects.

The team also expects another 500 billion yuan to 1 trillion yuan of special central government bond issuance for capital injections to banks, and more special local government bond issuance of 4.5 trillion yuan or more to support local government financing vehicles' debt swap and for home inventory destocking.

On the monetary front, she said policymakers will follow the "moderately loose" monetary policy tone set in the Central Economic Work Conference, with explicit calls to lower the funding costs of corporate finance and household credit, cutting the reserve requirement ratio and policy rates, enhancing countercyclical adjustments, and pushing forward a "reasonable rebound" of inflation.

"We expect the People's Bank of China, the nation's central bank, to cut policy rates by 30 to 40 basis points in 2025, likely in later months after the two sessions, and commercial banks to lower deposit rates further," she said. "The PBOC may also use various facilities to maintain ample liquidity, including more outright repos, partly to cope with a much larger scale of government bond issuance in 2025."

Wang said the government is likely to prioritize "boosting consumption" as the top policy task in the two sessions.

"We expect the government to ramp up fiscal spending to support consumption and the household sector, including more than doubling the size of trade-in programs, creating a subsidy scheme for families with young children, and increasing the payout level of resi-



dents' basic pension and government contribution to basic social insurance."

During a news conference at the beginning of 2025, the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator, said the annual quota for the consumer goods trade-in program for this year, which will be significantly larger than that of 2024, will be announced during the two sessions.

China's accelerated push for promoting trade-in deals for consumer goods is paying off, with significant growth in consumer spending on key items such as automobiles and home appliances, providing a solid base for steady economic recovery. Official data showed that retail

sales of passenger cars grew 5.5 percent year-on-year to 22.894 million units in 2024, while retail sales of home appliances and audiovisual equipment under the trade-in program reached 1.03 trillion yuan, up 12.3 percent year-on-year.

Among automobile trade-ins, more than 60 percent of the purchases were new energy vehicles, with over 6.6 million old vehicles replaced by new energy or energy-efficient cars. For home appliance trade-ins, sales of products with high energy efficiency accounted for over 90 percent, driving retail sales of highly energy efficient home appliances and smart home appliances to double-digit growth for four consecutive months.

"High-tech products with high energy efficiency are favored, which also helps drive the high-end, intelligent and green transformation of related industries," said Li Gang, director-general of the Department of Market Operation and Consumption Promotion of the Ministry of Commerce.

Looking forward, Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said the trade-in program will boost digital goods sales in the first quarter. "As Beijing shifts its stimulus focus from investment to consumption, we expect the trade-in program to continue playing a leading role in Beijing's stimulus in 2025," Lu added.

Citing the annual Central Economic Work Conference, Lu said

policymakers pledged more specific measures to support consumption, including increasing basic pension payments and raising fiscal subsidies for basic medical insurance.

Lu said his team expects Chinese policymakers to consider an increase in spending on social security for lower-income households. "We especially expect Beijing to significantly increase payments to those rural pensioners (55 percent of total pensioners) whose average monthly pension income is only 225 yuan. Beijing may also waive part of the annual 400-yuan fee on basic medical insurance for low-income individuals," he said.

Considering the pent-up demand for the consumer goods

trade-in program, Lu said his team expects the official manufacturing purchasing managers index to rebound to 50.2 in February from 49.1 in January. He estimates that the official nonmanufacturing PMI will increase to 50.5 in February from 50.2 in January, supported by travel and entertainment demand during the Spring Festival holiday.

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

Domestic travel spending during the holiday reached 677 billion yuan, posting a 7 percent increase from the same period last year, according to data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Spring Festival box office revenue also enjoyed a positive run, soaring to 9.51 billion yuan — a record high. The animated blockbuster *Ne Zha 2* was the star of the show as it became the first Chinese film to gross over 14 billion yuan and secure its place in the top 10 global box office rankings.

Joe Ngai, chairman of management consultancy McKinsey China, said that China's economic future will be shaped by its ability to boost domestic consumption, which he described as "underdeveloped" but possessing significant potential.

"Consumption demand is actually in the bank," Ngai said, explaining that Chinese households have saved up in recent years, creating a reservoir of demand waiting to be unleashed.

Looking ahead, he believes China's next phase of growth will be characterized by a shift from industrial output to stronger consumer demand. "We have always relied on industrial output for GDP growth, but as we continue to boost local consumption, there's a lot of room for growth," he said.

On prospects for 2025, Wang Yun, deputy director of the Xi Jinping Thought on Economy Study Center, said she believes it is advisable to implement targeted actions to further stimulate consumption, with a focus on closely combining boosting consumption with improving people's livelihoods.

"We should work to ensure stable growth in households' incomes, improve the normal wage growth mechanism for workers and increase support for specific groups," she said. "Meanwhile, we should increase direct fiscal spending on final consumption, drive greater strides in equipment upgrades and trade-in deals for consumer goods and optimize the subsidy issuance process."

Wang added that more efforts should be made to cultivate new consumption formats such as digital and green consumption and innovate diversified consumption scenarios. "We should actively develop emerging sectors such as the debut economy, ice-and-snow economy and silver economy, enhancing the supply-side adaptability to medium and high-end demand."

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

How the right cultural products can reshape our approach to consumption

REPORTER'S LOG

By Ouyang Shijia

As I sat in the cinema watching *Ne Zha 2* for the first time, I couldn't help but marvel at how this animated film has grown from a highly anticipated sequel to a full-scale cultural and economic phenomenon.

Surpassing the blockbuster *Inside Out 2* at the global box office, *Ne Zha 2* now holds the title of the highest-grossing animated film globally of all time. But its impact goes far beyond box office numbers. It's a clear reflection of the enormous potential that cul-

tural consumption holds in today's market, and how it can drive high-quality economic growth.

The success of the film is undeniable. *Ne Zha 2* has boosted cinema revenues and reignited a sense of excitement around movie-going. The film's dazzling effects and its distinct narrative have captivated audiences, turning *Ne Zha 2* into something much more than just a blockbuster. It's become a gateway to a broader cultural ecosystem, creating a surge in demand for everything from IP licensing to merchandise and even themed experiences.

As I sat among the audience, I could feel the collective emotion — the laughter, the tears and the cheers. This wasn't just about watching a film, it was about connecting with a cultural product

on a personal level. That emotional resonance is at the heart of *Ne Zha 2*'s success. The film has become a catalyst for a broader movement in cultural consumption, one that is starting to permeate many other sectors.

Beyond the theater, the *Ne Zha* brand has spread into the realms of collectibles, catering and even tourism. Limited-edition figures, blind boxes are flying off the shelves, and fans are eagerly sharing their own creative work on social media. It's clear: consumers aren't just consuming — they're actively seeking more of this high-quality content, and they're willing to pay for it.

The success of *Ne Zha 2* offers important lessons for China's broader consumption landscape, especially as the government looks

for ways to boost consumer spending. Traditionally, Chinese consumers have been considered more inclined to save rather than spend, particularly in times of economic uncertainty. However, *Ne Zha 2* has shown that improving the quality of offerings — specifically, by creating high-quality cultural products that tap into consumers' emotions — is a powerful way to unlock demand.

The film shows that the key also lies in the supply side: improving the supply-side offerings for high-quality goods and services that meet people's increasing demand for better lives. When businesses offer products that speak to people's deeper desires and values, they create a demand that isn't just driven by necessity, but by emotional engagement. And

when that connection is made, consumers are far more likely to open their wallets.

This isn't just about *Ne Zha 2* — it's a broader lesson in how to stimulate consumption. In today's market, consumers aren't just looking for cheaper or more abundant options, they want products that offer more in terms of quality, experience and emotional connection. By shifting the focus from just price to the total value of a product — how it makes consumers feel, how it fits into their lifestyle and how it aligns with their values — businesses can begin to foster stronger demand and ultimately drive economic growth.

Driving consumption also requires a larger, more collaborative ecosystem. The government

needs to continue to foster policies that support innovation and ensure high standards of product quality. Businesses, in turn, must focus on developing goods and services that meet the evolving needs of today's consumers. This collaboration will create a more sustainable, inclusive consumption model, where products not only fulfill functional needs but also create lasting emotional bonds with consumers.

As I left the cinema, I realized that *Ne Zha 2*'s success is more than just about a blockbuster film — it's a blueprint for how the right cultural products can reshape our approach to consumption. And, with the rise of the *Ne Zha* brand, I suspect this is just the beginning of a much larger wave of change.

BUSINESS



Runners seen at the starting point of the Bimbo Global Race 2024 at Beijing Olympic Park on Sept 28. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Grupo Bimbo bullish on China's market potential

Mexican MNC food firm deepens its footprint with strategic initiatives

By OUYANG SHIJIA
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn



Kelly Zhang

there's huge potential here," she said. Bimbo expects to continue its positive trajectory, forecasting double-digit growth in sales and a solid profit increase for 2025. "Our share in global Bimbo will become bigger," Zhang added.

Grupo Bimbo, a Mexican multinational food company, is deepening its footprint in China with significant investments and strategic initiatives aimed at capitalizing on the country's massive market potential, signaling optimism about the country's long-term development.

Kelly Zhang, general manager of Bimbo China, emphasized that the company has experienced a marked improvement in profitability in the past year and is confident that its efforts in China will continue to bear fruit.

"We made a big improvement in profitability versus a year ago. The contribution to Grupo Bimbo globally is solid," Zhang noted. Following its entry into the Chinese mainland in 2006, Bimbo owns 10 factories across the country and invested over \$70 million in China in 2023 and 2024.

Zhang pointed out that despite challenges, China remains an attractive market. "With 1.4 billion people and a growing demand for bakery products, there's still a lot of room for growth. Per capita bakery consumption in China is much smaller compared to Japan or the United States, which means

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that the consumer confidence index for China has remained below 100 during the past few years, pointing to persisting pressures from lackluster consumer demand. The consumer confidence index ranges from zero to 200 with 100 representing a neutral stance.

While China's broader economy is still facing challenges posed by still-weak consumer confidence and uncertainty surrounding global economic conditions, Zhang said she believes the country's intensified efforts to stimulate consumption will help fuel growth and stabilize the overall economy. "The government is taking proactive steps to support consumption."

Looking ahead, Zhang said she believes the upcoming two sessions will focus on driving consumer confidence and demand. Two ses-

sions refer to the annual meetings of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies.

"If the government continues with measures like creating job opportunities, consumption will increase. When people feel secure, they tend to spend more."

Bimbo's strategy in China is centered on expansion — both geographically and product-wise. The company is expanding its reach into central, southern and western China, where opportunities remain untapped. "We're looking to expand to more regions in China. For example, we've recently formed a strategic partnership with Jingxitong, a platform within JD, to enhance our product distribution to national grocery stores," Zhang revealed.

