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Anora wins big, Adrien Brody and Zoe Saldana make history

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British Prime Minister Keir Starmer (center), French President Emmanuel Macron (center left) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (center right) attend a summit on Sunday with European and Canadian leaders to discuss the Ukraine issue, in London, the United Kingdom.

Manufacturers see rise in orders in February

By OUYANG SHIJIA ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China's factory activity expanded in February, marking its fastest pace in three months, a private survey showed on Monday, signaling stabilizing growth in the first quarter and a strong start for the world's second-largest economy in 2025.

The Caixin China General Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, an indicator of the operating conditions of the country's manufacturing sector, rose to 50.8 in February from 50.1 in January, remaining above the 50 mark that separates expansion from contraction for a fifth consecutive month, media group Caixin said in a report on Monday.

Economists said they expect that the Chinese economy will get off to a pretty good start in the first quarter with around 5 percent year-on-year growth, supported by the continuing recovery trend that began in late 2024, the expansion of the consumer trade-in program for 2025 and fresh stimulus measures set to be unveiled during the two sessions, the annual meetings of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies.

They said that Chinese policymakers will likely prioritize stabilizing growth and expanding domestic demand as this year's key economic tasks, anticipating that the authorities will soon introduce new incremental policies to spur consumption, foster the development of new quality productive forces and bolster the private economy. Manufacturers surveyed for the Caixin report said that a general improvement in economic conditions and the introduction of new

products underpinned the latest rise in new orders, with new export business rising modestly for the first time since November due to stronger demand from foreign clients.

Monday's data was in line with the official PMI figure released on Saturday. The official PMI for the manufacturing sector rose from 49.1 in January to 50.2 in February, as enterprises gradually resumed work and production after the Spring Festival holiday, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

"The holiday period saw robust consumption momentum, and technological innovations in certain industries added to the positive sentiment, helping to sustain the manufacturing market recovery," said Wang Zhe, a senior economist at Caixin Insight Group.

Wang highlighted that the broader economy still faces challenges, saying that this month represents a critical policy window.

"Supportive measures should address market expectations and societal concerns, focusing on key economic bottlenecks. Meanwhile, policies should prioritize demand-side measures, strengthen countercyclical adjustments, and promote higher household income and consumer confidence," he said.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said that despite headwinds and the challenges ahead, he expects that China's manufacturing PMI will remain in expansion territory in March, given the seasonal recovery and pro-growth policies in the pipeline.

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Europe's peace push welcomed

Continent urged to recognize multipolar reality as compromises are needed for deal to be made

By EARLE GALE and ZHENG WANYIN in London

Experts have welcomed Europe's efforts to seek a peaceful end to the Ukraine crisis, but cautioned that all sides will need to make compromises if a deal is to be made.

Michael Dunford, a professor emeritus at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, said: "The world has changed. Europe's relative military and economic power has declined. Its ability to exact unequal geopolitical and geo-economic dividends has diminished. ... Europe should recognize this new multipolar reality."

Europe should, therefore, "start by negotiating an indivisible security agreement with Russia, or better with Eurasia", he added. Dunford's remarks come after days

of intense political tension was topped by a heated exchange on Friday at the White House between United States President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Zelensky, however, expressed his appreciation of the US for its support before attending a summit in London on Sunday, during which European leaders attempted to get peace talks involving Washington back on track.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced a four-step plan aimed at guaranteeing peace, with Europe doing the "heavy lifting" in terms of providing a peacekeeping force.

After the talks in London, Zelensky attempted to address criticism from the US that he was not grateful for Washington's support by writing on social media: "We understand the importance of America, and we are grateful for all the support we've received from the United States."

He added that there had "not been a day" when Kyiv did not appreciate Washington's backing, and that it felt "gratitude for the preservation of our independence."

However, Peter Mandelson, the UK's ambassador to the US, said Zelensky may need to do more. Ukraine may need to be the first side to declare a ceasefire, and Zelensky should enthusiastically accept Trump's proposed minerals deal, he said.

"We need a very radical reset," Mandelson told ABC News. "The reset has to consist of the US and Ukraine getting back on the same page, and President Zelensky giving his unequivocal backing to the initiative that President Trump is taking to end the war and to bring a just and lasting peace to Ukraine."

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron told Le Figaro newspaper that he wants a one-month pause of hostilities "in the air, at sea, and on energy infrastructure."

The pause would allow "negotiations that will take several weeks, and then, once peace is signed, a deployment"

of peacekeeping soldiers would be possible, he said.

But the UK's Armed Forces Minister Luke Pollard told the BBC on Monday that Mandelson's comments were his private opinion and not the position of the UK government, and that London had not signed off on France's proposed one-month truce either.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it looks as if the West lacks a "coordinated" plan.

"We see that the collective West has started to become less collective," he said at a daily news briefing. "A fragmentation of the collective West has begun, and the positions of different countries and groups of countries are becoming more nuanced."

Keith Bennett, a London-based senior international relations analyst, said that Starmer has taken on the role of mediating between the US, Europe and Ukraine, which is like "squaring a circle."

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Continued efforts urged to advance nation's opening-up

By LIU YUKUN liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

China will further expand its economic opening-up with a focus on deepening reforms in the foreign trade sector and may introduce additional policies to lower trade costs and bolster trade security, experts said on Monday.

There may be more extensive reforms in foreign investment and outbound investment management systems, as well as advancements in enhancing the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative, for broader, more extensive and higher-standard opening-up, they said.

Their remarks followed statements made on Monday by Liu Jieyi, the spokesman for the third session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Liu announced at a news conference that there will be continued efforts to enhance the high-

standard opening-up mechanism, steadily expand institutional openness, deepen reforms within the foreign trade system, and optimize regional opening-up strategies.

"China's commitment to further opening-up is evident," he said.

"Over the past year, China has maintained its role as a key driver of global economic growth, fast-tracking the establishment of a new high-standard economic opening-up system.

"China remains the world's largest goods trading nation and the second-largest import market, making continuous strides in the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative," Liu said.

"Through international events like the China International Import Expo, the country is actively fostering global economic cooperation, promoting economic globalization, and advocating shared prosperity and cooperation on a global scale," he added.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said: "The government may roll out a series of policies for trade facilitation and liberalization, leading to further reductions in trade costs. Additionally, by enacting measures to ensure trade security, potential risks will be minimized."

Furthermore, barriers to foreign investment will be further diminished to streamline investment processes, enabling businesses to effectively leverage global resources, Zhou said.

The latest figures from the General Administration of Customs showed that in 2024, the total value of China's goods trade imports and exports reached 43.85 trillion yuan (\$6 trillion), up 5 percent year-on-year, indicating that the country's foreign trade has reached a new high in terms of scale despite the presence of multiple challenges.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, the number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises nationwide was 59,080 last year, a 9.9 percent increase year-on-year.

Charlie Zheng, chief economist at Samoyed Cloud Technology Group Holdings, said that further efforts are expected in expanding opening-up pilot projects — a mechanism allowing certain areas to invite foreign companies to enter the market — in telecommunications, healthcare, education and other service sectors, along with the comprehensive removal of foreign investment restrictions in manufacturing.

Zheng also suggested simplifying procedures in order to streamline approval of foreign investment projects and improve efficiency.

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All eyes on China with two sessions underway

As China's two sessions — an annual major political event — get underway this week, there will be significant domestic and international attention on what unfolds.

Concurrent sets of meetings begin on Tuesday of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body. Then one day later, the 14th National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, kicks off.

The CPPCC plays an important advisory role through the recommendations it offers to government agencies. The NPC involves provincial political leaders, scientists, technicians, farmers and workers, among others, who review and vote on important legislative matters. Topics relating to economic growth, high-quality development, reform and opening-up, real estate, foreign trade and investment, and high technology are expected to be on the agenda.

WORLD WATCH

By Anthony Moretti

Experts and markets are closely watching the annual gross domestic product growth target the policymakers will set at the two sessions and what are the measures in the pipeline that would boost consumption, stabilize the real estate sector, encourage long-term "patient money" into the capital market, and continue to support the growth of the crucial private economy.

China has been the world's primary growth engine for multiple years, but of late it has had to deal with negative impacts of challenging domestic economic realities.

The pressures have been exacerbated by the corrosive tariffs applied by the United States that are now in their eighth year.

Put all of these factors together and it is clear that pro-growth policies will be a major focus intensely discussed by the NPC deputies and CPPCC members during the two sessions. Not to be forgotten is that 2025 marks the last year of the current 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25); as a result, an examination of which of its goals have already been met will take place.

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INSIDE A model of South-South cooperation Global Views, page 13

Newsstand prices: US \$1, Canada C\$1, UK 1.5, EU 1€, Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling, Asia Pacific: Thailand 120, Philippines 120 php, Myanmar 2000 kyat, Japan 210 yen, Dubai 10 dirham, Pakistan 300 rupee

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# TWO SESSIONS

## Private-sector tech companies to drive growth

Policies expected to empower firms to take on larger role in economy

By CHENG YU  
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Outside an unremarkable building in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, a humanoid robot is doing something truly remarkable. The Unitree G1, standing at 1.2 meters tall and weighing 35 kilograms, takes a martial arts stance, shifts its weight back and performs a swinging roundhouse kick, before rebalancing itself and standing up straight.

Built by Unitree Robotics, a Hangzhou-based startup, the G1 surprised viewers in January when 16 such robots performed a dance routine on China's Spring Festival Gala, which was viewed 16.8 billion times, according to China Media Group.

Unitree is one of a bevy of Chinese private tech firms making waves globally in recent months.

Chinese artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek is taking on Silicon Valley with its cost-effective yet formidable large language model. Meanwhile, *Ne Zha 2*, the sequel to China's groundbreaking animated hit, has smashed box-office records.

Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said: "A swarm of private firms — not State-run or big names — are emerging from China, pulling off unexpected technological feats and, in some areas, even outmaneuvering global titans.

"While many Western countries, including the United States, are still considering how to restrict China's technological rise, Chinese private enterprises are rewriting the rules, pioneering innovations that redefine the entire industry," Wang said.

With the two sessions, China's annual national legislative and political advisory meetings, taking place this week, the private sector is set to take on an even larger role in the economy. Industry experts have predicted that a wave of fresh policy support will be launched in the wake of the two sessions to fuel even greater growth of the private sector.

The founders of DeepSeek and Unitree Robotics — Liang Wenfeng and Wang Xingxing — participated in a symposium on the private sector presided over by President Xi Jinping in February. Seated alongside these young entrepreneurs were some of China's most influential private-sector figures — Huawei's Ren Zhengfei, Xiaomi's Lei Jun, and Tencent's Ma Huateng.

The message was clear: China's private sector isn't just growing, it's becoming the backbone of the country's innovative development.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, said at the symposium that the government's basic principles and policies concerning the development of the private sector have been incorporated into the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and will consistently be upheld and fulfilled. "They cannot and will not be changed," he said.

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

"On the new journey in the new era, the prospects for the development of the private economy are broad and promising. It is a prime time for pri-



Visitors shake hands with Unitree's H1 robot during the 26th China Hi-Tech Fair in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Nov 14. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

private enterprises and entrepreneurs to give full play to their capabilities," he said.

Li Jin, chief research fellow at the China Enterprise Research Institute in Beijing, said that the timing of the symposium — just before the annual two sessions — showed the central government's emphasis on private enterprises and their increasingly critical role in achieving economic growth targets.

"The remarks confirmed supportive measures, showed a firm tone and offered clear encouragement to private enterprises," Li said.

At the symposium, Xi emphasized the role of private enterprises in advancing China's broader goals in technological innovation, promoting rural revitalization and improving people's well-being.

Tian Xuan, associate dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, described the latest policy direction as "forward-looking", emphasizing the increasingly important role of private enterprises in driving China's technological breakthroughs.

"This symposium brought together both traditional manufacturing giants and cutting-edge innovators like DeepSeek and Unitree Robotics — companies making waves in AI, robotics and other frontier technologies," Tian said.

"In the medium to long term, the high-quality development of the private sector will be instrumental in ensuring China's stable economic growth. As private firms continue to push the boundaries of innovation, confidence in Chinese assets will only strengthen," he added.

Xu Hongcai, a prominent economist and deputy director of the economic policy commission of the Beijing-based China Association of Policy Science, noted that such efforts sent a clear signal. Despite shifting global trade policies and external pressures, China remains steadfast in its commitment to high-quality economic development, he said.

Xi presided over a similar symposium in 2018, which was followed by a three-year bull run in China's A-share market. At the 2018 symposium, Xi said the country would unwaveringly encourage, support and guide the



Top: A visitor greets Unitree robots H1 and Go2 at the company's booth resembling a smart living room during the Inclusion Conference on the Bund in Shanghai in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY  
Above: Robots play soccer during the Global Developer Conference in Shanghai on Feb 21. CHEN HAOMING / XINHUA

development of the nonpublic sector and support private enterprises to develop toward a broader stage.

The stance was reaffirmed at the 2022 Central Economic Work Conference, which emphasized that promoting the private sector's growth is a "long-term strategy", rather than a short-term measure.

In 2023, during the two sessions, Xi emphasized that the Party encouraged private enterprises and entrepreneurs to let go of their concerns and burdens and boldly pursue their development.

Xu, the economist, said: "These instances show that China's reform policies are continuous and stable. A

stable policy and a good business environment will further enhance private enterprises' confidence, consistently attract more foreign investment and promote sustained economic growth."

According to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, as of the end of September last year, China had over 55 million registered private companies, accounting for 92.3 percent of all businesses. They contribute more than half of the country's tax revenue, over 60 percent of GDP and over 80 percent of urban employment.

Notably, they have increasingly become a key pillar of China's innova-

tion ecosystem, contributing to over 70 percent of the nation's technological breakthroughs and making up more than 90 percent of national high-tech businesses.

With the two sessions underway, industry experts believe that fostering a business-friendly environment and creating more opportunities for the private sector will be a key spotlight.

A draft law on promoting the private sector, for instance, will be submitted to Chinese legislators for further review.

Liu Junhai, a professor and head of commercial law at the Renmin University of China in Beijing, said: "The private sector itself is a symbol of advanced productivity, and encouraging the development of the private sector will inject new productivity into economic growth in a timely manner.

"The new law on driving the private sector will be a focus of this year's two sessions. More detailed policies in treating State-owned enterprises and private enterprises equally from an institutional and legal perspective are expected," he said.

Liu added that promoting the nation's private sector should drive the equal status, common development, fair competition, mutual cooperation, equal supervision and equal protection for private enterprises, so that they can participate in market competition openly, fairly and justly.

Industry experts also said that China is expected to further enhance the long-term mechanism for private companies to participate in major national projects at the two sessions.

The country will also support capable private enterprises in leading national initiatives to make breakthroughs in major technologies and provide private enterprises with greater access to major national scientific research infrastructure, they said.

Luo Zhi, director of the research center for the new private economy at Wuhan University, said in an article that some private companies have a weak sense of gain, as in some regions, the public service system for small and medium-sized enterprises is incomplete, leading to high institutional transaction costs for private enterprises.

In recent years, an increasing number of private companies have played roles in major infrastructure projects in transportation, water conservancy and railways.

Earlier, Chinese authorities had identified a group of major scientific and technological areas that private enterprises can take a lead in, like industrial software, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, industrial internet, gene and cell medicine, and new energy storage.

The National Development and Reform Commission, the nation's economic regulator, has set up a special private sector development bureau to offer targeted support for private firms.

Among the country's latest efforts to drive the private sector, Zhang Xinghai, chairman of emerging automaker Seres and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said that he was deeply inspired and brimming with confidence in the vast potential of the private sector.

As a veteran in the automotive industry, rooted in western China's Chongqing for nearly 40 years, Zhang said that he has witnessed the transformation of China's auto sector — from expanding market access to achieving independent innovation.

In 2021, the company pioneered cross-industry collaboration between automakers and information and communications technology companies.

"The models we developed with our partners have set a new benchmark for China's premium car market, breaking the dominance of foreign brands in the luxury segment while showcasing the formidable strength of private enterprises," he said.

"The future competition in China's new energy sector is not just about technology but also about ecosystems. To maintain our leadership and build a strong automotive nation, China's auto industry must seize this historic opportunity with an open mindset, embrace cross-sector collaboration, and break industry conventions through innovation," he said.

Echoing this sentiment, Xu Guanju, chairman of Transfar Group, a leading chemicals manufacturer, said that amid intense market competition, private enterprises at this new stage of development must not only consolidate their market presence, but also prioritize technological advancements, including the development of new quality productive forces.

"Such efforts involve increasing investment in technology, using industries as platforms to tackle technical challenges, and fostering breakthroughs in product innovation, application innovation, foundational research and original cutting-edge technologies," said Xu, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

"The greater the challenges we face, the stronger our confidence must be. The steeper the climb, the more resolute and spirited we must become, fully integrating the development of our enterprises with the destiny of the nation," he added.

Wang from the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences said: "With unwavering government support, an influx of world-class talent and a surging global demand for Chinese innovation, the next decade is set to be a period of unprecedented growth and transformation for the private sector.

"In the years ahead, not just dozens, but potentially hundreds of private companies akin to DeepSeek and Unitree are expected to emerge in China," he said.



Left: Unitree robot dogs are tested during a rehearsal for a Lantern Festival gala in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Feb 11. LIN YUNLONG / FOR CHINA DAILY  
Center: Visitors record their moments at Game Science, the Hangzhou-based developer of popular video game *Black Myth: Wukong*, during the Third Global Digital Trade Expo in Hangzhou in September. HUANG ZONGZHI / XINHUA  
Right: A worker throws a four-legged robot into the air to display that it could still stand when it lands. Deep Robotics, a Hangzhou-based company that had developed it, is among leading cutting-edge innovation companies in the city. WANG GANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



# TWO SESSIONS

## HK and Macao eye boost from nation's growth

Confidence expressed in high-quality development, further integration

By WILLIAM XU  
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As they prepared to depart for Beijing to attend the two sessions, national lawmakers and political advisers from the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions said on Monday that they are eager to learn more about the progress of China's development and further advance the SARs' integration into national development.

The National People's Congress, the national legislature, has 36 deputies from Hong Kong and 12 from Macao, while the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body, has over 180 members from Hong Kong and 38 from Macao.

Speaking to reporters at the Hong Kong International Airport, Starry Lee Wai-king, a member of the NPC Standing Committee, noted that this year marks the end of China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), which outlined key goals for strengthening Hong Kong's status as an international center.

China's annual political meetings provide a great opportunity for reviewing the city's contributions to national development and also offer a platform for putting forward constructive suggestions for the next five-year plan, she said.

Lee said she is looking forward to hearing the Government Work Report to be delivered by Premier Li Qiang during the two sessions. The report summarizes the work done in the previous year and outlines the vision behind the path to Chinese modernization in the coming year.

Expressing her confidence in the country's ability to drive economic growth, Lee said she believes the central government will introduce more policies to stimulate private enterprises' investment on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong.

NPC deputy Ronick Chan Chun-

ying, who is also a Hong Kong lawmaker representing the finance sector, said he is keen to hear the Government Work Report, as it will provide insights into the nation's economic growth engines and pace.

Chan said he expects to see additional policy instruments introduced in order to drive domestic demand, which in turn would provide momentum for sustainable GDP growth.

Jimmy Ng Wing-ka, also an NPC deputy from Hong Kong, said he is interested in learning about how the country will utilize artificial intelligence and other technologies to accelerate industrial upgrade.

Many of the Hong Kong representatives attending the two sessions share a keen interest in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, a cluster of 11 cities with Hong Kong as one of its core cities.

National lawmaker Maggie Chan Man-ki emphasized the need to boost talent exchanges in the Greater Bay Area, while Shiu Ka-fai, a member of the CPPCC National Committee from Hong Kong, expressed the hope for new measures to bolster the tourism industry in the area.

Before boarding a flight to Beijing on Monday, Ho Sut-heng, an NPC deputy from Macao, said she is confident in the country's high-quality development.

Ho said that during the NPC session, she will focus on new policies that would further advance the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, which is a vital platform for expanding Macao's economic diversification and facilitating its integration into national development.

Vong Kam-fai, also an NPC deputy from Macao, said he will delve into issues such as Macao's role in the Greater Bay Area's development and on how to leverage the city's connections with Portuguese-speaking economies to fuel the country's growth.



A foreign reporter asks a question on Monday in Beijing during a news conference on the third session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body. The CPPCC annual session kicks off on Tuesday. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

## Constant support for green progress pledged

By HOU LIQIANG  
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China's top political advisory body has pledged to constantly offer wisdom and strength in support of the nation's ongoing efforts to foster a harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

Liu Jieyi, spokesman for the third session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the remark at a news conference in Beijing on Monday, one day before the opening of the annual session.

Reflecting on the significant achievements China has made in promoting environmental and ecological conservation, Liu noted that CPPCC members have made proactive contributions to these areas of progress.

In 2024, the proportion of days with fairly good air quality nationwide reached 87.2 percent, while the ratio of surface water with fairly good quality increased to 90.4 percent, he noted.

China's air quality index uses a scale of 0 to 500, and values at or below 100 are considered fairly good quality with little potential to affect public health. The country has a five-tier quality assessment system for surface water, with Grade I being the best. Water with a quality of Grade III is considered fairly good.

In 2023, the proportion of days with fairly good air quality across the country stood at 85.5 percent, and the proportion of surface water with fairly good quality stayed at 89.4 percent, according to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

With its forest coverage rate exceeding 25 percent, China leads globally in artificial forest area and has emerged as the world's top contributor to increasing greenery, Liu added.

Attaching significant emphasis to environmental protection, he said that the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC has established a new panel for the environment and natural resources, comprising members from various fields such as ecological and environmental protection and energy.

CPPCC members have engaged in political consultations over pivotal and future-oriented matters in building a beautiful China, and in tackling ecological and environmental challenges that resonate with the public, Liu noted.

Focusing on green, low-carbon

and high-quality development as a fundamental solution to China's environmental issues, national political advisers have made great efforts to promote green production and lifestyles, foster consensus on transformation among enterprises and different industrial sectors, and aid in the green upgrade of industries, he said.

They have come up with proposals concerning a series of themes such as the new energy industry, recycling of resources, sewage treatment in rural China and desertification control, Liu added.

He also mentioned that the CPPCC National Committee has implemented a series of initiatives, including hosting thematic forums, to promote the nation's environmental policies and bolster social consensus on the importance of environmental conservation.

## Shenyang plays key role in regional advancement

NATIONAL VISION,  
LOCAL ACTION

By YAN DONGJIE in Beijing  
and WU YONG in Shenyang

Months after being designated as a key international city in Northeast Asia by the State Council, Shenyang is reinventing itself through industrial and urban transformation, Mayor Lyu Zhicheng said in an interview with China Daily.

"Institutional innovation, technological breakthroughs and urban revitalization are the three pillars of Shenyang's transformation from a regional hub to a global player connecting domestic and international markets," said Lyu, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress.

Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning province and a longtime industrial powerhouse in northeastern China, is leveraging its manufacturing strengths, according to its



Lyu Zhicheng

mayor. "Our advanced manufacturing sector contributes to more than 50 percent of industrial output, with automotive, robotics and integrated circuit equipment leading national innovation," Lyu said.

With an investment of 5.4 billion yuan (\$740 million), the "Automotive Silicon Valley" in Shenyang's Tiexi district is driving technological advancement, as the 2.6-square-kilometer smart vehicle testing ground is incubating autonomous driving technologies. "This is not just about cars; it's about redefining the mode of transportation for an artificial intelligence era," Lyu said.