In terms of product innovation, Bimbo is entering the booming snack category, having launched Rusk, a crispy bread-based snack, in late 2024. "The snack market in China is massive, with a market size of over 1 trillion yuan (\$137.65 billion). And the product is a great fit for young people who snack frequently," Zhang noted. Bimbo is also tapping into the growing demand for healthier options, with products like zero-sugar, high-fiber bread and whole wheat options under its MANKATTAN brand.

Zhang stressed the importance of brand awareness, citing the success of the company's Bimbo Global

Race event, which attracted over 2,000 runners on-site and 200,000 online participants last year. "It's not just about promoting the brand — it's about contributing to society through meaningful events," Zhang explained. The company is also planning social campaigns to advocate for healthy eating and life choices, leveraging influencers to build greater consumer awareness.

Bimbo's investment in local innovation is another key aspect of its strategy in China. Zhang highlighted that the company's research and development team in China is crucial to adapting products to local tastes. The MANKATTAN Beijing was officially accredited as "Foreign-Invested R&D Center" by the Beijing Municipal Science & Technology Commission and Administrative Commission of Zhongguancun Science Park recently. "Our R&D center is close to local consumers, and we can develop products that suit their needs quickly. For example, Rusk was developed in China, and if successful, we may share it with our global team," she said.

Looking to the future, Zhang expressed confidence in China's long-term growth prospects. "China grew dramatically during the past decades. It's not an easy journey," she said. "As long as there is a clear direction, the Chinese government can put all the resources or energy together and create miracles."

Pet industry evolving at unprecedented rate

BEIJING — According to a Goldman Sachs report, the number of pets in China surpassed the number of children under the age of four for the first time in 2024. It further projects that by 2030, the former will nearly double the latter in number.

As a reference, China was home to 73.4 million infants and toddlers under four years old in 2021, a number that has dwindled in recent years due to birth rate declines.

When compared with the 2025 China Pet Industry White Paper, however, Goldman Sachs' calculation was quite conservative.

The white paper noted that in 2024 the pet population in China's urban areas alone reached 120 million, with the urban pet (dog and cat) consumption market exceeding 300 billion yuan (\$41.4 billion).

The latest data released by China's Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development show that China had an urban population of around 930 million in 2023, which means, on average, one out of every eight urban residents, regardless of age or gender, owns a pet.

Along with that is an explosive pet consumption market in China, the world's second-largest economy and second most populous country.

Previously, people would call their pets "friends" as it was all about companionship. But today, the new generation of pet owners treat their pets like their own flesh and blood. It is not just a name change, but a whole new level of love and care.

Shen Jing pampers her fur baby in every aspect of life. From meticulously choosing high-quality dog food brands, ordering custom-made treats and toys, scheduling regular trips to the grooming parlor, to occasionally splurging on creative styling, the 23-year-old treats her Golden Retriever as if it were her own child.

"I spend around 1,500 yuan per month on my dog, mostly on food, snacks and toys, with some going toward healthcare expenses," she said.

Pet owners are generous parents, with some willing to pay a jaw-dropping 5,867 yuan just for a pet toilet, far exceeding average prices for a human version.

"My dog is way too chubby!" said

Gao Boxin, 26, who purchased a pet treadmill for his Corgi Taotao. He even splurged on a heart rate monitor and cooling foot patches to soothe his dog's paws after a workout. Despite feeling a pang in his heart when he thinks about buying a sports watch for himself, when it comes to his pet, he throws money at it without a second thought.

China is embracing the era of pet economy 3.0.

In the 20th century, during the pet economy 1.0 era, pets were primarily kept for practical purposes such as dogs for guarding homes, cats for catching mice and chickens for producing eggs. By the 2000s, the pet economy 2.0 era had emerged, which was marked by a shift toward companionship, as people began to value pets for emotional interaction. Since 2015, the pet economy has evolved into the 3.0 era, where pets have achieved an elevated status, accompanied by a niche market serving diversified, pet-oriented consumption needs.

Around four years ago, Three Squirrels, a prominent Chinese snack brand, launched a subsidiary focused exclusively on dog food.

This move into pet food production is far from a downgrade. In fact, some pet food standards surpass even those for human food as the animals' digestive systems, metabolic processes and physiological structure are individually different.

Hu Zimeng, general manager of Jiangsu Weihong Pet Products Co Ltd in Jiangsu province, East China, told Xinhua that their sales of pet snacks have maintained an annual growth rate of over 10 percent in recent years.

Currently, the pet industry chain can be broadly categorized into three segments. The upstream segment primarily covers breeding and trading, while the midstream segment includes products such as pet food, supplies, toys and apparel. The downstream segment is service-driven, encompassing pet grooming, boarding, photography, medical care, insurance and funeral services, etc. The downstream services, in particular, are witnessing remarkable growth trends.

XINHUA



Participants style hair for dogs during a pet groomer qualification test held in Beijing on April 15. XINHUA

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PUBLIC INTEREST AD: Q116

BUSINESSINSIGHT

Focusing on real estate woes vital for China

EAGLE EYE

By Liu Yuanchun

There have been lots of discussions lately about some major adjustments in China's macroeconomy.

Speaking of root causes, in general, there are five groups who hold views as outlined below.

The first group believes that due to the ongoing Sino-US tensions, a deterioration in the external environment has led to China's macroeconomic difficulties.

The second group deems weak consumption as the reason, as changes in the overall income, confidence and other factors have led to a contraction in consumption.

The third group thinks that domestic supply is piling up, and corporate profits are compromised, which has further led to a decline in income and insufficient consumption.

The fourth group blames deep adjustments in the real estate market for the decline in demand, high debt and oversupply.

There is also a group holding the view that China is undergoing a balance sheet recession, believing that there is a significant change in the asset-liability structure that has led to comprehensive liability management nationwide and contraction in the number of market players.

Finding the root cause

In light of this, figuring out whether these reasons are the root causes or not for the current macroeconomic downturn is significant.

External demand, which has always been an important cornerstone of China's macroeconomic stability, performed beyond expectations last year despite headwinds from an unstable external environment. Therefore, a variation in the external environment can be preliminarily ruled out.

Second, there is also the issue of insufficient consumption, which is reflected in a decline in the growth rate of total retail sales of consumer goods. However, by analyzing the changes in domestic demand, and supply and demand structure, it can be revealed that the most dramatic changes did not occur in consumer goods, but investment goods, because the decline in consumer goods prices has been significantly lower than that in investment goods rates. Therefore, in finding the root cause, the decline in consumption is only a superficial reason.

As for oversupply in some sectors due to overcapacity, it is only cyclical — a natural market phenomenon that normally appears every seven to eight years.



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

In summary, we can see that changes in supply, demand and the balance sheet are all related to changes in China's development paradigm, which point to drastic adjustments in its real estate sector, a major issue that the nation should pay heed to at present.

In the current cycle, such an issue presents some new phenomena, the causes of which include but are not limited to cyclical changes, market behavior and market order. These factors are not the root cause for the imbalance in domestic supply and demand.

When it comes to the balance sheet, changes in the assets and liabilities of any market entity are inevitably the result of changes in a variety of basic parameters, and will also form an important influencing factor in the next-step economic cycle and the decision-making of market entities. That is, changes in the balance sheet, which for China is a so-called recession in this case, are both a

result and a derived cause, negating its role as the ultimate cause. The management of the balance sheet, too, is only a temporary solution.

In summary, we can see that changes in supply, demand and the balance sheet are all related to changes in China's development paradigm, which point to drastic adjustments in its real estate sector, a major issue that the nation should pay heed to at present. Such an adjustment leaves a profound and drastic impact not only on the demand side of the real economy, but also on the asset side of the balance sheet and the liability side from a financial perspective.

Policy tools are key

Specifically, changes in the real estate sector have affected some key parameters, such as real estate consumption, investment spending, credit, as well as the collateral of enterprises and individuals, and government revenue. Meanwhile, they also show a series of deep-seated issues in the development mode and involved systems. Therefore, there is a need for precise policy-making and implementation in the real estate sector.

First, proactive fiscal policy, which attracts most of the market's attention, is an important pillar of in-depth governance in the real estate sector. A more proactive fiscal policy should not focus too much on

the deficit ratio, but rather on the growth rate of broad fiscal spending, which is central to a more proactive fiscal policy in 2025 and 2026, and the growth rate of broad fiscal spending should match the target growth rate of nominal GDP of 5 percent.

To this end, the implementation of a proactive fiscal policy must be complemented by a more active monetary policy, and the easing of the monetary policy is of equal importance to prevent economic "hypothermia" and avoid deflation.

It is necessary for proactive macroeconomic policies to be made with a cross-year perspective — preferably with a two-year time span — to systematically arrange indicators, as these can help dispel market concerns over policy stability. In addition, the policy foothold should not be overly generalized, and must focus on basic and root issues.

Way out

Stabilizing the real estate market is the key to stabilizing China's confidence, expectations and avoiding vicious circles.

China should seize the opportunity of the sharp decline in real estate prices, carry out large-scale real estate acquisition and storage, and make every effort to promote new urbanization.

This will not only help resolve the dilemma of deep adjustment in the real estate market, but also effectively solve the housing problem of migrant workers and comprehensively promote the development of new urbanization.

In addition, the nation can further issue treasury bonds on a large scale to provide sustained financial support for deepening reform and expanding domestic demand.

The government should promote the adjustment of the asset side in a timely manner, and accelerate the construction of the social system with the optimization and adjustment of the asset side.

Regulators should rectify the current chaos resulted by giving low prices with no limits in the market and take this reform as an opportunity to upgrade the mechanism of price formation, secure market order, and promote the construction of a unified market.

Last but not least, on the question of local government debt, China should deepen reforms among local governments and refresh the goals and functional positioning of local governments. To the outside world, China should promote opening-up to a new stage, and further enhance the resilience and competitiveness of its economy.

The writer is president of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Green development drives Chinese enterprises' global expansion

MAIN STREET

By Lin Xuefen

Addressing climate change and exploring green, low-carbon and sustainable development represent critical challenges facing humanity. Progress toward achieving the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals remains limited, with significant gaps still needing to be bridged. All countries are in urgent need of green and low-carbon transitions, requiring increased investment and more effective international cooperation. China has adopted "green development" as the country's major development strategy.

President Xi Jinping has emphasized that: "To protect the environment is to protect productivity, and to improve the environment is to boost productivity."

A green and low-carbon economy and society are crucial to advance high-quality development and Chinese modernization. With its vast economic capacity, China's pursuit of green development is expected to lead to deeper cooper-

ation in trade and investment with other countries in relevant fields, thereby enhancing prospects for global economic recovery.

Global expansion key

Expanding overseas markets is an essential step for companies pursuing globalization. Amid profound shifts in global politics and economies — including technological revolutions, geopolitical conflicts and restructuring of global value chains — Chinese enterprises face increasing uncertainties in overseas markets. However, these changes also present new opportunities.