Shenyang's pilot free trade zone has emerged as a hub for institutional reform. The Single Window for International Trade, a one-stop system for services, has reduced the time taken for customs clear-

ance by 30 percent, while last year, cross-border e-commerce grew 52.4 percent.

Government data shows the volume of cross-border e-commerce transactions in the pilot FTZ exceeded 8 million orders in 2024, with a 32.4 percent increase in trade with Russia. The cargo route between Shenyang and Vancouver, Canada, moved 43.5 metric tons of goods on its first flight last year, and Shenyang is expanding to 10 new air routes this year.

The city has also strengthened international partnerships, forming technology collaborations with Novosibirsk in Russia and Daejeon in South Korea.

More than 1,500 foreign-funded enterprises, including over 100 Fortune Global 500 companies, have set up shop in Shenyang, Lyu said.

Despite Shenyang's GDP growth rate reaching 5.2 percent last year, challenges remain. Speaking on pressing ahead with the reform of State-owned enterprises, Lyu said, "We reduced their

numbers from 587 to 160 since 2001, and it has made us leaner and more competitive."

An aging population has added urgency to talent recruitment. The city's "Talent 3.0" initiative offers 100 million yuan in grants to top teams and streamlines visa procedures for foreign experts. Partnerships with Northeastern University aim to create a high-end talent pool for emerging sectors such as AI and hydrogen energy.

Lyu envisions Shenyang as a regional hub for technology and trade. "From producing 10,000-ton machinery to shaping digital trade rules, we're becoming the 'operating system' for regional development," he said.

"Shenyang's revival isn't just economic; it's about creating a livable, globally connected city," Lyu said, adding, "When international talent chooses to stay, that's the ultimate validation of our strategy."

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## Arriving for session



Deputies from the Xizang autonomous region arrive in Beijing on Monday ahead of the third session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature. The opening of the annual session is scheduled for Wednesday. National lawmakers and political advisers have registered to attend the annual two sessions as preparations were completed on Monday. TENTSSEN SHINDEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## TCL chief stresses on high-tech manufacturing

By FAN FEIFEI  
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Further efforts should be made to optimize the financing environment for China's high-tech manufacturing sector, said Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of Chinese consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group Corp.

Li, who is a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, also called for Chinese high-tech manufacturing enterprises to increase the number of application scenarios for cutting-edge artificial intelligence technology.

He said that China's high-tech

manufacturing sector has become a cornerstone in promoting high-quality economic growth, and Chinese enterprises are catching up with leading global tech companies in fields such as integrated circuit manufacturing and semiconductor display.

China's high-tech manufacturing is a heavy-asset industry requiring large amounts of capital input.

However, manufacturing enterprises currently have some difficulties in terms of financing, Li said, highlighting the importance of increasing support for leading high-tech manufacturing companies to ensure that they gain a competitive edge amid fierce international com-



Li Dongsheng

petition.

Li suggested providing such enterprises with innovative services and assistance from the capital market, moderately easing equity financing restrictions, and improving the predictability of capital market financing.

China ranked as the world's largest manufacturer for the 15th consecutive year in 2024, and its manufacturing output accounted for about 30 percent of the global total, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

As fast-developing generative AI technology is spearheading a new round of industrial transformation and upgrading, Li said that TCL has applied AI technology in intelligent transformation and the upgrading of its manufacturing supply chain, as well as product research and development in order to improve production efficiency.

"We established an AI research and development center in Poland in 2018. Prior to that, we set up an R&D center in the United States in 2011. As a manufacturing enterprise, we will focus more on the application of AI," Li said.

So far, TCL has established 46 R&D centers and 38 manufacturing

centers around the world, with operations in more than 160 countries and regions.

He emphasized that Chinese enterprises' globalization is of vital importance in boosting the sustainable development of the Chinese economy, adding that globalization is a long-term strategy for TCL, and that domestic high-tech manufacturers should accelerate their expansion in overseas markets.

Against the backdrop of changes in global trade rules and reconstruction of the global economic pattern in recent years, Li said that Chinese enterprises should optimize their presence in global industrial and supply chains, and speed up localizing production and operations, in order to enhance their competitiveness in the manufacturing sector globally.

He also highlighted the significance of technological innovation and capital input in bolstering the development of high-tech manufacturing.

Luo Zhongwei, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Industrial Economics, said that China's high-tech manufacturing sector is playing an increasingly pivotal role in bolstering technological innovation, safeguarding the stability of industrial and supply chains, and helping the country gain competitive advantages on the global stage.

He added that it is crucial to push the manufacturing sector toward higher-end, smarter and greener production through the adoption of new-generation information technologies, including AI, 5G, big data and the internet of things.



# TWO SESSIONS

## A source of stability for chaotic world

China's two sessions showcase democracy, confidence and growth

**W**hile the world is stunned by the Oval Office confrontation between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky over the weekend — a scene rarely made public in the history of modern diplomacy — China is quietly preparing for its biggest annual political event: the two sessions.

This year's two sessions — a term for the annual meetings of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the top political advisory body — will officially kick off on Tuesday, with more than 5,000 participants.

Due to the scale and significance of the two sessions, it is usually a closely-watched event, not only in China but also around the world. Official figures show that over 3,000 reporters have registered to cover this year's meeting, about one-third of whom are from overseas.

So, apart from some routine schedules, what should we watch for in this year's two sessions? I believe this year's event will not only epitomize China's unique model of whole-process people's democracy, but also serve as a powerful testament to the nation's resilience, innovation, and cultural vitality.

Against geopolitical fragmentation and economic volatility, China is poised to deliver a message of confidence and unity.

First, the democracy. The two sessions are a vibrant showcase of China's democratic ethos.

Unlike many Western legislators who are professional politicians, the great majority of China's NPC deputies and national political advisers come from all walks of life. Their primary task is to review and vote on the work of the central government, the top procuratorate, the top court, and other relevant bodies. They also give suggestions and opinions on matters they deem necessary in the country's political, social, and economic sectors.

During the past two sessions, I've interviewed villagers, farmers, doctors, teachers, technicians, entrepreneurs, and deputies from



Zhu Zhe  
Reporter's log

many other careers. Although their opinions may not be comprehensive or mature if judged from a national or professional perspective, China's democratic system guarantees them the right to speak, and their voices are heard by the top leadership and decision-makers.

Second, confidence. Since late January, the most talked-about topics among Chinese people have been the homegrown AI technology DeepSeek and the box-office sensation *Ne Zha 2*.

The rise of AI pioneers like DeepSeek, which is believed to have outpaced global competitors in some ways, exemplifies the nation's technological leap and potential. *Ne Zha 2*, the Chinese animated movie, has earned a box office revenue of more than 14 billion yuan (\$1.92 billion) worldwide, making it one of the top 10 films at the global box office. Both have significantly boosted the morale of the Chinese public.

A high-level symposium on private enterprises, attended by President Xi Jinping on Feb 17, also underscored the Chinese authorities' latest endeavor to bolster confidence and boost the development of the private sector, which is key to the country's high-quality development.

During the meeting, China's annual growth target will be unveiled, and more details on its proactive macro policies, particularly a "moderately loose" monetary policy — a significant departure from the "prudent" approach over the past 14 years — are widely anticipated.

Therefore, the 2025 two sessions are much more than a "political ritual", as some Western media have said; they declare China's unwavering resolve to innovate and inspire.

In an era of flux, this is the confidence and strength the world urgently needs at the moment.

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## Grassroots deputy helps transform Shanghai's largest apartment complex

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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Zhang Junping, a community official with 20 years of experience, took on her role at Shanghai Kangcheng, the largest apartment complex in Shanghai, 13 years ago.

Through her unwavering dedication and the leadership team's efforts at the residential compound, the community, which accommodates 280 residential buildings and around 40,000 residents, has thrived as a place where inhabitants can quickly come together to work for a common goal.

This compares to the fact that around a decade ago, the apartment complex troubled by illegal group housing rental, residential apartments renovated for commercial use, and other problems, was dubbed by local media as "the most chaotic neighborhood in town". In 2015 alone, 185 burglaries took place at the residential compound.

"During my early days working here, I met a resident who drove to work. The middle-aged hid the community parking permit away immediately after leaving the gate of the residential compound. He said he'd feel embarrassed if others knew he lived in this community. I felt sad, and was determined to make some changes," said Zhang, 48, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee for the third year, and deputy secretary of the Communist Party of China committee of the Kangcheng neighborhood.

"Today, even my family and I would love to live here," she said, adding that residents' diverse needs, including shopping, medical care, and children's education, can be met without the need to leave the community. The quality of service has been improving to respond to people's constant pursuit for a better life.

One of the reasons for the changes taking place at the community, which was established in around the year 2000, was that the community leadership team has been open-minded in listening to residents' requirements and advice on improving their daily lives, said Zhang.

She said that the Party organization is at the grassroots level and never rejects residents' suggestions.

For example, residents demanded charging facilities for their non-motor vehicles. The residential complex has nearly 10,000 such vehicles, and the insufficiency forced some residents to risk installing additional wires themselves, causing potential safety hazards.

Last year, with resolute determination and full-scale actions, all 40 parking lots for non-motor vehicles underwent renovation, providing



Residents of Shanghai Kangcheng community attend a tug-of-war event organized by the neighborhood in July, 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Zhang Junping

residents with enough parking space and safe and adequate charging facilities. Fire-fighting facilities were added as well.

"While Shanghai's efforts to build a safe and resilient city are quickly gathering pace, at the community level, safety is the bottom line and foundation of our work. Also, we must respond to the needs of the residents and gradually build mutual trust with them," Zhang said.

Another reason for the changes was that Zhang and her team tried to mobilize as many residents as possible to participate in various aspects of neighborhood governance, which is to put the concept of building urban governance community at the grassroots level, she said.

"Community governance not only depends on the Party organization and residents who are Party members. We should invite more residents to join in. The more they participate, the more they will feel this is relevant to themselves," said Zhang, adding that daily situations, like differing opinions among neighbors regarding pet ownership, necessitate collective wisdom from more residents to devise improved solutions.

In 2023, 108 middle-aged and young residents from diverse professional fields, including property management, construction and engineering project management, finance, and law, became the first batch of "partners to build a better

community" at the residential compound. By integrating their expertise and good ideas for neighborhood development, the quality of residents' lives kept escalating, said Zhang.

For example, in addition to the initial two bus routes linking the neighborhood to a nearby metro station, a new bus route has been introduced to connect Kangcheng to Shanghai Hongqiao Railway Station and Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport. This improvement offers residents convenient transportation choices.

The concept of a "15-minute living circle" that meets residents' basic needs for shopping and leisure was proposed in Shanghai in 2014. In the Kangcheng neighborhood, residents could also feel that life is becoming increasingly easier, so their living circle has been constantly expanded.

Currently, the residential compound includes two kindergartens, a nine-year school planned from the beginning, and a nursing home for the elderly. The health center has also been expanded to a 2,000-square-meter community health service center.

"In this way, the facility not only meets our needs to replenish medications regularly, but also is equipped with departments of general medicine, dentistry, and traditional Chinese medicine. They are widely welcomed by residents," said Zheng Junwei, a 71-year-old resident in the neighborhood.

Furthermore, the number of grocery stores, food markets, barber shops, and bank outlets within the residential compound has been

growing, enhancing the convenience of residents' daily lives, he said.

Zhang emphasized that her primary focus in the upcoming year will be implementing additional measures to alleviate residents' parking challenges and promoting service to meet the personalized needs of elderly care.

"For a resident, if he or she drives home after work and fails to find a parking space, this may harm their sense of belonging to the community," Zhang said.

"However, if we want to adjust the spatial layout of some parts of the compound to free up parking spaces, we need all the residents to find an optimal solution based on the mentality of seeking common ground and working toward a shared better life. This is a great test for us to build an exchange platform and find a good way for negotiations."

Regarding elderly care, Zhang noted a growing awareness of the diverse needs of senior residents, including requirements for rehabilitation, physiotherapy, in-home night care, hospital escort services, and healthcare utilizing TCM practices. "Some also proposed needs for consultation regarding planning after retirement, and some others were interested in holding a birthday party while gathering their elderly friends together," she said.

Zhang said she would work with relevant government departments to promote work in this area. Residents may be provided with a name list of professional institutions and caregivers endorsed and supervised by the government to provide corresponding services based on personalized needs.

### PERSPECTIVE

## Culture enhancing cross-border communications

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok  
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Diversified cultural forms, particularly video products such as movies and short videos on social media platforms, will deepen cross-border communications and further improve the appeal of Chinese culture, said a Thai expert.

Culture was a buzzword during last year's two sessions. China's biggest annual political event, the annual sessions of the nation's top legislature and political advisory body, is expected to continue drawing wide attention this month.

As mentioned in last year's Government Work Report, China will implement cultural projects that creatively benefit the public and improve the services of free public cultural facilities. More efforts will be made to develop the cultural sector.

"The impressive box performance of Chinese animated film *Ne Zha 2* reflects the country's cultural achievements. It represents the rise of China's animation industry in terms of technology, an epitome of its significant overall development," said Chalermchatri Yukol, a member of Thai National Soft Power Strategy Committee and the National Film Committee.

As a sequel to the 2019 animated box office hit *Ne Zha*, *Ne Zha 2* draws inspiration from China's 16th-centu-



Chalermchatri Yukol

ry classic novel *The Investiture of the Gods*. This animated fantasy adventure has not only exceeded the earnings of last year's top-grossing film, *Inside Out 2*, but has also claimed the title of the highest-grossing animated film of all time.

As a famous Thai film and TV director, Chalermchatri said he had seen *Ne Zha* and was impressed by the storytelling, which reinterprets traditional culture from a modern perspective, aligning it more with contemporary audiences' aesthetics and values.

"The most challenging part of an animated film is technology. That's why developed countries such as the United States have dominated the related market for years. The success of *Ne Zha 2* is definitely a major breakthrough, which reflects China's rapid overall development," Chalermchatri said.

Apart from this resolute hit at the box office, he also named several other Chinese films that impressed him a lot, such as *The Eight Hundred*, which tells the story of 800 Chinese soldiers

fighting under siege from a warehouse in the middle of the Shanghai battlefield, which was entirely surrounded by the Japanese army.

"Many foreigners who haven't been to China are familiar with the country through the lens. The booming Chinese film market and the surging amount of films produced by the country show the world a more colorful and vivid China with different looks. It has helped the world to know China more," said Chalermchatri.

"To make the world know China more, China should fully encourage the blossom of all diversified art forms, covering music, film, literature, painting, etc, encouraging all kinds of art forms to bridge China with different cultures and thoughts worldwide," Chalermchatri said.

He noted that China and Thailand enjoy long-term friendships and partnerships beyond the blood ties that connect their people. But for most Thai people nowadays, such connections with China and understanding of the country are out of touch with China's current development.

"For example, the Chinese TV series mostly known by Thai people is still *Bao Qingtian*, a Chinese drama released 40 years ago. And the most popular Chinese singer is still Teresa Teng," he added.

Amid the new communication trend due to technological reform,

Chalermchatri stressed the importance of triggering the interests and curiosities of people outside, especially the younger generation.

Also, he prioritized the role of social media platforms in boosting cross-border communication and mutual understanding amid recent reports on "TikTok Refugees" — people who decided to explore alternative social media platforms due to potential TikTok bans.

"Social media platforms are open stages for everyone to share their stories. People want to talk and communicate. It's human nature that shouldn't be banned due to geographical politics," he said.

He revealed that there are several cultural events jointly organized by the Thai and Chinese governments and private sectors to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations, including the first Thai-Chinese Film Festival that is to be scheduled in Chiang Mai this June.

"Also, I will lead a team to participate in film festivals and some other cultural events this year in several Chinese cities including Shanghai and Kunming (in Yunnan province). Seeing is believing. I hope the lens can strengthen ties between people of the two countries and encourage them to visit each other more for a deeper understanding," he said.

### What the NPC deputies say



Lin Lan, NPC deputy, vice-president of the China Artists Association

The new era presents new demands and high requirements for cultivating professional artistic and design talent. The development of new industries, new business formats and new business models, dubbed the "three new" economy, requires design to effectively bridge the demand and supply sides, continuously driving industrial transformation and upgrading. A national platform for nurturing top young artistic talent could be established in a structured and comprehensive manner, alongside regional platforms built through multi-stakeholder collaboration.



Li Zwei, NPC deputy, a teacher of Liaoyang special education school in Liaoning province

For a long time, little to no policy support has been in place for people with autism. Greater efforts can be made to vocational education for individuals with autism, including expanding curriculum development, establishing vocational training programs, and improving the educational framework of vocational schools. These measures would equip autistic people with practical skills, providing them a pathway to integrate into society and realize their social value. Additionally, government departments should implement targeted assistance for those people and offer policy support to help them secure stable employment.



Chen Hongbin, NPC deputy, director of the supervisory office of Yancheng No 1 Primary School in Jiangsu province

Artificial intelligence education system should be enhanced in basic education. Education authorities could develop unified yet differentiated curriculum standards, enhance experiment conditions, and establish tailored guidelines to ensure that students nationwide receive AI education suited to their needs. Meanwhile, efforts should be made to strengthen the development and training of teachers in AI, promote innovation in curricula and teaching methods, and establish a scientific evaluation and feedback mechanism.

LI SHANGYI



# TWO SESSIONS

Zhou Li'an

## Local competition drives rural vitalization

Rural vitalization is one of the key strategic imperatives of China's development paradigm. After eradicating absolute poverty, the country has shifted its focus to the implementation of the rural vitalization strategy. However, this is not merely an economic issue; it is a complex interplay of political and economic factors. The task therefore is to expedite this process through political-economic interaction.

At the heart of China's rural development lies a sophisticated mechanism of political-economic interaction. This dynamic, which I refer to as the "government plus market" model, is crucial to the development of county-level economies and the broader rural vitalization efforts. Local governments and market entities in a specific region maintain a frequently competitive relationship with their counterparts in other areas, spurring one another to propel growth.

Local governments' competition is based on critical metrics such as GDP, tax revenue and foreign investment, while businesses engage in market competition. These dual forces are intricately intertwined, propelling the local economies forward and, in turn, contribute to rural vitalization.

County governments play a pivotal role in this mechanism. Acting as a bridge between national policies and local realities, county-level governments are key to translating top-down policies into actionable strategies. In recent years, the central government has laid greater emphasis on ensuring that local officials play a hands-on role in driving rural development.

Through a multilevel system, local governments are now directly responsible for implementing policies tailored to meet the economic needs of their areas. By assigning specific duties and targets to local officials, the central government ensures that rural vitalization efforts are not just abstract plans but concrete actions that align with market demands. This shift has been instrumental in turning policies into real economic opportunities, boosting local industries and improving the livelihoods of farmers and entrepreneurs alike.

A key driver of rural vitalization has been the development of specialized local industries. Apt examples of this are the crayfish industry in Qianjiang city, Hubei province, and the apple industry in Luochuan, Shaanxi province. These industries owe their success to the guidance, coordination and empowerment provided by local governments.

Besides, the performance of local industries directly affects the career development of local officials. As such, there is a strong incentive for governments to support these industries. In



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

turn, these local industries contribute significantly to both economic growth and rural vitalization.

The local snacks industry in Shaxian county, Fujian province, is another example of how government support can help vitalize a traditional sector. The Shaxian snacks industry has become a symbol of local economic success, transforming into a national brand while providing substantial employment opportunities. Its success highlights the effectiveness of the political-economic model, which ensures local government support, coupled with market forces, fosters sustainable growth and creates national recognition.

Moreover, rural e-commerce has emerged as a powerful force driving

rural vitalization. Once a distant possibility, it has now become a key component of China's rural economy. Thanks to the rise of online platforms, mobile payments, and advanced logistics, rural areas that were once isolated have been able to connect with global markets. This transformation has been made possible by not just technology but also the efforts of local government officials who acted as intermediaries, bridging the gap between government policy and market opportunities.

In this process, three key trends have emerged. First, e-commerce platforms help match supply with demand, offering farmers the opportunity to engage in customized production. Second, grassroots entrepreneurs benefit from a relatively

low entry threshold thanks to the support of e-commerce platforms. And third, local governments provide crucial support in the form of funding, land and talents to fuel the growth of rural e-commerce.

These developments highlight an important fact — that industrial revitalization is at the core of rural vitalization, and the key to success lies in fostering robust collaboration between governments and business.

A further evolution of this model can be seen in the "company-farmer" approach, which has proven effective in many rural areas. This model encourages collaboration between businesses and farmers, providing farmers with access to new technologies and financial resources, and helping businesses secure a steady supply of raw materials.

In some areas, this model has expanded to include local governments and village collectives, creating a more comprehensive "government-enterprise-village" model. This approach strengthens the collective economy, increases farmers' income, and promotes long-term, sustainable growth of rural communities.

One of the most notable developments in rural vitalization has been the emergence of "rural CEOs". These individuals, often returnees from urban areas or veterans, are taking on the responsibility of leading rural economic and social development. By combining rural governance with business management, the rural CEOs are navigating the complexities of the "government plus market" dynamics, helping transform rural vitalization from a political directive to a tangible reality.

To attract and retain these talented individuals, local governments need to offer targeted support and create an enabling environment for their success.

Rural vitalization is a complex, multifaceted endeavor that requires the coordination of government policies, market forces, and talents. By using the political-economic interaction model and industry innovation, and cultivating talents, China is setting the stage for sustainable rural development. While the road ahead may be challenging, the vision of a prosperous future for China's rural areas is gradually becoming a reality.

And by ensuring the government and the market work in harmony, rural vitalization will continue to be a driving force behind China's overall socioeconomic development, helping to realize the goal of shared prosperity.

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Zeng Xiaomin

## Modern twist on White Snake reviving Cantonese Opera

Traditional Chinese culture is the spiritual lifeline of the Chinese nation and the foundation of China's cultural confidence. Cantonese Opera, as an intangible cultural heritage, is a cultural symbol and shared treasure of the people in Guangdong province, and the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions. It is therefore necessary that litterateurs and artists shoulder the responsibility of delving deep into the lives of the people to create more masterpieces.

Take, for example, the Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute's production of *Madam White Snake - The Affection*. The production has breathed new life into the ancient myth, blending romance with Chinese aesthetics. The opera has toured more than 40 cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Macao and Taipei, as well as countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain and Singapore.

Since its debut in 2014, the opera has been performed more than 300 times, earning over 40 million yuan (\$5.5 million). It has helped overseas Chinese people to cherish their connection with the motherland and prompted international audiences to admire traditional Chinese culture.

The *Legend of the White Snake* is a popular folktale passed down generations for more than 1,000 years. As one of China's Four Great Folktales, the story of two snake spirits is deeply intertwined with traditional Chinese culture, evolving from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) through the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, and continuing to influence people in modern times.

The movie's success not only drew greater attention to the opera but also provided new directions for the innovative development of traditional operas.

A film adaptation of the Cantonese Opera, with the same name, was released in 2021, breaking box office records for Chinese opera movies. It became a milestone for the genre, winning numerous awards both at home and abroad. Its success can be attributed to not only its artistic excellence but also its ability to strike a balance between tradition and innovation, and which in turn is bridging the gap between the past and the present.

The production of *Madam White Snake - The Affection* seamlessly integrates tradition with innovation. It preserves the classical singing and performance techniques, allowing audiences to experience the timeless charm of Cantonese Opera. At the same time, it incorporates new artistic forms, plot structures, modern stage technology and musical elements to make the opera more engaging. It is also available on new media platforms, enabling a broader audience to appreciate its beauty, injecting new vitality into traditional culture.

*Madam White Snake - The Affection* has attracted younger audiences, too, ensuring traditional culture continues to thrive. The Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute has accorded priority to contemporary aesthetic values in the production, ensuring the opera resonates with modern audiences. At its core, the opera explores the theme of love, which transcends age, gender and regional boundaries.