Many countries have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by mid-century and are accelerating investments in renewable energy, reflecting strong market demand. According to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024, global renewable energy capacity grew at an unprecedented annual rate of 8.1 percent between 2017 and 2022, with remarkable progress in renewable energy.

Chinese enterprises are expected to sustain steady growth of the global economy. China holds a competitive edge in renewable energy supply chains, with significant market shares in photovoltaics, wind energy products, batteries and elec-

tric vehicles. Combined with technical and operational expertise, China is well-positioned to drive rapid internationalization in renewable energy.

Through green development initiatives and the advancement of its dual carbon goals, China continues to enhance international cooperation, jointly launched the Initiative for Belt and Road Partnership on Green Development with 31 partner countries and has established the Belt and Road Initiative International Green Development Coalition with more than 170 international partners from over 40 countries.

Clean energy pillar sector

Clean energy is emerging as a focal point of international economic cooperation. China's exports of green products are growing rapidly. In 2024, China's production and sales of new energy vehicles accounted for over 70 percent of the global total, marking 10 consecutive years of global leadership. NEV exports surpassed 2 million units for the first time, while exports of lithium-ion batteries reached 3.91 billion units, both hitting record highs.

China's photovoltaic products have exceeded 200 billion yuan in exports for four consecutive years, and exports of PV modules reaching 820 million units, up 80 per-

With its vast economic capacity, China's pursuit of green development is expected to lead to deeper cooperation in trade and investment with other countries in relevant fields, thereby enhancing prospects for global economic recovery.

cent year-on-year. The growth of green industries has also spurred new overseas business models. Chinese companies are increasingly leveraging local resources, investing in NEVs, solar panels and energy storage equipment such as automotive batteries.

These efforts aim to build and extend local green industrial supply chains to achieve sustainable development. For instance, in Africa, Dongfeng Motor signed an NEV project framework agreement with Egypt's Ministry of Public Enterprise to localize NEV production. Meanwhile, several Chinese battery companies announced invest-

ments in Morocco to establish battery manufacturing plants, contributing to the development of Morocco's first industrial park dedicated to EV battery production.

These companies not only bring advanced battery manufacturing technologies and equipment, but also contribute to building comprehensive automotive battery supply chains in the region. China collaborates globally to improve clean energy supply chains, share knowledge and jointly promote green, low-carbon energy transitions.

Sustainability critical

Chinese companies actively fulfill social responsibility and put environmental, social and governance principles at the core of their strategy and operations, fostering local economic and social development while improving community welfare. Currently, China collaborates on green energy projects with over 100 countries and regions, with 34 countries participating in the Belt and Road Energy Partnership.

In Africa, China has not only fulfilled its commitment of "stop building new coal-fired power projects abroad", but also implemented hundreds of green energy and grid projects. These efforts will significantly enhance the generation capacity for

solar and wind power, improve Africa's energy supply structure and reduce electricity costs.

In Gulf Cooperation Council countries, China's clean energy partnerships have achieved notable results. Projects such as Saudi Arabia's Al Shuaibah Solar PV project and the UAE's Al Dhafra Solar PV project — the world's largest single-site solar power station — are increasing the share of renewable energy in GCC energy portfolios, accelerating carbon reduction goals and promoting economic diversification.

High-quality BRI growth

The fourth symposium on the Belt and Road Initiative highlighted that the BRI has entered a new phase of high-quality development. Principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution, shared benefits, openness and sustainability are guiding the expanding cooperation in emerging sectors. In green collaboration projects, China aims for high quality standards, ensuring project competitiveness and balancing major landmark projects with community-based initiatives. Green development will continue to drive China's high-quality opening-up, injecting new momentum into global economic stability and growth.

The writer is an assistant research fellow of the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorials

Any bullying, coercion or blackmail will be met with countermeasures

The casualness with which the Donald Trump administration can impose punitive tariffs on imports from major trading partners of the United States only does a disservice to the country itself through harming its immediate economic interests and shaking the foundations of the world trade order.

In the latest such move, the US president unexpectedly flagged an additional 10 percent duty on Chinese imports on Thursday, on top of the 10 percent tariff on Chinese goods that was imposed earlier last month. The new tariff, which is due to be imposed on Tuesday, came shortly after some visiting European leaders told Washington that the primary goal of the US should be its tariffs on China.

About 90 percent of the cost of the additional tariffs imposed by the US on China over the past few years has been borne by US consumers and companies, according to the Peterson Institute for International Economics, whose studies show that the US' punitive tariffs on China increased the procurement costs of intermediate products for the US manufacturing industry by 13 percent. Other studies point to the same thing.

But the Trump administration has chosen to prevaricate on that key issue, trying to hoodwink the US people to believe that the tariffs can help "Make America Great Again".

The additional tariffs Trump imposed on China, starting from 2018 during his first term, which were carried on by the previous US administration, have failed to reduce China's surplus against the US, which rose from \$323.33 billion to \$361 billion between 2018 and 2024. Nor have they helped reshore industries from overseas, due to the squeezing effect of the US' financial capital and the US' strong dollar policy.

So the latest excuse the US administration has found to justify its tariffs on China has become more absurdly overstretched: China is responsible for the US' fentanyl crisis.

Hitting back at Trump's comments on Friday, China's Ministry of Commerce said in a statement that Chinese laws on drugs were among the strictest in the world and Washington was "shifting the blame and shirking responsibility" for a problem of its own making.

"The fentanyl issue is the United States' own problems on regulation at home," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said. As early as 2019, China took the lead in the world in implementing the whole-category control of fentanyl-related substances, becoming the first country in the world to formally control fentanyl-related substances as a whole category. The 2023 report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime clearly pointed out that the antidrug cooperation between China and the US has increased the interception of illegal fentanyl precursor chemicals by 47 percent year-on-year, and this achievement has been recognized by multilateral organizations such as Interpol.

"The fentanyl issue is just an excuse the US uses to impose tariffs on, pressure and blackmail China, and they punish us for helping them," Lin said. "This will not solve their concerns. It is only counterproductive and will deal a heavy blow to the dialogue and cooperation with China on counternarcotics." Reducing the domestic demand for the drug and strengthening law enforcement cooperation are the fundamental solutions to the US' fentanyl crisis.

The US administration's love of tariffs has also resulted in a beggar-thy-neighbor scramble for damage limitation. As shown by Mexico proposing to match the US tariffs aimed at China in exchange for the US administration showing it lenience. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent even encouraged Canada to follow Mexico's lead in matching US tariffs on Chinese goods in an interview with the media on Friday.

"I think it would be a nice gesture if the Canadians did it also — so in a way, we could have fortress North America from the flood of Chinese imports that's coming out of the most unbalanced economy in the history of modern times," Bessent said.

Instead of resorting to adversarial tactics, nations should embrace dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding to address trade imbalances and foster inclusive growth. Only through collaboration and shared prosperity can a more resilient, equitable, and interconnected global economy be built from which all can benefit. There are no winners in a tariff war. But China will not give in to pressure and blackmail. The US, or any other country, implementing tariff attacks against China in the blind belief that serves their own interests, should be prepared for countermeasures.

'Great television' underscores changes underway

The meeting between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office was, as Trump said, "great television".

It certainly made for riveting viewing, just not in the way expected. What unfolded was a stark reminder of the shifting dynamics of global diplomacy and the challenges faced by nations navigating an increasingly unpredictable international landscape.

The meeting, broadcast live to a global audience, was expected to see the signing of an agreement that would grant the US access to half of Ukraine's mineral resources. This deal, framed as a lifeline for Ukraine amid its ongoing conflict with Russia, had drawn criticism for its seemingly exploitative nature, with many likening it to "looting a burning house", although it was originally mooted by Kyiv, for whom it represents a painful but necessary compromise in the face of current realities.

What transpired during the meeting, however, was far more compelling viewing than a handshake to seal a deal. In what appeared to be a carefully orchestrated setup, the encounter devolved into President Trump and his deputy, JD Vance, openly berating Zelenskyy, who had traveled to Washington with a security guarantee in mind, with Trump dismissing Ukraine's negotiating position and Vance accusing Zelenskyy of ingratitude.

The Ukrainian leader, for his part, sought to articulate his concerns about Russia while expressing gratitude for US support. As diplomacy, the spectacle was unseemly. But as reality television, it offered a gripping and revealing glimpse into the realpolitik of the Trump administration.

The fallout from this ignominious public spat raises questions about the future of US-Ukraine relations. Despite the Trump administration's continued military aid, the meeting suggests that Ukraine may need to recalibrate its expectations of substantial US support. Even with the resource deal, the US has made no firm commitments to the kind of security guarantees Ukraine seeks, intimating that it should be shouldered by European countries.

In this context, Ukraine's pivot toward Europe is both logical and necessary. Following the contentious meeting in Washington, Zelenskyy flew directly to London, where he was warmly received by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The strong support voiced by European leaders in the wake of his treatment in the US highlights the growing importance of European solidarity for Ukraine.

But for the European Union itself, this episode should serve as a wake-up call: the era of relying on US security guarantees may be coming to an end.

The conflict in Ukraine has exposed vulnerabilities in Europe's defense capabilities, much as the COVID-19 pandemic revealed weaknesses in supply chain resilience. In response, major European powers are taking steps to bolster their own defense capabilities and explore collective security mechanisms. This push toward strategic autonomy is not only essential for Europe's security but also for the stability of a multipolar world. As the US under the Trump administration increasingly retreats from international responsibilities, the concept of a "US-led West" is receding into history.

China, for its part, has consistently advocated for dialogue and consensus-building to achieve a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine. Beijing's vision of a community with a shared future for mankind is rooted in the principles of multipolarity and mutual respect. A Europe that embraces strategic autonomy aligns with this vision, offering hope for a more balanced and harmonious international order.

The Oval Office meeting may or may not have been "great television", mileage on that will depend on how on board one is with the messages it was intended to convey, but regardless of that, its true significance lies in what it has laid bare: For Ukraine, it underscores the need to diversify its alliances and seek sustainable partnerships. For Europe, it highlights the urgency of achieving greater self-reliance. And for the world, it serves as a reminder that the path to peace and stability lies in cooperation, not confrontation. As the global order continues to evolve, the choices made today will shape the future for generations to come.

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Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huxin Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/moblie/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254 (0) 70 436 2812 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Li Min



Opinion Line

Holistic approach to security foundation for long-term stability

On Friday, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee conducted a group study session focused on promoting the Peaceful China Initiative to a higher level. President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the session and delivered an important speech, emphasizing the need for continuous efforts to make the country safer, society more orderly, governance more effective, and the people more satisfied.

Thanks to the constant efforts of the CPC Central Committee to enhance leadership and systems in national security since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, China has successfully written a new chapter marked by the twin miracles of rapid economic growth and long-term social stability.

To adapt to the development and changes of the situation and tasks, the building of a peaceful China can

only be strengthened, not weakened, as Xi noted.