As an eponymous film, *Madam White Snake - The Affection* played a pivotal role in promoting Cantonese Opera. By employing advanced visual technology, the film showcases traditional Chinese aesthetics, enthralling the global audience with the charm of Cantonese Opera. The movie's success not only drew greater attention to the opera but also provided new directions for the innovative development of traditional operas.

In recent years, "China-Chic" has emerged as a popular cultural phenomenon, spanning music, dance and other art forms, as well as fashion fueled by the nation's growing cultural confidence. The popularity of *Madam White Snake - The Affection* shows that traditional opera can still radiate with its vitality in the new era. By embracing innovation and leveraging modern technology and new media platforms, traditional opera can influence young people and become a part of their spiritual world.

Therefore, efforts should be made to promote fine traditional Chinese culture globally and spread its influence globally through cultural innovation and international exchanges. In this era of globalization, it is essential to showcase the charm of Chinese culture, making Cantonese Opera and other Chinese operas important vehicles for telling China's stories and amplifying China's voice worldwide.

The performance of *Madam White Snake - The Affection* abroad has allowed the world to appreciate the allure of Cantonese Opera and better understand China. The need is to continue upholding tradition while promoting innovation, enabling Cantonese Opera and other Chinese operas to impress global audiences.

Through such efforts, Cantonese Opera will become not only a new cultural emblem showcasing traditional Chinese culture but also a cultural bridge connecting China and the world. Hopefully, Cantonese Opera will become a part of young people's lives, and traditional culture will flourish in the new era.

The author is director of the Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Deng Hui

## Industry-specific universities a necessity in new era

Industry-specific universities, which are focused on certain sectors, are unique to China's higher education system, with their development and changes closely related to educational system reforms and their establishment, growth and transition highlighting the distinct characteristics of the times.

Having the advantage of integrating education and industry, industry-specific universities continue to power the high-quality economic and social development of the country. They have developed an array of special disciplines covering key areas of the economy, and helped form an innovation ecosystem through industry-university-research cooperation.

The importance of social services for industry-specific universities has become increasingly prominent thanks to China's rapid economic and social development. These universities shoulder the mission of cultivating industry talents, seeding industry innovation, and putting technological achievements to commercial use to promote socioeconomic development.

However, there is a need for industry-specific universities to develop a new development system, keeping pace with the high-quality socioeconomic development. The development model of universities is undergoing a fundamental transformation, with the focus shifting from giving people access to education to fulfilling the personalized and diversified resource needs of high-quality higher education. Industry-specific universities should also shift their focus from their own growth to serving the needs of socioeconomic development, and helping solve problems to facilitate high-quality socioeconomic development.

Among the five major functions of universities — talent cultivation, scien-

tific research, social services, preserving and promoting cultural heritages, and international exchanges and cooperation — social services, being the weakest, are restricting the high-quality development of talent training and scientific research. Hence, the urgent task of such universities is to comprehensively improve their social services.

As a fundamental function of universities, social services are an important indicator of their educational level and social contribution. The need is to make social services a driving force for the high-quality development of industry-specific universities and boost their strength.

By providing better social services, industry-specific universities can strengthen their connection and interactions with and better understand the development needs of the local economy and society, while providing targeted services and support for governments and enterprises. By offering differentiated social service projects and products, industry-specific universities can enhance their brand advantages and sharpen their core competitiveness.

It is therefore necessary to establish an industry-university-research mechanism that adopts a goal-oriented approach, promotes innovation through collaboration, provides resource guarantee and evaluates performances to improve the social services of these universities.

First, industry-specific universities should clearly chart their service direction and create a distinctive service system by focusing on how to meet national strategic and local development needs, so as to cultivate talents that have a sharp industrial vision, can achieve breakthroughs in key technologies to boost industrial development, and establish technology research institutes and modern industrial colleges to serve industries.

Second, these universities should also establish an open collaborative network and develop innovative service supply models. By establishing a multi-channel and multi-dimensional cooperation mechanism, they can explore a more collaborative innovation model, help enterprises address their various problems, and tap the market to test these solutions.

Third, the universities should take measures to improve their capacity-building mechanism and lay a solid foundation for talent cultivation. They also need to give full play to the collaborative education approach of "on-campus and industry mentors", and include teachers' achievements in social services to evaluate their performances to promote innovation.

And fourth, industry-specific universities need to establish a comprehensive evaluation system that takes into consideration the service scale, economic benefits and social impact, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of social services in real time through a big data platform. They should also link the evaluation results with the allocation of special funds and resources and support the formation of a dynamic and optimized resource allocation model. These measures will help transform industry-specific universities from traditional teaching institutions to modern service-oriented institutions, helping boost industrial upgrading.

The job of industry-specific universities is to nurture talents that can boost the country's socioeconomic development. Major economic and social transformations have shaped the development of these universities, aligning their "specification", "de-specification" and "re-specification" in relation to industries with China's economic and social development phases.

"Re-specification" means industry-specific universities changing their "one-way feedback model" and adopting a new "two-way symbiotic model" and changing their teaching methods to meet the needs of different types of talents and accommodate technological innovation brought about by cross-industry integration thanks to the fourth scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation.

"De-specification" refers to industry-specific universities developing a better understanding and actively responding to adaptive changes. Through "re-specification" strategy, industry-specific universities can better serve the needs of economic and social development, and enhance their competitiveness and influence.

For example, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics has adopted a "re-specification" strategy by developing new disciplines and deepening the integration of industry and education. The different disciplines or subjects the university offers highlight their financial characteristics and help the students to explore green areas. The university has deepened its cooperation with local government departments by intensifying research in the region's economy, and providing more diversified and higher-quality services. These measures have not only boosted the high-quality development of the university, but also provided useful reference for a "re-specification" approach of industry-specific universities.

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## CHINA

## Seeking jobs



College graduates look for opportunities at a job fair at the Xinjiang International Convention and Exhibition Center in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Sunday. More than 500 enterprises and institutions from across the country offered over 13,000 job opportunities, spanning industries such as manufacturing, marketing, energy, finance and internet technology. LIU XIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## More than 620 fraud suspects repatriated

By WANG QINGYUN  
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More than 620 Chinese suspects in Myanmar, Myanmar, have been repatriated in a crackdown on cross-border telecommunications fraud jointly launched by China, Myanmar and Thailand, China's Ministry of Public Security said on Monday.

The ministry said in a statement that officials from the three countries held a ministerial-level meeting in Bangkok on Friday to coordinate efforts against telecom and online fraud.

The meeting marked a milestone in joint law enforcement efforts, with participants agreeing to establish a regular coordination mechanism and continue repatriating suspects.

Officials called for stronger information sharing, improved repatriation procedures and more effective measures to combat the fraud, which they said remains a serious problem that harms economic growth, social stability and the rights of people in multiple countries.

China, Myanmar and Thailand need to deepen cooperation to target criminal organizations, reduce their operating space and eradicate such crimes, officials said. They also called for greater law enforcement collaboration with other nations to maintain regional stability.

The meeting came less than two weeks after Myanmar repatriated the first group of Chinese fraud suspects from Myanmar. On Feb 20, Chinese police escorted 200 suspects back to China on chartered flights.

Authorities have intensified their crackdown on fraud operations in Myanmar since January, following reports of Chinese nationals disappearing at the Thailand-Myanmar border.

Among them was actor Wang Xing, whose alleged kidnapping case drew widespread attention. The Ministry of Public Security said it successfully rescued Wang and several others and brought them back to China.

Wang had arrived in Bangkok on Jan 3 before being taken to Myanmar and sold to multiple telecom fraud operations, the ministry said.

## Guidelines to boost continuing education

Universities urged to focus on advanced fields such as AI and green development

By XU NUO  
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The Ministry of Education has released this year's guidelines for managing continuing education programs and off-campus teaching sites, emphasizing the need to align talent cultivation with national strategies and market demands.

"Higher education institutions should make continuing education an integral part of their talent cultivation and social service system," the guidelines state. "Institutions should fully consider their educational positioning and academic strength, as well as market demands and the employment competitiveness of disciplines. They should also thoroughly justify the need for new programs before opening them and continuously optimize the structures of such programs."

Continuing education is a parallel track to China's regular higher education system, which consists of full-time, campus-based study for recent high school graduates who have passed the national college entrance exam, or *gaokao*. Continuing education, by contrast, offers full-time or part-time programs designed for adults seeking to upgrade their skills or qualifications. It includes

online education, adult education, the higher education self-study test and open education.

To improve the structure of continuing education programs, the guidelines encourage higher education institutions with the necessary conditions to establish new programs in fields such as advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, quantum technology, life sciences, energy, green low-carbon development, international organizations and financial technology. Institutions are also urged to offer programs in areas concerning people's livelihoods, such as domestic services.

The guidelines support the creation of programs in fields of urgent need, including opera, cultural relic protection and restoration, non-common languages, foreign-related legal systems and international communication.

The new measures are part of China's broader efforts to reform its continuing education sector.

In 2022, the Education Ministry issued a plan to promote continuing education reform, aiming to address issues such as unclear positioning, underdeveloped standards, unsound systems and low-quality talent cultivation, while advancing

high-quality educational development.

Data from the Education Ministry shows that 1,725 higher education institutions offered continuing education programs, enrolling a total of 12.093 million students in 2021 — about 25 percent of the country's total higher education enrollment.

However, as regular higher education expands, the scale of continuing education is shrinking, wrote Yue Chuanyong, former vice-president of Ningbo University in Zhejiang province, and Xu Rihua, a lecturer at the university's Institute of Adult Education.

"As such, the focus of continuing education needs to transition from scale expansion to quality improvement," they wrote in an article published on the ministry's website.

Starting this fall, the Ministry of Education will standardize terminology for continuing education, eliminating terms such as "correspondence education" and "part-time education" in favor of the uniform term "non-full-time education."

Continuing education programs at regular universities will uniformly admit students through the adult college entrance examination, meet basic professional teaching requirements, standardize the minimum duration of study and unify graduation certificates, according to the new guidelines.

## PMI: Private sector, consumption and tech innovation to be further prioritized

From page 1

"During the two sessions, policymakers will likely announce a higher fiscal deficit ratio, as well as greater issuance of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds and local government special bonds, while following a moderately accommodative monetary policy."

"Stronger support will be provided for the replacement of old growth drivers with new ones, alongside measures to stabilize the real estate market," he said.

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said: "China's economy appears to be having a relatively good start to the year. Investment and consumption might have been supported by the tech-led stock market rally. The expansion of the trade-in program is stimulating sales of digital goods."

Stronger support will be provided for the replacement of old growth drivers with new ones."

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International

As of Feb 19, more than 3.97 million consumers bought over 4.87 million units of home appliances through trade-in deals this year.

Over 26.71 million consumers have applied for subsidies to buy new digital products, including smartphones, tablets, smartwatches and wristbands. In addition, some 647,000 electric bikes have been

exchanged for new ones, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

"On the domestic demand front, China has made remarkable achievements in boosting the trade-in program for consumer goods," said Li Chao, chief economist at Zhesang Securities. "We anticipate a strong start to the economy in the first quarter. First-quarter GDP growth could reach 5.1 percent, with the full-year trajectory expected to follow a U-shaped pattern."

Citing recent policy signals, Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, said that a greater emphasis will be placed on stabilizing the private sector, boosting consumption and strengthening technological innovation.

"This could be reflected in new policy statements and new incremental measures to provide stronger support," Xiong said.

## Construction begins on cold-seep research facility

By YAN DONGJIE  
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China has begun construction of a deep-sea research platform in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, marking a major step in the country's efforts to explore extreme marine environments and develop sustainable ocean resources.

The Research Facility of Cold-seep Ecosystems, led by the South China Sea Institute of Oceanology under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, is scheduled for completion within five years.

The project will combine a manned deep-sea laboratory on the ocean floor with advanced land-based simulation systems. The hybrid design is intended to allow long-term, high-precision studies of cold-seep ecosystems — unique biological communities that thrive in darkness and under extreme pressure, where methane and other chemicals seep from the seafloor. These ecosystems, often called deep-sea oases, support species such as tube worms, clams and rare corals that rely on chemical energy rather than sunlight.

"Cold seeps hold keys to understanding Earth's carbon cycle, life in extreme environments and the safe extraction of resources such as methane hydrates," said Li Chaolun, director of the South China Sea Institute of Oceanology and leader of the project. "This facility will position China at the forefront of deep-sea science and green ocean economy innovation."

The research center will focus on three core challenges: how cold-seep ecosystems evolve, how organisms adapt to extreme conditions, and how methane — a potent greenhouse gas — interacts with marine environments. Scientists expect its findings to inform climate policies and guide environmentally friendly deep-sea energy development, Li said.

The facility will also test technologies for prolonged human habita-

tion in deep-sea environments, with potential applications in underwater mineral mining, engineering and ecological monitoring.

"This isn't just about science — it's about translating discoveries into industrial breakthroughs," Li said, highlighting possible advances in marine biotechnology and methane hydrate extraction.

Located in Guangzhou, a key city in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the project aims to leverage regional strengths in marine research and manufacturing. Once completed, it will serve as an open-access platform for international collaboration and attract top researchers, according to the institute.

Li said the project aligns with China's goal of becoming a global maritime power and achieving carbon neutrality. By integrating land-sea research capabilities, it is expected to help establish the Greater Bay Area as an innovation hub while addressing climate change and sustainable resource use.

The initial four-year construction phase will focus on building pressure-resistant deep-sea laboratory structures, developing high-precision land-based simulation systems and establishing a research infrastructure network that connects sea and land, the institute said.

A one-year offshore operational phase in 2030 will test new equipment — including methane leakage monitoring systems and life-support modules for deep-sea crews — in real-world conditions. Scientists say this phase will help bridge the gap between laboratory research and practical marine applications, ensuring that new technologies can function in extreme environments.

Researchers worldwide anticipate findings that could influence energy strategies, biotechnology, and climate policy, Li said.

## Rough weather



A child picks up hailstones in Duchang county, Jiangxi province, on Monday. The area experienced severe convective weather due to a cold front, which caused thunderstorms, strong winds, intense lightning, hail and brief heavy rainfall, resulting in damage to some crops. FU JIANBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Quake victims to have new homes by year-end

The rebuilding of eight villages severely affected by the 6.8 magnitude earthquake in the Xizang autonomous region started on Monday, marking the start of a recovery effort aimed at relocating over 120,000 residents into new homes by the end of this year.

The launch ceremony was held in Gurum village of Dingri county in the city of Shigatse following a month of preparations, including debris clearance, risk assessment and housing designs. Opinions were gathered from residents to help finalize housing designs.

"The threshing ground is shared by several households, and the livestock pens are right next to our homes, making both daily life and work very convenient," said Migmar Tsering, a local villager.

Kang Zhuo, associated with the construction company for the rebuilding project in Gurum vil-

lage, said the company would prioritize ecological and environmental protection and provide employment opportunities for villagers, ensuring that affected residents can move into their new homes as soon as possible.

Dawa Tsering, Party secretary of the city, said most of the reconstruction will be on the original sites of the villages as per residents' preferences, except for those on the earthquake belt or in areas prone to landslides or floods, which will be relocated.

On Jan 7, Dingri and neighboring counties experienced a 6.8 magnitude earthquake that killed 126 people and leveled thousands of houses.

According to reconstruction plans, more than 120,000 people currently living in temporary shelters will move into new homes by the end of the year.

XINHUA

## CHINA

## Hangzhou news program adds AI-generated hosts

By ZHAO RUINAN and CHEN YE in Hangzhou

A television channel in Hangzhou has launched an innovative newscast featuring AI-generated anchors, drawing significant attention and sparking discussions about the role of artificial intelligence in the media industry.

During the Spring Festival holiday, Hangzhou News Broadcast, produced by Hangzhou Culture, Radio and Television Group, used AI-generated anchor Xiaoyu for the entire news reporting process.

Xiaoyu was made to look like human host Liu Yuchen, who praised her digital counterpart.

"Seeing a digital AI avatar that looks exactly like me for the first time was magical," Liu said. "After more than a year of continuous learning and technological advancements, it has become more and more like me."

Liu said she began participating in the creation of the AI anchor during the Asian Games last year.

"The AI needed to capture my voice, movements, expressions and more. The process was quite cumbersome and time-consuming back then, often taking several hours to record just one aspect," she said.

Since 2023, the company has been developing an AI-driven short video production workshop, which led to the launch of its first project—the Intelligent Language Digital Human Application Creation Platform.

According to the company, the platform uses professional-level human filming combined with AI algorithms to replicate appearances and voices, creating ultra-realistic digital humans for broadcast.

With the debut of Xiaoyu, Hangzhou News Broadcast became the first news program in China to feature AI-generated hosts for an entire show.

AI technology has advanced rapidly, and in less than a year, Xiaoyu has undergone multiple updates.

"Now, capturing a single image may only take five to 10 minutes. That's quite impressive," Liu said.

The AI avatars have also become increasingly lifelike.

"My male co-host also has a digital avatar that can even replicate the movement of his Adam's apple, making it very realistic," she added.

Other Chinese media outlets

are also exploring AI in journalism. In Shenzhen, a local TV station introduced a humanoid robot named Kua Fu, which served as a special reporter at the city's political meetings this year. In January, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala featured robots performing choreographed dances, clapping and twisting their hips with ease.

The use of AI-generated anchors is not new. In March last year during China's two sessions—the annual meetings between the National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the top political advisory body—China Central Television's financial news division created AI versions of real anchors who provided real-time responses to audience questions.

The growing presence of AI in newsrooms has sparked debate, with some expressing concerns that the technology could replace human journalists and lead to job losses.

Liu said, however, that AI avatars are meant to be partners at work rather than replacements.

"AI avatars can handle routine tasks in news broadcasts, allowing us to dedicate more time to in-depth reporting and meaningful communication with interviewees," she said.

Although AI newscasting is highly precise and nearly error-free, it lacks the emotional nuance of human anchors, Liu said, calling emotional expression a unique advantage of real broadcasters.

Wang Min, an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at the Minzu University of China, said AI optimizes the division of labor but cannot replace human judgment, critical thinking or creativity.

"Instead, AI can free up journalists to focus on deeper investigative work and more comprehensive analysis, ultimately elevating the role of the news industry in society," she said.

Wang added that AI's impact extends beyond journalism, with applications in healthcare, education, culture and tourism.

"AI enhances efficiency, optimizes workflows and provides assistance, allowing people to focus on more creative tasks," she said.

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## Behind the epic work

Visitors pose with character puppets and posters from the blockbuster hit *Ne Zha 2* at a behind-the-scenes exhibition of the film in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Monday. The display mainly focuses on the manuscripts of important characters in the film and the production details behind several scenes. It allows the audience to have a comprehensive understanding of the design iteration process of the characters, scenes, concepts and more.

LIU ZHONGJUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Manned lunar exploration mission steadily progressing

Design work, construction of primary components proceeding as scheduled

By ZHAO LEI zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China is making steady progress in its manned lunar exploration program, with all research and construction work advancing as planned to achieve the goal of sending Chinese astronauts to the lunar surface by 2030, according to the China Manned Space Agency.

The agency said in a news release on Monday that key components of the ambitious project, including the Long March 10 heavy-lift carrier rocket, the Mengzhou manned spacecraft, the Lanyue lunar lander, the Wangyu lunar suit and the Tansuo crew rover, are currently in the preliminary prototype development phase, and the design work is proceeding on schedule.

Meanwhile, construction of new testing and launch facilities is underway at the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province. The overall design plans for the tracking, telemetry and command

systems, as well as landing site infrastructure, have been finalized and construction work is set to begin imminently, according to the release.

Once realized, China's manned lunar program will make the country the second nation to land astronauts on the moon, significantly boosting its global space standing.

The United States successfully made six Apollo crewed missions in the 1960s and 1970s, bringing 12 Americans to the silver celestial body.

The country's roadmap for its first manned lunar expedition involves two Long March 10 launches from the Wenchang spaceport to transport a Lanyue lunar lander and a Mengzhou manned spacecraft to lunar orbit.

After reaching their preset orbital positions, the Lanyue lander and the Mengzhou vessel will rendezvous and dock. Two crew members will enter the lander, which will then undock and

descend toward the lunar surface for an engine-assisted soft landing.

On the moon, the astronauts will drive a Tansuo rover to carry out scientific tasks and collect samples. Upon completion of their assignments, they will return to the Lanyue module, which will fly them back to their spaceship waiting in lunar orbit.

In the final stage, the astronauts will carry the samples into the Mengzhou spacecraft, which will then undock and carry the crew back to Earth.

To prepare for the challenging adventure, China has selected its fourth group of astronauts, who are currently training for lunar landing and surface operations.

In another development, the space agency said in the release that it will arrange two manned spaceflights—the Shenzhou XX and XXI—and the Tianzhou 9 cargo mission for travel to the Tiangong space station.

Crew members for the two upcoming flights have been selected and are undergoing training, it noted.

So far, Chinese astronauts from eight crews have carried out more than 180 scientific research and application projects aboard Tiangong, spanning fields such as life science, human physiology, microgravity physics and cutting-edge space technologies.

Experts have said that these in-orbit experiments aim to advance humanity's understanding of long-term space travel, novel material development under microgravity conditions and innovative engineering solutions for extraterrestrial environments.

The operations have led to multiple world-class achievements such as the first germplasm resources of rice and ratoon rice developed in space, and the first human embryonic stem cells differentiated into hematopoietic stem/precursor cells in space.

The accomplishments also include the world's first cold atom interference gyroscope in space microgravity, the first high-throughput in-orbit microbial control test platform, and the longest operation of a space-based water ecosystem.

## Wild species populations rebound, thanks to policies and protections

By YANG DONGJIE yangdongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Wild populations of giant pandas, crested ibises and Asian elephants in China have continued to grow as their habitats and breeding environments improve, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration announced on Monday.

China is building a national park system that will be the world's largest, protecting more than 80 percent of the country's key wildlife species and their habitats, the administration said while marking the 12th World Wildlife Day on Monday.

Officials attributed the improvement in ecosystems and flagship species conservation to stronger policies and legal protections, increased financial investment and coordinated efforts in both in situ and ex situ conservation.

China is home to about 3,100 species of terrestrial vertebrates and 130,000 named insect species. It also has more than 38,000 species of higher plants, including over 4,000 rare and endangered wild plant species.

According to the latest monitoring data, the wild giant panda population has risen from about 1,100 in the 1980s to nearly 1,900. Snow leopards now number more than 1,200, and since the launch of China's pilot national park system in 2017, the number of Siberian tigers has grown from 27 to 70, and Amur leopards from 42 to 80.

The crested ibis population has increased from seven at the time of



An ornithologist demonstrates raptor rescue techniques at an event hosted by the Shenyang Raptor Rescue Center in Shenyang, Liaoning province, on Sunday. WANG QIBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

its rediscovery to over 7,000. The Tibetan antelope population has rebounded from 60,000 to 70,000 in the late 1990s to more than 300,000.

Some critically endangered plants have also seen significant recovery. There were only three known Baishan fir trees when they were discovered, but more than 4,000 have since been reintroduced to the wild. Similarly, when the Putuo hornbeam tree was discovered, it was the only one known to exist. Now, over 4,000 have been reintroduced to the wild.

In recent years, China has strengthened its wildlife protec-

tion laws, updated the national lists of protected wild animals and plants, and published a list of important terrestrial wildlife habitats.

The country has also established flagship animal protection research centers for species such as giant pandas, Asian elephants, pangolins, Pere David's deer, blue-crowned laughingthrushes and crested ibises.