Elevating the Peaceful China Initiative to a higher level is of fundamental significance for steadily advancing the modernization of the country.

President Xi's remarks have provided clear direction and important guidance for solidifying the foundation for the long-term stability of the country by promptly and effectively addressing security issues.

Only on the basis of preventing and defusing all kinds of risks can the nation create a stable and orderly environment for economic and social development, promote prosperity and long-term stability, and ensure a better life for the people.

Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era provides a powerful ideological weapon and action guide for promptly and effectively addressing security issues.

Officials at all levels should take a holistic approach to national security, remain vigilant to security challenges, fully engage in various tasks with a high sense of responsibility, better coordinate development and security, and give top priority to safeguarding national political security.

The Peaceful China Initiative is for the people and relying on the people, and so more efforts should be made to effectively safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the people, as well as social fairness and justice.

Authorities should strengthen work in fields such as disaster prevention and mitigation, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence security and more, with the focus on preventing risks in key areas.

In particular, they should take more concrete actions to improve crime prevention and control, and to promote the law-based handling of public complaints.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Tariffs trigger for sharp decline in crypto assets

On Friday, mainstream crypto assets experienced a significant drop, with the value of Bitcoin plummeting by 6.69 percent and the popular digital currency Dogecoin also seeing a substantial decline of 9.74 percent. The reasons for this can be attributed to several factors.

First, US President Donald Trump's intensified tariff threats have led to a substantial retreat in global risk assets, including cryptocurrencies. On Thursday, Trump stated on his social media platform that the proposed tariffs on Mexico and Canada would still take effect on March 4, as would additional 10 percent tariffs on China. Coupled with previous measures, nearly all of US' trading partners, except for the United Kingdom, will face additional tariffs.

The escalating tariff threats from the Trump administration have dampened global appetite for risks. Both the US and Asian stock markets saw significant pullbacks, and cryp-

tourrencies, as risk assets, were not immune to these effects.

Second, the fluctuations in crypto assets are closely linked to global liquidity, and the expectation of a Federal Reserve rate cut in 2025 has narrowed under the pressure of rising inflation. On Jan 30, the Federal Reserve's interest rate meeting paused rate cuts, maintaining the federal funds target rate at 4.25 to 4.5 percent. On Feb 27, the hawkish president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland suggested that the current interest rate level had not yet reached a significantly restrictive point and should remain stable for some time.

Furthermore, although many members of Trump's Cabinet supported the idea of cryptocurrencies becoming a reserve currency, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has dismissed the possibility of this during his tenure. Additionally, numerous hacking incidents involving crypto assets indicate that the industry still

has vulnerabilities in technology and risk management.

Moreover, leading US tech stocks have been reevaluated in the face of low-cost and more efficient artificial intelligence. Crypto assets, which are closely related to US tech companies, have indirectly accelerated their revaluation due to the rise of Chinese AI companies such as DeepSeek.

Overall, during the second Trump presidency, despite the majority of Cabinet members supporting crypto assets, his policies are characterized by significant randomness and uncertainty. During this period, global macroeconomic conditions, liquidity environments, and foreign policy will have significant impacts or even disruptive changes, affecting the capital in the crypto market, the behavior of crypto asset investors, and the sentiment of cryptocurrency investors, leading to increased volatility in crypto assets.

—21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

What They Say

False teaching of Lai's distorted history lesson

While the latest quarrel between the leaders of the United States and Ukraine in the White House has brought home to many that the US administration has a use-and-forget attitude toward those it promises to protect, Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te will seemingly be one of the last to accept that the US "protection" is conditional on what it can get in return.

Which is apparently why he said, at the 78th anniversary of the "Feb 28 Uprising" on Friday, that the Chinese mainland is "the biggest threat" to Taiwan's so-called "sovereignty and democracy", something he vowed to defend.

The "Feb 28 Uprising" on the

island happened on that date in 1947 following Kuomintang's assault on a female cigarette vendor escalated into a bloody confrontation between Taiwan residents and the KMT authorities and further an island-wide movement against the latter's rule. It's necessary to make clear that the movement has nothing to do with "Taiwan independence" that some secessionists claim.

As early as 2017, or the 70th anniversary of the incident, some witnesses had already recalled the occasion, saying that what the protesting Taiwan people sought was democracy and autonomy. They believed that the idea of "Taiwan independence" was false and absurd.

Democracy and autonomy are exactly what Lai and the secessionist-minded Democratic Progressive Party he leads are trying to deprive the 23 million people of the island of. By dedicating the island to "Taiwan independence", Lai is tying the peaceful residents there to his chariot, decreasing the possibility of peaceful national reunification.

Instead of mending historical divides and healing the wounds caused by the bloodshed 78 years ago, Lai's words that distort the "Feb 28 Uprising" and his stubborn pursuit of "Taiwan independence" only make the divide wider and prevent the scars from healing.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Innovation and High-Quality Development

Editor's note: China has reiterated the importance of innovation and high-quality development. How can the Chinese economy embrace the new tech revolution? Three senior experts and economists, who are also members of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, share their views with China Daily.

Xu Jiuping

AI pilot zones can lead tech revolution

Artificial intelligence has triggered what many say is a revolution in technology and industry, prompting countries worldwide to capitalize on the market momentum by establishing AI pilot zones in order to make breakthrough innovations. With the increase in generative AI adoption, the AI market has been flourishing through inclusive growth and disruptive models. In such circumstances, global collaboration is essential to unlock the AI era's dividends.



The author is a distinguished professor at Sichuan University, and a CPPCC National Committee member.

worldwide.

The US is trying to harness a seamless synergy of innovation and application by establishing AI pilot zones in global hubs such as Silicon Valley and Boston. More than 20 AI research centers, led by institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford University, are fostering collaboration among government, industry and the academia. Focusing on autonomous driving, smart healthcare and AI chips, they are trying to achieve cross-disciplinary breakthroughs, accelerating technology transfer from labs to market and boosting AI-driven industrial development.

China has designated major cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hangzhou and Chengdu, as front-runners in AI commercialization since launching its National AI Innovation Pilot Zone initiative in 2019. These hubs are applying research results to smart manufacturing, healthcare and autonomous vehicles. Supported by targeted policies, funding and industrial clustering, the rise of DeepSeek highlights China's cost-efficient, high-performance AI model and offers a unique blueprint for global AI development.

Japan's Society 5.0 program promotes AI integration with traditional

industries, fostering breakthroughs in manufacturing, healthcare and smart cities. The Japanese government has introduced the AI Business Guidebook to guide enterprises in AI adoption, and implemented funding initiatives, policy incentives, international partnerships to accelerate AI commercialization. By focusing on AI-powered solutions for the aging population, smart transportation and advanced manufacturing, Japan is enhancing AI's social relevance and accelerating its penetration across entire industry chains.

The UK has adopted a structured approach to AI development, ensuring industry integration. The UK government has established the AI Council and AI Office, and introduced key policies such as the AI Roadmap, National AI Strategy and AI Regulation White Paper, alongside the AI Opportunity Initiative. AI applications in finance, manufacturing, healthcare, and energy have become crucial drivers of the UK's digital economy, reinforcing its long-term leadership in AI innovation.

But despite their progress, AI innovation pilot zones face challenges that constrain scalability and sustainability. So breakthroughs in fundamental research are urgently needed amid fierce global competition, underdeveloped infrastructure, limited commercialization and talent gaps.

Although large AI models, artificial general intelligence (AGI) and cross-modal integration remain in early stages, countries are racing to the edge.

The US leads in chip development, computational ecosystems and algorithm innovation, while China makes

advances in large-model training. But to sustain long-term competitiveness, all major AI economies must accelerate efficient training frameworks, energy-optimized computing and human-AI collaborative intelligence.

The US dominates with NVIDIA's H100 chips and robust cloud services, high costs limit adoption. And China's DeepSeek has reduced the country's reliance on massive compute power through optimization, and yet the country's needs to expand its intelligent computing centers and autonomous supply chains.

While AI has demonstrated its transformative potential, many apps remain in the early stages of commercialization, while AI adoption is still largely concentrated in high-value sectors such as advertising, finance and autonomous driving, and other emerging apps lack mature business models. As such, bridging the gap between AI innovation and market demand to create scalable, replicable commercialization models is a key challenge for global AI pilot zones.

The rapid growth of the AI industry has intensified global competition for AI talents, particularly for professionals with both technical expertise and business acumen. The US continues to attract top AI researchers, while China is likely to face an estimated AI talent shortfall of 4 million by 2030. Similarly, the EU and Japan are struggling to address AI workforce shortage.

To unlock the full potential of AI innovation pilot zones, governments and industries must work together to overcome exist-

ing challenges, and boost high-quality AI development. This requires advancing foundational research, strengthening AI infrastructure, expanding real-world applications and cultivating a skilled workforce.

The related authorities should also increase investments in AI foundational research, establish dedicated funds for open-ended research and breakthrough innovations, and encourage multiple AI research pathways. In this regard, it is essential to advance original AI algorithms, large-model architectures and AGI, and establish a research ecosystem that supports trial-and-error experimentation to foster continuous technological advancement.

Robust AI infrastructure is critical for widespread adoption. Establishing an AI open-source ecosystem will drive algorithm reusability and innovation while lowering development costs, and improving data governance frameworks will ensure security and regulatory compliance, and facilitate efficient data utilization.

Since AI's true value lies in its real-world applications, countries should fast-track AI integration into critical sectors such as smart manufacturing, healthcare, financial services and urban planning, and establish AI innovation hubs and industry incubation centers to accelerate the transition from research to commercialization, and create AI intellectual property exchange platforms to streamline technology transfer and enhance industry-wide collaboration.

As sustained AI growth depends on a well-developed talent pipeline, Chinese enterprises can implement strategic AI talent recruitment policies, attract high-caliber professionals and expand AI training programs that integrate the academia and industry, while the development of interdisciplinary AI education frameworks incorporating AI engineering, ethics and business applications will help build a competitive AI workforce.

In the era of AI innovation, pilot zones can be engines of transformative progress. As for challenges like lack of breakthroughs in fundamental research, compute resource shortages, commercialization hurdles and talent gaps, they can be overcome through coordinated international efforts. And by combining their strengths, China can unleash AI's potential to reshape industries and promote global technology breakthroughs.

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

Huang Qunhui

New quality productive forces an innovative engine

New quality productive forces are advanced productive forces, a new development paradigm, which help improve labor resources and objectives, leading to improved total factor productivity.

President Xi Jinping proposed the concept of new quality productive forces in 2023, and the third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee in July 2024 has been promoting the development of new quality productive forces based on local conditions to propel high-quality development.

Developing new quality productive forces is crucial for achieving high-quality development, and promoting high-level openness can cultivate a favorable environment for the development of new quality productive forces. Technological innovation will lead the construction of a modern industrial system, which is key to transitioning from traditional to modern productivity systems and advancing new quality productive forces. And promoting higher-level openness will break down the barriers hindering the flow of innovative elements across the world, and unleash domestic innovation potential.