The National Forestry and Grassland Administration said it will continue to improve wildlife protection through enhanced monitoring, habitat conservation and efforts to promote the coexistence of humans and nature.

## Study shows correct stroke order key to improving Chinese writing skills

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn

A new study has confirmed that the ability to follow correct stroke order significantly enhances foreign learners' Chinese writing skills, including recognizing and remembering characters.

Published in the top-tier linguistics journals *System* and *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, the research underscores the importance of structured handwriting instruction in Chinese language education. The landmark study was a collaboration between researchers at Tianjin Normal University and the University at Albany-State University of New York.

Immediate and delayed tests showed that participants who followed the correct stroke order performed significantly better in their writing with accuracy and speed, character recognition and long-term memory retention, according to lead researcher Yu Miao, a professor in the department of psychology at Tianjin Normal University.

The research tracked 43 Chinese-as-a-second-language learners from 15 countries with the help of a computer-assisted learning system. Participants were divided into three groups: one practicing correct stroke order, another following random stroke order and a third receiving no stroke order.

Test results showed that participants in the first group recognized and wrote characters 15 percent faster than those in the other two groups. Their memory retention of characters was also significantly longer. The study further indicated

that recognition accuracy could increase by 20 percent when writing accuracy improved by 30 percent.

"Stroke order is more than a writing convention. It helps create cognitive scaffolding for the decomposition and reconstruction of Chinese characters," Yu said.

The study provides strong empirical support for stroke order instruction and offers insights into the development of intelligent Chinese learning tools. The research team constructed a dynamic stroke visualization system that breaks down Chinese characters into animated stroke sequences, helping learners visualize and replicate the correct writing process more easily. The system also records learners' behavioral data and tracks improvements in writing accuracy, speed and memory retention.

The research highlights the challenges faced by second language learners in writing Chinese characters, which are logographic and structurally complex. Many students struggle with rote copying methods, which fail to provide meaningful learning connections.

"Rote copying is not effective because learners only retain fragmented images of Chinese characters, which is not helpful for long-term memory," said co-author Sun Hui of Tianjin Normal University. "By contrast, our structured stroke practice helps build a durable mental model for recognizing and using *hanzi*—Chinese characters."

Foreign students who participated in the study reported noticeable improvements after learning stroke order systematically. "Before learning stroke order, my

writing was inconsistent, and I found characters difficult to remember," said Otieno Innocent Omondi, a graduate student from Kenya. "Stroke order makes my writing easier. It's like a roadmap—it tells me where to start and how to complete each *hanzi* properly."

For Supakchanad Chookan, a Thai student at Tianjin Normal University, structured handwriting practice made a difference in her learning attitude and strategies.

"Since practicing structured handwriting, I have made fewer mistakes in my homework and feel more confident in writing," she said.

Based on their findings, researchers advocate for integrating stroke order instruction into Chinese-as-a-second-language curricula, incorporating dynamic learning tools with real-time feedback and designing handwriting practices tailored to different proficiency levels.

"Many believe typing alone is sufficient for learners who want to write in Chinese, but our research proves otherwise," Yu said. "Typing activates different cognitive processes compared with handwriting. Proper stroke order builds learners' procedural memory and reinforces long-term retention and comprehension."

To further verify their findings, Yu and his team plan to use functional magnetic resonance imaging—a method of visualizing brain activity by detecting changes in blood flow—to explore how stroke order training activates language processing areas in the brain.

Guo Yanqi contributed to this story.

# CHINA

By YANG FEIYUE

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For those who watched *Spirited Away* by Japanese animation maestro Hayao Miyazaki, the sight of one of Wang Limin's fish tanks will most likely evoke a sense of *deja vu*.

Wang, a teacher who works at a college in Fujian province, has a passion for landscape design, and in 2020 replicated a scene from the movie in an aquarium.

Amid the gentle swimming of goldfish, a red gate, submerged in water and framed by trees draped in rich green foliage, helps create an otherworldly ambience reminiscent of the film. The attention to detail is striking, with a stone path leading up to the gate, appearing just as it did in the movie.

"You can see it is still running perfectly, and all I have to do is renew the water and glass from time to time," said Wang.

The idea of crafting the exquisite fish tank struck him when he stumbled upon instructional videos on creating a miniature ecological system.

"I have always loved handwork, so I figured it would be a great diversion from my stressful academic life," said Wang who was engaged in postgraduate studies in environment and garden design back then.

As an animation fan, he thought of bringing to life the *Spirited Away* scene as his first fish tank creation.

From drafting a sketch of the scene, to finding wood, grass and gravel, and fitting and assembling every part, it took him a month to pull off the project.

"It requires keen aesthetic sensibility, a deep understanding of biological cycles, and the right materials,"



Yu Qifei's ecological wall in his home.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A woman shows her glass display during a micro-landscape making event in Bozhou, Anhui province, in March 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wang said, adding that all the components must be scaled to the correct proportion. Finding the right materials was also a major challenge.

"They would have to endure in the water, and be able to be manipulated and processed, while looking good, and being safe for the fish," he added.

Wang's attention to detail also extends to choosing fish-safe paints and ensuring the ecosystem remains sustainable by maintaining proper biological cycles — where fish waste nourishes algae, and water plants photosynthesize and generate oxygen for the aquatic life.

The work proved to be a labor of love. "It has been a great decoration for my place. Whenever I see it after work, I feel relaxed," Wang said.

Compared with regular fish tanks, Wang believes his has a more therapeutic effect and can evoke positive responses in people who love aquatic animals, natural landscapes or animation.

When he posted videos of crafting the fish tank on social media platforms, such as Bilibili, they went viral.

"They received more than 1 million views in a short time and made it to the most-searched list in Bilibili's animal section," Wang said. "Many fans have since shown great interest and admiration for my ecological tank," he added.

## Nature in miniature

Sharing the same interest with Wang, Li Ang from Beijing has taken his interest in replicas of micro ecosystems up a notch.

In a glass terrarium, he has managed to capture nature's vastness in miniature — from rainforests and deserts to oceans, and even landscapes formed from his imagination.

In this creation of his, mist rises from a mountain stream and a waterfall drops from the top. An ancient tree stands tall in the center of the tank, with a serene pool of water reflecting the surroundings at the bottom. These carefully chosen elements evoke the depth and mystery of a dense, ancient forest.

As one peers closer into the tank, a new world unfolds. Miniature water lilies float on the surface of the pool, and delicate plants resemble lotus leaves.

With the flick of a switch, the top of the terrarium releases a fine mist, simulating rain that showers the forest below.

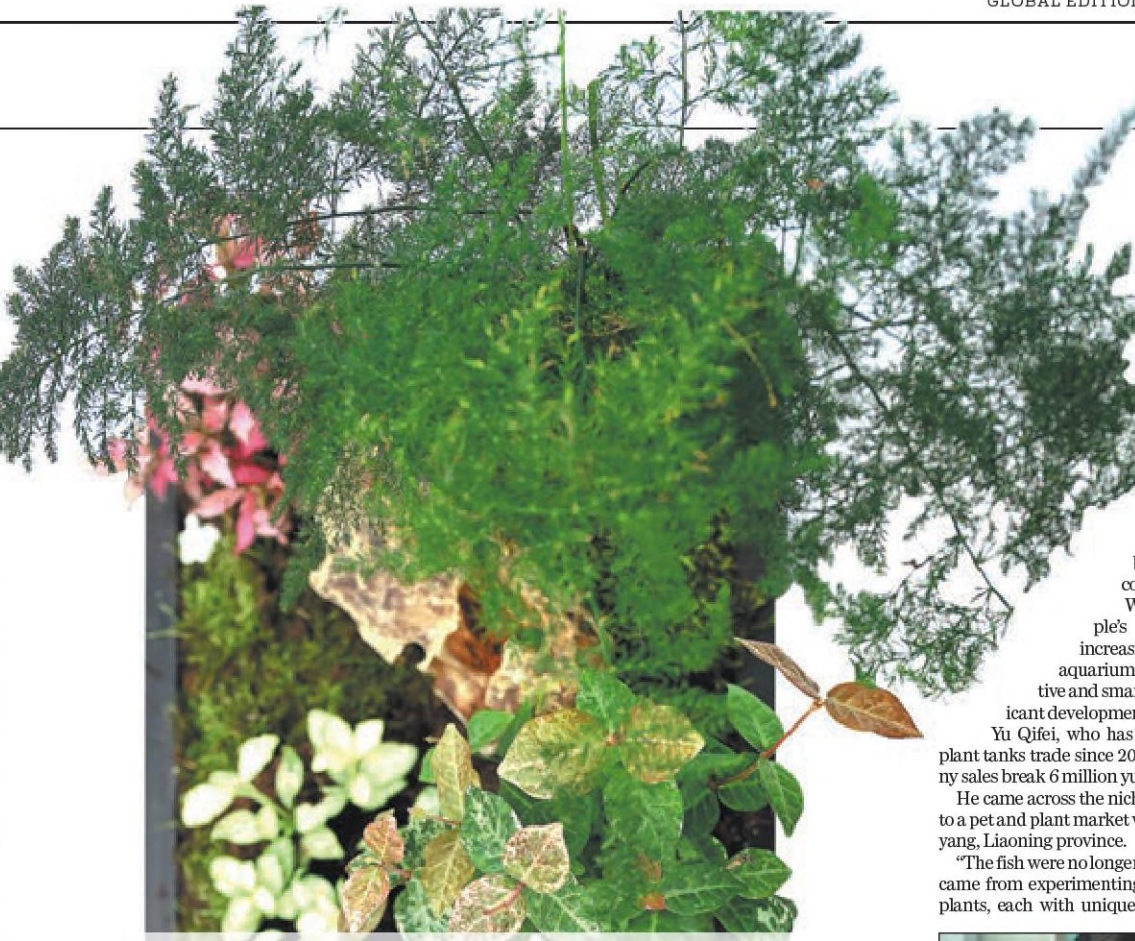
"Ecological micro-landscapes, to a certain extent, are about creating a stable environment for plants," said Li, a 40-year-old with a design background. He added he aims to achieve a seamless integration of ecological harmony and visual aesthetics, allowing both elements to complement and enhance each other.

Key elements include grandeur of form, twisting and graceful lines, and conveying vastness through small details, he explained.

Li has been fascinated by small creatures, particularly insects, since childhood. "My love for insects led me to explore tropical rainforests, which eventually expanded my interest to the broader natural world," he recalled.

This curiosity sparked a fascination with various plants and animals, and their ecosystems, he said.

One of the projects he undertook about a decade ago, began with a simple water flow device, but soon trans-



## Micro marvels thrive in glass menageries

Inspired by animation, beautiful landscapes, fish tanks showcase wondrous scenes



Above and bottom: Works made by contestants for a micro-landscape competition in Hefei, Anhui, in April. PHOTOS BY ZHANG DAGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

formed into a miniature swamp, complete with plants and a water cycle.

"That was when I was hooked," Li said. "My initial passion for plants came from struggling with keeping potted plants alive. I began to search for the reasons behind it, and the more I researched, the deeper my interest grew."

He also studied traditional Chinese culture and applied it to his creations, in the form of ancient buildings and gardens.

"Chinese landscaping is more about the person being part of the landscape, where the person and the scenery merge into one world. It places greater emphasis on the experience of time and space, with the entire process reflected in the consideration of the landscape's flow," he said.

As his expertise has grown, the style of his creations has expanded from tropical misty forests to traditional Chinese garden courtyards.

To ensure the uniqueness of each landscape, he uses dozens of different plants each time, carefully selecting those that complement a theme.

Many of his 100,000 online followers have remarked that viewing his creations feels like watching a nature documentary. Not only can one appreciate the artistry

of nature itself, but also the creator's meticulous attention to detail and the expression of ideas, some said.

His works have been recognized by ecological landscaping enthusiasts worldwide, with first prize at the International Vivarium Layout Contest in 2022 and 2023.