The author is a professor at the School of Economics, University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and a CPPCC National Committee member.

China should therefore take measures to create a high-level international business environment conducive to attracting global elements of new quality productive forces. To create such an environment, China can learn from high-standard global market rules, regulations and management, and expand institutional openness.

To build a transparent, stable and predictable institutional environment, China needs to strengthen regulations for intellectual property rights (IPR) protection, industry subsidies, environmental standards, labor protection, government procurement, e-commerce and finance. To attract talents, it should explore high-level talent immigration systems across the world, especially in sectors such as artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing. And to advance technology, it should build world-class element transaction markets, and develop new transaction methods for fields such as intellectual property securitization, technology options trading, and carbon financial derivatives.

Besides, China can attract global digital giants if it embraces high-standard trade rules such as those adopted by the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement — which is a pioneer in digital economy and green trade — strengthen IPR protection, establish world-class IPR dispute resolution centers, update the negative list for cross-border service trade, expand pilot projects for service sector openness, and encourage professional global services.

The country also needs to build a modern industrial system by strengthening cooperation in global industry and supply chains, while leveraging its massive market demand, rich application scenarios, and comprehensive industrial supporting systems to provide favorable conditions for transnational corporations' innovative development.

Besides, China ought to expand openness and reduce limits to foreign investment in manufacturing, high-tech, energy conservation and environmental protection, and introduce pilot programs for foreign investment in the fields of technological innovation, foreign-funded R&D centers, and foreign companies in national projects. It needs to improve foreign investment management and protection mechanisms to strengthen cooperation in global industry and supply chains.

Through a "scientist-entrepreneur-investor" development mechanism, and a global innovation chain of "research-tech breakthroughs-achievements-tech finance", the country can create a new global industrial ecology.

On the research front, China should build a global research and development network by attracting multinational companies to invest or set up shop in the country, and support local companies to participate in global science projects to keep up with the global development of cutting-edge technology. Also, it should push forward the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative, and science and technology innovation action plans under the Belt and Road framework, in order to promote multilateral and multi-industrial cooperation in green development, the digital economy, AI, energy, taxation, finance and disaster mitigation.

Moreover, pilot free trade zones should be developed into high-standard global networks that can pioneer exploratory hubs of innovation, and become testing grounds for high-standard rules. The experiences gathered by the pilot free trade zones will help maintain the multilateral trading system centered on the World Trade Organization, and enable China to proactively participate in the reform of the global economic governance system, and provide more global public goods.

Equally importantly, the country should establish "data customs" in pilot free trade zones, facilitate cross-border data flow, and explore the possibility of setting up data authenticity rights, trading and security systems. By leveraging platforms such as the Hainan Free Trade Port and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, China should develop offshore R&D and manufacturing. And by strengthening Hong Kong's position as a global financial, shipping and logistics hub, and supporting Hong Kong and Macao to attract global high-end talents, it can enable the two cities to play a greater role in advancing new quality productive forces.

In short, the orderly and free flow of international and domestic elements, more efficient resource allocation, and deeper integration of domestic and international markets can create a conducive global environment for the development of new quality productive forces, raise total factor productivity, and inject new momentum into the Chinese economy.

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MA XUJING / CHINA DAILY

Jiang Ying

Foreign R&D centers contribute to China's innovation

Foreign-funded research and development (R&D) centers have become an integral part of China's innovation ecosystem, playing a crucial role in introducing cutting-edge international technologies, attracting top talent, and enhancing industrial technological levels and innovation capabilities. In recent years, these centers have been rapidly developing, particularly in major international innovation hubs like Beijing, Shanghai, and the Guangdong-Hong



The author is chair of Deloitte China and a CPPCC National Committee member.

Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. By recruiting talent from China's market and supporting industrial upgrades, foreign-funded R&D centers and China's industries benefit mutually, injecting sustained momentum into China's technological advancement.

Moreover, foreign-funded R&D centers serve as bridges, helping China integrate into global innovation and industry chains. These centers closely collaborate with their parent companies and other global R&D institutions, facilitating technical sharing and talent exchanges. With their global reach, they connect China with the world's technological advancements. Large foreign-funded R&D centers can also drive local companies to enhance their technological and innovative capaci-

ties. This collaboration within China's industry chain boosts innovation and promotes overall industrial upgrades, achieving mutual benefits.

As global tech competition intensifies, China needs to seek more advantages and resources in this race. Foreign-funded R&D centers, with their strong innovation capabilities in foundational and frontier fields, play a critical role in China's technological innovation and high-quality development. However, with China's innovation system continuing to evolve, the high-quality development of foreign-funded R&D centers also faces several challenges. These include difficulties in transferring intellectual property abroad, with unclear definitions and varying review standards across regions.

Furthermore, foreign-funded R&D centers are disproportionately concentrated in the eastern part of the country, leaving the western regions underserved despite their rapid economic growth and the urgent need for R&D support in manufacturing upgrades. Additionally, foreign-funded R&D centers receive limited government funding, and there is a shortage of substantial industry-academia-research cooperation projects, preventing them from fully utilizing local policy resources.

In early 2025, the State Council issued an action plan to stabilize foreign investment, which proposes practical measures to stabilize and expand foreign investments. Relevant government departments can pay more attention to foreign-funded R&D centers, implementing multifaceted strategies to support their high-quality development.

First, a unified standard for reviewing transfer of intellectual property rights (IPR) abroad should be established. Government departments should lead the efforts to consider factors such as technological value, application potential, and competition, clearly defining terms like "impact on national security" and "impact on innovation in key technologies". This would provide a solid foundation for local implementation guidelines. Additionally, national science and IPR departments can collaborate to create a database of critical national technologies and supervise their protection. This would support local review processes, ensuring they are scientific, standardized, and consistent.

Second, central and western regions can accelerate the development of specialized policies for foreign-funded R&D centers, increasing their appeal to foreign investors. Currently, only a few provinces in these regions have implemented relevant policies, and a comprehensive policy system has yet to be formed. Most foreign R&D centers frequently engage in cross-border exchanges. If these regions model their policies after Shanghai by optimizing systems for cross-border R&D, personnel mobility, and immigration, while addressing gaps in cross-border financial services and IP protection, these regions can leverage cost and computing power advantages to attract more foreign-funded R&D centers.

Last, creating smooth channels for foreign enterprises to participate in the innovation ecosystem and deepening industry-academia-research collabora-

tion are essential. Local science and technology departments should be encouraged to form professional service teams to offer guidance on policies, promptly announce government science and technology projects and subsidy plans, and assist with application challenges.

Through these solid measures, China can create a more favorable environment for foreign-funded R&D centers, enabling them to deeply integrate into the country's innovation system. This collaboration will drive mutual development, injecting powerful momentum into China's innovation-driven growth and ensuring a thriving, competitive future for the nation.

Furthermore, supporting foreign-funded R&D centers in establishing postdoctoral research stations, joint laboratories with research institutes, along with providing government funding for key projects, improving supporting services, and creating a more international and law-based innovation environment will help accelerate the transformation of scientific research into commercial applications.

Through these solid measures, China can create a more favorable environment for foreign-funded R&D centers, enabling them to deeply integrate into the country's innovation system. This collaboration will drive mutual development, injecting powerful momentum into China's innovation-driven growth and ensuring a thriving, competitive future for the nation.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ABDUL MAJID AHMAD KHAN

Well-positioned to prosper

By keeping a clear focus on its foundational values, ASEAN can successfully maintain regional stability and its development momentum

In assuming the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for 2025, Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to fostering a policy of open and inclusive engagement with all relevant stakeholders. Emphasizing the importance of dialogue and cooperation, Anwar has pledged to prioritize initiatives that strengthen regional unity, enhance economic collaboration, and address shared challenges such as climate change, security threats and socio-economic disparities.

Indeed, one of ASEAN's key pillars is its dedication to fostering relations and cooperation with external partners, including China, the United States, Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, Australia and others. This open policy has brought numerous benefits to the ASEAN members, such as economic growth, enhanced mutual understanding on security issues, and significant contributions to the peace and stability of the region.

Over the decades, this platform has deepened and broadened to include new partners and initiatives. This year, Malaysia will host the inaugural summit in May between ASEAN, the Gulf Cooperation Council and China. This initiative will enhance ASEAN's role in shaping the inter-regional dialogue on trade, investment, energy and security cooperation.

According to Anwar, ASEAN must expand its global engagement beyond traditional partners to better navigate the current tensions in global trade. "Strengthening ties with China, the GCC, BRICS and other emerging economies is not about choosing sides," Anwar said. "Rather, it is about ensuring ASEAN has strategic relevance in a multipolar world."

Indeed, ASEAN has consistently engaged with all parties, including both China and the US, which have made a significant contribution to

strengthening ASEAN and its centrality. And ASEAN would like to see continuation of these contributions.

It must be acknowledged that as a dialogue partner, China has played a constructive and pivotal role in advancing regional growth and stability. Today, China is ASEAN's leading trading partner and a major source of investment. Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, ASEAN has further consolidated its economic interdependence with China, and enhanced its connectivity.

As an ardent supporter of ASEAN's core principles of neutrality and regional centrality, China has consistently demonstrated its commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the region. Beijing's active participation in multilateral frameworks and willingness to collaborate on shared challenges further underscore China's crucial role in fostering a stable and prosperous Southeast Asia.

The return of President Donald Trump to the White House has introduced new variables as well as uncertainties into the global geopolitical and economic order. Trump's "America First" foreign policy is

prompting both allies and adversaries to reassess their geopolitical alignment and strategies. His imposition of tariffs on allies and adversaries alike is escalating the risk of a global trade war.

At the start of Trump's second term, the already tense rivalry between the US and China seems set to intensify further, affecting not only the two great powers but also other countries, including those in Southeast Asia. Heightened US-China rivalry could force the ASEAN nations into making difficult geopolitical choices, potentially fracturing regional unity. ASEAN has made it clear that it does not want to be caught in the crosshairs of the US-China rivalry.

ASEAN should continue to affirm its long-standing non-alignment policy, emphasizing neutrality in the increasingly fraught global geopolitical landscape. "We remain non-aligned and will not be drawn into greater power rivalries," Anwar said. "We reject economic coercion and unilateral actions that undermine regional stability."

Indeed, ASEAN has consistently made efforts to maintain its independence, focusing on regional stability and cooperation without taking sides in the great power rivalry, thereby safeguarding the interests and sovereignty of its member nations through economic resilience and diplomatic neutrality.

Despite the uncertainties, it is

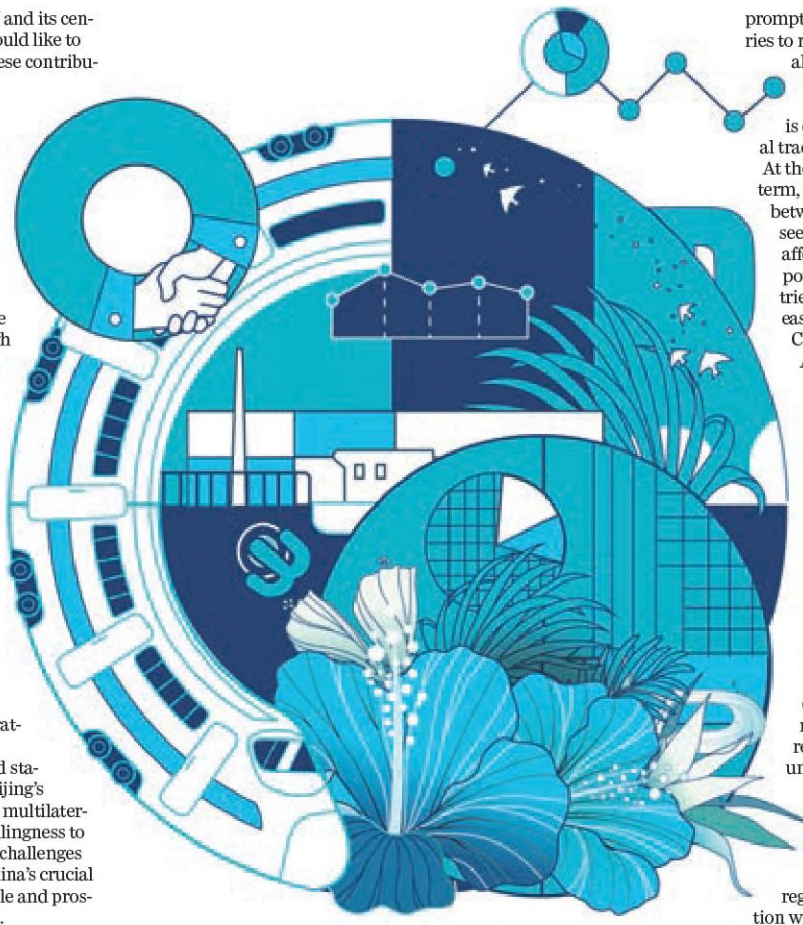
hoped that the Trump administration will continue to recognize the strategic importance of Southeast Asia and maintain its commitment to playing a constructive role in promoting regional peace and stability. Such engagement would reaffirm US commitment to a balanced global order and support ASEAN's efforts to address shared security and economic challenges in the region.

To that end, ASEAN also hopes that the US-China relationship will shift from rivalry to cooperation. A collaborative partnership between the two great powers is essential not only for their own well-being but for the future of the world. Humanity is faced with global crises such as climate change, potential future pandemics and the risks posed by artificial intelligence. Unless the US and China work together, the collective ability to effectively address these challenges will be severely compromised.

The 21st century is witnessing profound transformations in the global geopolitical and economic landscape. In this era of uncertainty and shifting power dynamics, ASEAN must steadfastly uphold its core principles of neutrality, inclusivity and proactive engagement with all stakeholders. By maintaining this commitment, ASEAN can not only safeguard its centrality in the region but also serve as a vital force for fostering peace, stability and sustainable growth, both within Southeast Asia and on the global stage.

The path ahead demands resilience, adaptability and unity, but with a clear focus on its foundational values, ASEAN, with the support of external partners such as China, is well-positioned to navigate these challenges and seize emerging opportunities.

The author is president of the Malaysia-China Friendship Association and former Malaysian ambassador to China. 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.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

SHI ZHONGJUN

Center stage

ASEAN and China should continue to uphold true multilateralism and open regionalism amid fast-changing global landscape

There are opportunities and challenges for ASEAN-China relations against the backdrop of the current international and regional situation. The friendship between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries and the remarkable progress made over the past more than 30 years contributed to the peace, prosperity and sustainable development of the region. While the future of their bilateral relations remains bright, ASEAN-China relations still face certain challenges in the fast-changing global landscape.

First, the international power dynamics are undergoing profound changes. While the current international order faces significant challenges in addressing current global issues, emerging economies are becoming more prominent in global power dynamics. The anti-globalization trend is still on the rise, unilateralism is increasing, geopolitical confrontations are prolonged, and global issues are intensifying.

Second, the regional economy is facing growing risks. This is due to the rising trade tensions, further moves toward protectionism and carbon pricing on imports. The implementation of mercantilist and domestic-orientated policies by the Donald Trump administration, especially the tariff hikes, has posed challenges to the trade-dependent regional architecture of Southeast Asia.

Third, regional development is facing the implications of extraterritorial factors. The ongoing effort initiated by certain countries for "decoupling" and "de-risking" from China is putting more pressure on many ASEAN member states to

take sides. The risk of global fragmentation in many areas could bring severe ramifications for the regional development.

Nevertheless, China and ASEAN can play a positive role in maintaining regional and world peace and development with concerted efforts. The ASEAN-China relationship has gone far beyond the bilateral sphere and has assumed great significance for Asia and the world at large. We can respond to global uncertainty with regional certainty of solidarity. We can respond to the international economic slowdown with regional economic prosperity. And we can respond to a disordered world with a just and equitable international order.

Next year marks the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. There is an old saying in Southeast Asia that the lotus flowers grow taller as the water rises. In this era of increasing uncertainties and instabilities in the global landscape, it is even more important to maintain the momentum of sound and sustainable development of ASEAN-China relations.

Over the past 30 years, ASEAN and China have helped each other to weather two financial crises, the SARS pandemic and the Indian Ocean tsunami, and confronted the COVID-19 pandemic by coming to each other's aid, demonstrating the spirit of fraternity and sense of community with a shared future. Earlier this month, the Sultan of Brunei and prime minister of Thailand paid visits to China. Brunei became the eighth ASEAN country which has reached consensus on building a community with a shared future with China, while Thailand and China have agreed to further advance their comprehensive strategic cooperative partner-

ship and build a China-Thailand community with a shared future for enhanced stability, prosperity and sustainability.

The two sides are taking new and solid steps toward building a closer ASEAN-China community with a shared future. As important members of the Global South, China and the ASEAN member states share broad common interests and similar positions in international affairs. They share the desire for a peaceful international environment to promote people-centered sustainable development, proactively strengthening the synergy of their development strategies and jointly uphold multilateralism and open regionalism. The two sides should continue to steadfastly support an ASEAN-centered, open and inclusive regional architecture, pursue a path of regional security governance with broad consultation and joint contribution for common benefit, and enhance vigilance and firm preemption against actions that undermine regional stability and increase the risk of conflict, so as to protect their fundamental shared interest in peace and stability, and make Asia an anchor of world peace.

With one-fourth of the world's population and accounting for more than 20 percent of the global GDP, ASEAN and China share common development goals. Nowadays, ASEAN is working on the ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision toward a people-centered and more

sustainable ASEAN community, while China has embarked on a new journey to realize modernization with the Chinese characteristics. In addition to industrial complementarity, China and ASEAN share the common pursuit of industrial upgrading, digital transformation and green development.

ASEAN-China economic and trade cooperation has entered a new phase of high-standard and high-quality connectivity with the substantial conclusion of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area 3.0 and the adoption of the "ASEAN Plus Three Leaders' Statement on Strengthening the Connectivity of Regional Supply Chains" last year. Bilateral cooperation in emerging areas and frontier industries, such as digital, intelligent and green technologies, will definitely be conducive to nurturing new economic growth points and will inject fresh

vitality into the regional and global economy. According to a report of Boston Consulting Group, ASEAN's trade with China is expected to grow 5.6 percent annually to hit \$558 billion in 2033. China's high-quality development through high-standard opening up will offer vast opportunities for the modernization of regional countries.

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Bandung Spirit have laid a solid foundation for ASEAN countries and China to treat each other as equals, deepen mutual trust, and safeguard regional and global peace, stability and development. Recognizing that the ASEAN countries and China have unique political, social, religious and cultural characteristics, the two sides have always respected each other's development paths, accommodate each other's concerns and overcome differences and difficulties as a united team. China has

always supported ASEAN's centrality and endorsed the advancement of regional cooperation in the "ASEAN Way".

In conclusion, ASEAN and China should continue to uphold true multilateralism and open regionalism, make joint efforts to promote an equal and orderly multipolar world, and build a new type of international relations and a path of security that chooses dialogue over confrontation, partnerships over alliances, and win-win cooperation over zero-sum games, so as to generate more positive energy for their friendship and solidarity in an increasingly fragmented world.

The author is secretary general of the ASEAN-China Centre. 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

CULTURE

The recent Chongqing premiere of *For an Eternal Homeland — Dazu Rock Carvers' Legacy* has been hailed by the audiences and critics as a spectacle that brings the ancient figures of the Dazu Rock Carvings, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to life.

Through a blend of artistry and narrative, this dance drama has been recognized by many as a successful reimagining and revitalization that allows the historical treasure to shine anew.

Zhang Yaqi, artistic director of the dance drama, says that the collaboration between the municipality of Chongqing and the China Oriental Performing Arts Group, a national performing arts institution, was developed over a two-year period and pays tribute to Dazu's stone carvers.

The performance is themed on celebrating the ancient philosophical vision of an ideal society: *renjian xiaoman; tianxia dazu*, (literally "small satisfaction in human life; grand prosperity and abundance in the world").

The Dazu Rock Carvings include the 144 grottoes, 50,000 statues and 100,000 inscriptions found in Chongqing's Dazu district.

Begun during the early Tang Dynasty (618-907) and reaching its peak during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), these extensive carvings amalgamate Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist sculptures.

The UNESCO designation was awarded in 1999. Along with the Mogao Caves in Gansu province, the Longmen Grottoes in Henan province, and the Yungang Grottoes in Shanxi province — all similarly designated — the Dazu Rock Carvings are considered an essential part of the history of cave art in China.

The 10-chapter, 100-minute dance drama is the tale of a young refugee named Xiao Fu. Fleeing to Dazu during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), he seeks sanctuary among local rock carvers, embracing their simple joys and aspirations for a brighter tomorrow. However, when a rockslide occurs, he pledges to immortalize the names of his departed family members by carving them on the cliffs, ensuring their memory lasts forever.

"The stage presentation was challenging, with a deep sense of reverence. We drew inspiration from the details of the carvings, capturing their lifelike appearances," Zhang says.

She adds that every aspect, from characters and costumes to design, movements and props, was created to reflect the poetic essence of these portrayals of everyday rural life.

For instance, figures such as the flute-playing woman, the chicken-raising woman, the cattle herder, and the woman wine seller, as well as Graceful Guanyin (Avalokitesvara, or the Goddess of Mercy), Water-moon Guanyin, and the Buddhist monk Zhigong (418-514) are brought to life in the drama.

The 40 performers, 18 women and 22 men, radiate an ancient charm that encapsulates the aesthetics of the Song Dynasty, according to Zhang, who adds that the production included some core members of the team behind another hit, *Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*.

A large mirror onstage was used as a backdrop, according to Gao Guangjian, the drama's visual director and set designer.

A variety of multimedia techniques was used to create a dis-



Legacy carved in stone

Dance drama brings Dazu's historical art to dazzling life, **Tan Yingzi and Deng Rui** report in Chongqing.



Dance drama, *For an Eternal Homeland — Dazu Rock Carvers' Legacy*, which premiered in Chongqing recently, brings the ancient figurines and statues of the Dazu Rock Carvings, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to life. It is set to tour nationwide this year, staging a total of 100 performances.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tinct realm, enabling the exploration of the dynamic interplay between reality and faith.

"The Dazu Rock Carvings are a priceless treasure, and belong to humanity," says Li Fangyin, former director of Dazu Rock Carvings Research Institute.

"Their deep content, such as philosophical ideas, humanistic principles, values and morals, helped us to further tap their worth through creative efforts," Li adds.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, the country has increasingly focused on the conservation and use of cultural heritage and grotto temples.

According to Li, more than 30 protection projects have been carried out at the Dazu Rock Carvings over the past two decades, resulting in marked progress on the protection, research, and use of the site.

The Qianshou Guanyin (Thousand-hand Avalokitesvara) statue, carved during the Southern Song Dynasty, is a treasure of Baoding Mountain, one of the sites part of Dazu. In June 2015, after an 8-year national project to conserve its stone relics, aided by technology, salvage efforts were completed. That year, the Art Museum of Dazu Rock Carvings was opened.

After 16 years of surveys and research by experts at the research institute, *Dazu Shike Quanji* (A Collection of Dazu Rock Carvings) was published by Chongqing Publishing Group in 2019, the first Chinese archaeological report about large grotto temple sites.

In recent years, several international academic symposiums have been held in Chongqing and Ziyang, Sichuan province, to integrate cultural tourism and preservation.

Last August, the first International Forum on Cave Temple Conservation kicked off in Dazu. Experts from countries, including Norway, the United Kingdom, Japan, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Nepal, convened to share insights and address common challenges in the global conservation of grotto temples.

Chongqing's Dazu and Ziyang city in Sichuan are known for their stone carvings — 150,000 in all — among which the Anyue Grottoes in Ziyang's Anyue county have been included in the provisional list of UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage Sites.

The Sichuan-Chongqing Grotto Protection and Research Center has been established and has organized 20 international forums and academic exchange studies in Dazu. It is also responsible for publishing the academic journal *Cave Temple Research and Conservation*.

"The fusion of traditional art and modern technology has led to many changes," Li says, citing the example of *Black Myth: Wukong*.

The game's production team explored the Dazu Rock Carvings three years ago, and set many scenes in the hit game there.

After its three-day premiere from Feb 21 to 23 in Chongqing, the drama will travel to 10 more cities, including Chengdu, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, Nanchang in Jiangxi province, Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Fuzhou and Xiamen in Fujian province, as well as Changsha in Hunan province. A total of 100 performances are planned for the year.

Contact the writers at dengrui@chinadaily.com.cn

What's on



Value of revival

At 22, Wang Xun (1915-69), then a student at Tsinghua University during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), published an essay titled *The Value of Jade in Chinese Culture*, in which he investigated the philosophical, cultural and aesthetic meanings embodied in jade. The philosophy major was determined to commit himself to the research of Chinese art history and aesthetics. Later, he taught fine arts at his alma mater, and at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, wrote and was involved in designs to integrate aesthetic traditions with modern crafts.

An exhibition, running until May 5 at the Tsinghua University Art Museum, *For the Revival of Chinese Art*, introduces Wang's academic, educational and design accomplishments, which he hoped would take forward the country's cultural lineage. It

commemorates the 110th anniversary of his birth. From a family of intellectuals, Wang was known for his knowledge in many fields such as philosophy, art, and folklore. The depth of his academic understanding was demonstrated when he teamed up with other professionals to modernize the art of *jingtailan*, or cloisonne enamelware, in the 1950s.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. Tsinghua University, Haidian district, Beijing. 010-6278-1012.

Glass work

Reality and Illusion, an exhibition by China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, presents recent glass works by artists from China and abroad that celebrate cultural diversity and technology, and share insights into social change.

It is a display of glass technical mastery and creative artistry accumulated over the centuries.



The exhibited pieces are also fine examples of how a cross-disciplinary approach has enriched the presentation of glass art, changing established perceptions and inspiring creativity. The ongoing exhibi-

tion runs until March 10.

9:30 am-4:30 pm, closed on Mondays. Xiangshan campus of the China Academy of Art, 352 Xiangshan Road, Xihu district, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. 0571-8720-0881.

Soil of creativity

The craft of paper-cutting first became popular in Fangzheng county, Harbin, Heilongjiang province, during the mid-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and continued for more than two centuries. It was introduced by emigrants to Heilongjiang from other parts of the country.

Fangzheng paper-cutting art was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2008, and is known for its vivid colors and intricate designs that capture the social and cultural landscapes of the region.

The Shenzhen Art Museum's new venue in Guangdong province is showing a selection of Fangzheng

paper-cuts in *The Glories of the Black Soil*.

The exhibition introduces northeastern Chinese tradition to this southern coastal city that is home to people from across the country, including from the Northeast. The exhibition runs until May 11.

10 am-6 pm, closed on Mondays. Building 1, 30 Tenglong Road, Longhua district, Shenzhen, Guangdong province. 0755-2806-2004.

CHINA DAILY



LIFE



Young singers selected to take part in the ongoing NCPA opera training program perform *Libiamo ne'lieti calici* (popularly known as The Drinking Song) from the opera *La Traviata* at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre on Tuesday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Setting sights on tomorrow

NCPA training program for rising young singers seeks to create next generation of opera stars, **Chen Nan** reports.

In an ambitious effort to nurture talent and contribute to the development of China's opera scene, the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing launched a young opera training program, the NCPA-Guan Zhijing Young Artist Program, on Feb 24. The program seeks to identify exceptional young talent — typically singers around the age of 35 — who have the potential to make a significant impact in the opera world.

Running until March 11, the program is designed to discover and train talented young opera singers, by offering them rigorous, hands-on education and an opportunity to perform at a world-class venue.

As the name behind the program, bass singer Guan Zhijing, resident artist at the NCPA, says that 177 applicants ranging in age and experience applied for the program from all over the country. After three rounds of auditions, 17 stood out and are now receiving training from experts including tenor Shi Yijie, stage director Chen Xinyi, and soprano He Hui.

The two-week course covers all aspects of opera. It includes intensive vocal training, opera practice, music coaching and drama rehearsals, all designed to elevate the skills of the young singers.

It will culminate in a concert at



Left: Conductor Lyu Jia is one of the coaches taking part in the training program. Right: Bass singer Guan Zhijing, after whom the program is named.

Beijing Performing Arts Centre on March 11, where the participants will give a demonstration of their progress by performing a selection of excerpts from both Chinese and international operas.

"Over my two-decade career, I have performed in over 500 operas both at home and abroad," says Guan. "Based on my experience, I know how crucial it is for emerging artists to gain knowledge of vocal technique, stage presence, and musical interpretation. More importantly, they need to learn about more than just the music to

prepare them for success on the international stage."

A 2006 graduate of Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, Guan worked with the China National Opera House before joining the NCPA in 2013. He has performed in several NCPA productions, including Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Guan emphasizes that the heart of the training program is its commitment to providing an immersive educational experience that blends the traditional aspects of



opera with modern interpretive techniques.

"The program's goal is not only to improve vocal techniques but also to deepen their understanding of opera as an art form. It helps their transition from talented vocalists to fully rounded performers," says Lyu Jia, the NCPA's artistic director of music. Lyu is also music director and principal conductor of the China NCPA Orchestra, who performed with the orchestra in 2008 during the NCPA's first opera, Puccini's *Turandot*. "Opera singers have long-last-

ing careers. As they grow older, they develop increased vocal range, and often, emotional maturity. There are many great singers who are still at their peak in their 60s and 70s," he adds.

Speaking of his experiences as a young conductor, Lyu says that before returning to China and joining the NCPA in 2012, he was the musical director of the Verona Opera. He was the first Asian conductor to serve as the artistic director of a major opera house in Italy, which is the birthplace of European opera. He also held posi-

tions as chief conductor at the Trieste Opera, and was in charge of productions at La Scala, the Deutsche Oper Berlin, and the Bavarian State Opera.

"I learned from many great musicians when I was a young conductor. I watched their rehearsals, asked questions, and spent time with them. They not only taught me about music, but also helped me expand my repertoire and shared their onstage experience. This allowed me to build my own style of stage presence and musical interpretation," he says. "They also inspired me to build my confidence as a conductor."

The establishment of this program is also a reflection of the growing ambition of China's opera scene. Over the years, the NCPA has built a reputation for hosting world-class productions and training some of the best operatic talents.

Since its foundation in 2007, the NCPA has produced 103 operas, many of which have garnered international acclaim. This new training program is a natural extension of these efforts, ensuring that the next generation of Chinese opera stars is ready to shine on the world's stages.

Contact the writer at chenan@chinadaily.com.cn

By XING WEN

xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn

The family may be a basic unit of society, but it can also be one of the most complex. The recently aired TV comedy series *Me and My Family* shines a light on the chaos and drama in a blended family. The story revolves around a 28-year-old daughter who, after losing her job and going through a breakup, has to temporarily move in with her 48-year-old mother, stepfather, and her stepfather's high school-aged son.

At this point, the mother discovers she is pregnant again and decides to keep the baby. As a result, her daughter takes on the responsibility of full-time caregiver, embarking on a 180-day journey. The differing personalities navigate conflicts arising from generation gaps, and struggle to express their feelings. Through these challenges, they gradually come to understand one another.

Directed by Li Mo, the series was the final installment in his "urban trilogy". The previous two were *Remembrance of Things Past*, which focused on the friendships between several out-of-towners working in Beijing, and *Fake It Till You Make It*, a romance between an investment banker and a lawyer who learn to lower their defenses and connect with each other sincerely.

Both received high praise, earning an 8.1 out of 10 on review site Douban.

In *Me and My Family*, family bonds, particularly the mother-daughter relationship, are the central theme that the series aims to explore. The focus is on the idea of returning home — how people can rebuild relationships with their families after they have gradually drifted apart.

Li says that many young people today are reluctant to return home, and prefer independence and solitude. The younger generation often tries to change the ingrained habits of their parents, urging them not to eat leftovers, or spend too much time scrolling through short videos, while the parents, in turn, espouse traditional values to correct their children's lifestyles, insisting on early bedtimes and early mornings.

"Everyone has their own lifestyle and way of thinking, convinced that they are right and often unwilling to listen to the other side," Li says, adding that the series seeks to show the way family members of different generations can learn to coexist despite their differences.

"Understanding our parents is something that often happens much later in life. In our teens and 20s, we don't truly understand them. We're too focused on rushing outward, rarely stopping to ask



Gu Yunsu (left), the protagonist in the newly aired TV drama *Me and My Family*, has a heartfelt conversation with her ex-boyfriend, following their breakup. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Learning to cross the generational divides



Wu Yue (left) and Zhou Yutong play a mother and adult daughter in the new TV series *Me and My Family* about relationships and deepening understanding.

what our parents experienced when they were young, or why they made certain life choices. But eventually, there comes a day when these questions arise, and it stems from a sense of identity," says Li, who is in his 30s.

As the series progresses, we discover that Wu Limei, the mother in the series, fell head-over-heels in love and became pregnant while at university, leading her to marry. After becoming a housewife, she decides to find a job, but her husband repeatedly dismisses the idea, gradually chipping away at her sense of self-worth.

Determined to reclaim her life, Wu decides to divorce, and becomes a single mother. Despite the numerous setbacks she faces while search-

ing for a job, she eventually becomes an editor at a magazine.

For Li, the character of the mother embodies many women born in the 1970s — a generation shaped by reform and opening-up. These women yearned for freedom, resisted being defined solely by their roles as mothers, and were determined to chase the lives they truly desired.

Wu Yue, who plays Wu Limei, says she was deeply drawn to the story. "I loved the script after reading just the first five episodes. At my age, most of the roles I get are for middle-aged women with heavy or pathetic storylines. This character — a cheerful, vibrant middle-aged woman — really touched me."

CULTURE

Dancing with memories of home

Indonesian dance group in Hong Kong blends the modern and traditional, **Hou Chenchen** reports.

Accompanied by the soft melody of a flute and the rhythmic pulse of drums, the dancers' vibrant costumes, adorned with red, yellow, and green tassels, swayed gracefully.

With fluid movements, they extended their arms as though gathering stalks of rice, before transitioning into swift, precise motions, wielding sickles to slice through the imaginary crops. As the rice falls, they bend low, gathering the harvested grains into waiting bamboo baskets.

This captivating performance is *tari panen padi*, a traditional Indonesian dance from Java Island that celebrates the harvest season. The dancers are part of the Jackson Dancer, a group of nine Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

"Padi means rice in Indonesian," says Arya Jackson, the group's leader. "When we dance, we use handmade straw props, integrating them into the movements to symbolize the harvesting of rice. We also incorporate tools like *arit* (sickles) and *tengkok* (bamboo baskets), which are common in Indonesian agriculture."

The Jackson Dancer is the oldest and only Indonesian dance group in Hong Kong that blends modern elements with traditional Indonesian dance, according to Jackson.

Indonesians are the second-largest ethnic minority group in Hong Kong, with over 140,000 domestic helpers, according to the 2021 population census in Hong Kong. Despite their numbers, Jackson says there are few dance groups offering a distinctive voice in their cultural expression.

"We like to choreograph our own dances," she explains. "Many other groups perform the same traditional Indonesian dances. We prefer to try something different, incorporating modern elements into our routines."

Angelina Ucix, 40, vice-leader and chief choreographer of Jackson Dancer, is the creative force behind most of their traditional performances.

"I research the history of different dances from Indonesian islands on YouTube," Ucix says. "I look at the core movements of each dance and maintain those historical elements, but I also add new, creative touches to make it fresh."

One of their most popular dances is *tari ondel-ondel*, a traditional art form originating in Jakarta. The dance features giant puppets, known as *ondel-ondel*, which represent a male and female figure.

The male puppet wears a red mask, symbolizing courage, while the female puppet's white mask stands for purity and kindness. Often performed at weddings or special celebrations, this dance has brought the Jackson Dancer team to prestigious



Top: Members of Jackson Dancer perform in Victoria Park, Hong Kong, during Hong Kong Flower Show 2023. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Above left: Arya Jackson (center) and two members of her troupe rehearse in November at a secondary school in Hong Kong. HUXINYUE / FOR CHINA DAILY. **Above right:** Angelina Ucix (center) and two fellow dancers practice traditional Indonesian dance in the Tsim Sha Tsui area of Hong Kong in November.

venues like Queen Elizabeth Stadium, the Indonesian Consulate General, and Victoria Park in Hong Kong.

"The Indonesian Consulate has helped us prepare the large red and white puppets for our performances — they stand at about two and a half

meters tall," Jackson says.

"We love performing this dance. It makes us so happy," says Ucix. "After every show, people always ask when we'll perform again."

The dancers' costumes, decorated with vibrant yellow and blue vine

patterns, are the work of Ucix herself. These intricate designs are inspired by Dayak patterns from Kalimantan, a region in Indonesia known for its geometric motifs drawn from nature — flowers, animals, and flowing water.

"I found that costumes available in stores weren't unique or attractive. If I bought them, they would all look the same," Ucix explains. "So I decided to design and make them myself."

A passion for fashion and design runs deep for Ucix. "I buy fabric from

local markets, design the outfits, and sew them by hand," she says.

It takes about two weeks to create each costume. To date, Ucix has designed and made seven distinct performance outfits for the Jackson Dancer group.

Sense of belonging

Jackson arrived in Hong Kong 18 years ago, but back then, she struggled to make new friends.

"I felt really lonely and lost," Jackson recalls. "The language barrier was a big challenge. I could only say 'hello' and 'good morning' in Cantonese, and there were no groups for Indonesians to dance or perform."

For many members of the Jackson Dancer group, however, it has become more than just a dance team; it's like a second home.

"For us, the Jackson Dancer is like our family," says Sri Handayani, 35, who joined the group a year ago. "I don't have my parents here in Hong Kong, but Jackson and Ucix are like our parents in this group."

Sri says that Ucix, the team's choreographer, is known for being strict during rehearsals. "Ucix pushes us to be better, and that's my motivation to improve," she says. "When I'm feeling down, Jackson and Ucix always notice and check in on me. When I face difficulties, I share them here, and it's a safe place."

Before coming to Hong Kong, Jackson had no formal dance training, but an unexpected opportunity changed her life. "My first dance performance was at an Indonesian karaoke bar. My friends were singing, and they were amazed by my dancing. They encouraged me to enter a dance competition in Hong Kong, where I won the third place," Jackson says.

That victory marked the beginning of her journey. She formed a small dance group in Hong Kong, and as more people joined, the group grew, opening doors to new friendship.

Jackson designed the Jackson Dancer logo herself: a yellow star outlined in blue stitching.

"I want every member of Jackson Dancer to feel like a star — someone who shines brightly and spreads warmth to those around them," she says. "Dance has given me health, joy, and a sense of belonging. When I dance, all my worries disappear. But more importantly, it's connected me to a group of friends who have become like family."

"Although we are Indonesian, dance has created a bridge that connects us to the people of Hong Kong and beyond. It fills our hearts with happiness."

Hu Xinyue contributed to this story. Contact the writer at houchenchen@chinadaily.com.cn.

Youths embark on journey to discover secrets of TCM

By HOU CHENCHEN

In a world where the wisdom of ancient traditions meets modern curiosity, a group of young delegates from around the globe embarked on a journey to discover the secrets of one of the most classic prescriptions of Traditional Chinese Medicine, or TCM.

In December, more than 30 people from 10 countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Brazil, and Italy, set out to explore TCM by visiting the Pien Tze Huang Museum in Zhangzhou, Fujian province.

The name "Pien Tze Huang" derives from three characters: "Pien" means "a piece," "Tze" an exclamatory particle in the Southern Fujian dialect, while "Huang" refers to "heat, toxicity, swelling, and pain". Together, they convey the meaning: "A small piece will suffice to alleviate the condition of Huang."

"Traditional Chinese medicine has a history of 5,000 years, embodying the wisdom and efforts of the Chinese people," said Andrea Randisi, an Italian social media influencer.

After his visit to the museum, Andrea was astonished by the intricate history and culture behind the prescriptions of traditional Chinese medicine. Pien Tze Huang, a prestigious Chinese proprietary medicine, is renowned for its potent effects in clearing heat, detoxifying the body,



Left: Young people smell the distinctive aroma of a herbal medicine powder at Zhangzhou's Pien Tze Huang Museum on Dec 9.

Right: Youths from around the world make sachets of traditional herbal medicine at Zhangzhou's Pien Tze Huang Museum on Dec 9. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

cooling the blood, resolving stagnant blood, and alleviating swelling and pain.

Davide Crocicchia, a young Italian athlete coach, was also among the delegates. He has a keen interest in traditional Chinese medicine due to its efficacy in treating illnesses and alleviating pain. In his view, herbal sachets are especially well-suited for athletes, providing relaxation and stress relief.

"It's fantastic that one can achieve relaxation without resorting to

medication," he said. "This natural, gentle, and noninvasive approach to relaxation aligns perfectly with the needs of athletes." Davide plans to introduce this concept in Italy and incorporate it into daily training, hoping to offer athletes a new method of physical and mental regulation.

Andrea has traveled extensively to Guangdong, Sichuan, and Zhejiang provinces in China. With 80,000 international followers and 40,000 Chinese fans, he is eager to share

his experiences. On his first visit to Fujian, he was deeply impressed by the province's profound historical and cultural heritage. He expressed his desire to encourage more people to visit Fujian and experience the charm of Chinese culture through his short video posts.

Ennzo Perasso Cenamo, a university student from Brazil, said: "My mother has a great interest in traditional Chinese medicine and Chinese tea, so I'm excited to bring these wonderful things back with

me." He was eagerly looking forward to sharing his experiences and insights with his family and friends.

"I hope that through my sharing, more Brazilians can appreciate the charm of traditional Chinese medicine culture and rediscover its value," he said.

Residents of Fujian and Guangdong provinces would set sail from Yuegang Port in Zhangzhou to seek their fortunes in Southeast Asia, often carrying Pien Tze Huang for health protection during their ardu-

ous ocean voyages. The Maritime Silk Road, originating from this port, facilitated trade with nearly 50 countries and regions, making it a key hub in Southeast Asia. Along this route, Pien Tze Huang was exported to 19 countries and regions.

Cultural heritage

In 2011, the craftsmanship of Zhangzhou's Pien Tze Huang was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage. The Pien Tze Huang pill, a Grade-1 protected traditional Chinese medicine, has consistently ranked among the top exports of Chinese medicine.

Mohamed Hesham Elaskary, a young professional from the US working in a medical technology company, believes that traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine are complementary and interconnected. He hopes for enhanced collaboration between Chinese and foreign medical fields in the future to create better formulas and medications, promoting global health development.

"I got to learn more about Eastern medicine and see how Western and Eastern medicine can complement each other. It was fascinating to see how ancient formulas are being used to create new and more advanced medicines today," he said.

Gao Yuzi contributed to this story.