As he shares tips about creating small wonders, he has noticed a rising number of fans who are showing a strong desire to get their hands dirty. "They have inquired about how to create such landscape scenes for their pets, such as the choice of the right materials," he said.

He believes every ecological landscape is a hymn to nature. "Over time, every action we take in shaping and nurturing the landscape is imbued with a deep sense of mindfulness. Our desires and losses fade into insignificance, and what becomes important is how we can contribute to the ecosystem's balance, offering our services where needed," Li said, adding this brings a sense of hap-



iness and fulfillment by working in harmony with nature.

## Expanding industry

The design and technology used in the tanks is being continuously upgraded, according to the 2024-29 China fish tanks market report by the industry research institute Zero Power Intelligence Group.

Annual sales in China's smart aquarium market have already reached more than 1 billion yuan (\$140 million) and continue to grow, the report said. With the improvement in people's living standards and their increasing pursuit of quality of life, the aquarium market, especially the innovative and smart aquarium sector, holds significant development potential, it added.

Yu Qifei, who has been involved in the aquatic-plant tanks trade since 2021, has seen his annual company sales break 6 million yuan.

He came across the niche market in 2018 during a visit to a pet and plant market while attending college in Shenyang, Liaoning province.

"The fish were no longer the main focus, but the true joy came from experimenting with various types of aquatic plants, each with unique growth patterns and shapes,"



Li Ang teaches a boy how to make a vivarium in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



One of Li Ang's intricate works features plants and a waterfall. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

said Yu, also known as *Feiyu* (fat fish) in trade circles.

He gained attention from online followers when he began posting videos of the tank setups. Working with two classmates, Yu could rake in 4,000 to 5,000 yuan a day.

After graduating in 2021, Yu moved to Jinan, Shandong province, to start his business.

His products include marine tanks that require saltwater adjustment, and costly fish and stream tanks featuring stones and river fish.

One of the most popular and versatile products, the water plant tank, has diverse uses, he said. "Customers can mix and match various plants based on their own taste. No two such tanks are the same, which can be fun," Yu said.

Most of Yu's customers are white-collar workers and cultural enthusiasts from more affluent regions like Guangdong province, he said.

## Bio bottles

Fairy Land, a horticulture company based in Sichuan province, has tapped into the craze of young people wanting a touch of nature close by.

The company has launched an array of borosilicate glass bottles that house vibrant green micro-landscapes featuring moss, ferns, driftwood, stones, and climbing plants.

Upon closer inspection, tiny creatures like frogs and crabs can be found in the setting.

"These ecological bottles have already developed into small, self-sustaining ecosystems before they're sold. Once customers bring them home, they only need to occasionally mist them for upkeep," said a company employee surnamed Chen.

The large moss area continually releases oxygen, while microorganisms in the bottle support the crabs' survival. As long as a small amount of water is sprayed occasionally to maintain moisture, the ecosystem can be sustained indefinitely, Chen said.

These products are popular, with annual output value exceeding 20 million yuan, according to the company.

So far, the company has partnered with the bio-space creator Bioloark and opened stores in Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore.

"Next, we plan to expand nationwide and share our micro-landscape products, which bring nature into everyday life," Chen said.

Wang, the college teacher, said he intends to grow his hobby into a side business.

To date, he has fashioned several tanks carrying themed images from major scenic spots or other animated films, which have earned him more than 110,000 followers online.

With a deep understanding of aesthetic principles, design, and biology, Wang said he will strive to craft tanks that are both therapeutic and functional — offering a calming escape from the daily grind while maintaining the delicate balance of life within the tank.

"These tanks are not just visually pleasing, but also serve as a way to educate others about ecological balance and the importance of maintaining healthy aquariums," he said.

## WORLD

## Tariffs seen as threat to auto industry in North America

By YANG GAO in Toronto  
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US President Donald Trump's imposition of new tariffs on automobiles could disrupt North American supply chains and cause the continent's auto industry to collapse, experts say.

Mahmood Nanji, a policy fellow at the Ivey Business School and a former associate deputy minister of finance for Ontario, said the tariffs also could cause economic disruption across the region.

"Regardless of whether it's 25 percent or 50 percent, it would have a huge impact on the Canadian auto sector," Nanji told China Daily. "But it would also have a huge impact on the American auto sector."

Nanji noted the deep integration of North America's auto supply chain. "Parts can cross the border seven or eight times before a vehicle is fully assembled," he said. "If you impose these tariffs, the first thing that happens is the price goes up, and the disruption will be felt on both sides of the border."

"It's projected that the cost of a car could increase by \$4,000 to \$5,000," Nanji continued. "When that happens, demand will shrink because the auto industry is incredibly competitive. Consumers might switch to vehicles from manufacturers not affected by the tariffs."

Nanji also rejected the narrative that Canada has "stolen" American manufacturing jobs—a claim Trump has regularly made.

"Since 1965, when the Auto Pact was established, this has been a competitive and cooperative relationship. Disrupting that integrated system would have devastating consequences for both countries," he said.

Nanji said that the proposed tariffs would also strain US automakers. "Auto companies would face tough decisions: Absorb the additional costs or pass them on to consumers," he said.

Trump has announced he would impose 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico starting on March 4, and that there is "no room left" for the two nations to negotiate their way out of the levies.

"The tariffs, you know, they're all set," Trump said on Monday. "They go into effect tomorrow."

Nanji said that with 25 to 50 percent tariffs on automobiles, "the auto industry in North America could collapse within days, if not weeks."

Nanji said he believes that Trump is motivated by his "America First" agenda and that "his goal is to repatriate industries and create jobs in the US."

"But the assumption that you can shut down Canadian operations and move everything south overnight is unrealistic. Building new plants would cost billions and take years," he said.

Nanji predicted that American businesses and consumers would also feel the pressure. "If the cost of producing vehicles skyrockets, stock markets will react, and US consumers will face higher prices," he said. "The consequences of disrupting a supply chain this integrated would be profound and immediate."

Juan Carlos Baker Pineda, former Mexican vice-minister for foreign trade, also underscored the economic risks of such a measure.

"A 25 percent tariff on automobile imports would not only impact Mexico's economy, but it would also destabilize North America's entire auto

industry," Baker told China Daily.

"The automotive sector accounts for nearly 4 percent of Mexico's GDP and generates thousands of jobs directly linked to exports to the US," he said.

Baker said that Mexico is not just an exporter — it plays a critical role in the North American supply chain.

"With over 80 percent of Mexican car exports destined for the US, a tariff would create bottlenecks and inefficiencies, forcing companies to either absorb higher costs or shift production strategies," he said.

"It is unlikely that a tariff would lead to a large-scale relocation of production away from Mexico and into the US instead; it would create friction within an ecosystem that has been optimized over decades," he said.

"The reality is that Mexico helps US manufacturers stay competitive by providing cost-effective, high-quality production that benefits American companies and workers," he noted.

"If tariffs are imposed, we would likely see job losses, delays in production and higher vehicle prices for American consumers — exactly the opposite of what protectionist policies claim to achieve," he said.

Baker said that the Mexican government needs to communicate the effect that the tariffs would have.

"First, it must engage diplomatically with the US administration and key stakeholders in the American auto sector to emphasize that this policy would be mutually damaging," Baker said.

"Mexico should explore legal mechanisms within USMCA (US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which replaced NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement), to challenge any measure that violates trade commitments," he said.

"Mexico must strengthen its investment climate to ensure that automakers and suppliers continue to see the country as a reliable and competitive production hub," Baker said.

"Finally, if none of these steps work, and tariffs are imposed, I believe that Mexico should retaliate, establishing tariffs of its own toward US exports to Mexico," he said.

Baker also stressed the importance of reducing Mexico's reliance on the American market.

"Perhaps this could be an opportunity to diversify trade relationships so that Mexico is not overly dependent on the US market," he said.

Baker pointed to the modernization of Mexico's trade deal with the European Union and growing partnerships with Asia, particularly Japan and South Korea — as key opportunities.

"While the US will always be Mexico's primary trading partner, a more balanced trade portfolio would strengthen Mexico's resilience and reduce its exposure to external political shifts," he said.

Baker noted that while the tariff threat is serious, it may also serve as leverage in trade negotiations. "This is both a serious threat and a negotiation strategy," he said.

"Trump has a long history of using tariffs as leverage, but I believe that a 25 percent auto tariff would hurt the US as much as Mexico."

"For me, the key is to remain firm, proactive and strategic, reinforcing that Mexico is an essential part of North America's competitiveness, not a target for protectionist measures," he said.



Relatives mourn two Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza, on Sunday. Health authorities in Gaza said four people were killed and six others wounded in Israeli attacks after the first phase of a cease-fire in the territory drew to a close. BASHAR TALEB / AFP

## Gaza reconstruction plan ready, says Egypt

Arab summit to discuss way forward as Israel's decision to block aid draws flak

CAIRO — Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty said on Sunday that a Gaza reconstruction plan, which ensures Palestinians remain in their land, is ready and will be presented at an emergency Arab summit in Cairo on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the United Nations, the Arab League and many countries around the world have strongly condemned Israel for blocking aid into Gaza.

The reconstruction plan will not be purely Egyptian or Arab, but will gain international support and funding to ensure its implementation, Abdelatty said.

"We will hold intensive talks with major donor countries once the plan is adopted at the upcoming Arab Summit," he said at a news conference. "We will ensure that the results of the Arab Summit are presented to the world in the best possible way."

Asked about the second phase of the cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas, Abdelatty said Egypt will continue its efforts to ensure the truce is maintained and negotiations for the second phase can begin.

The first phase of the fragile cease-fire deal expired over the weekend. Abdelatty reaffirmed Egypt's com-

mitment to the originally agreed-upon cease-fire that had been scheduled to move into the second phase. "It will be difficult, but with goodwill and political determination, it can be achieved," he said.

Former intelligence chief of Saudi Arabia, Turki Al-Faisal, said Israel bears financial responsibility for the damage it has inflicted on Gaza and the West Bank.

## Financial responsibility

Appearing on Arab News' *Frankly Speaking* program, Turki laid out his case for why Israel should bear financial responsibility for the damage it has inflicted on Gaza and the West Bank — rather than the Gulf states footing the bill.

"I have been saying this for some time now that there should be a fund, a worldwide fund, for the reconstruction, not just in Gaza, but also in the West Bank. And Israel should be forced to chip into that fund," he said.

Israel on Sunday blocked the entry of aid trucks into Gaza as a standoff over the truce that has halted fighting for the past six weeks escalated. Abdelatty said the use of aid as a weapon of collective punishment could not be permitted.

The decision has also sparked fierce condemnation from Palestini-

an factions, international organizations and regional countries.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine called the Israeli move "a flagrant violation of the cease-fire" and an indication that Israel seeks to evade the second phase of the agreement.

Faisal Aranki, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee, told Xinhua News Agency that the decision will worsen Gaza's already severe shortages of essential goods and medical supplies.

In a statement on X, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for "humanitarian aid to flow back into Gaza immediately and for the release of all hostages", and urged "all parties to make every effort to prevent a return to hostilities in Gaza".

Tom Fletcher, UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, called Israel's decision "alarming".

Jordan's Foreign Ministry spokesman Sufyan Qudah said Israel's decision "threatens to reignite the situation" in Gaza, adding that Israel must "stop using starvation as a weapon against innocent Palestinians who are under siege, especially during the holy month of Ramadan".

Mike Gu in Hong Kong contributed to this story.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Rubio's remarks slammed as fallacies

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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China has voiced strong dissatisfaction and resolute objection to recent comments by United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio, accusing him of "spreading fallacies based on the Cold War mentality".

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said on Monday Beijing has made solemn representations to Washington in this regard.

In a recent interview with US media, Rubio made accusations against China over topics such as Taiwan, the economy and trade, the COVID-19 pandemic and the "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

"I would like to officially remind the US side that repeating the same lie a thousand times will not make it true; smearing and slandering China will not mislead the world; and engaging in 'microphone diplomacy' will not do any good to China-US relations," Lin said.

What "constitutes the most fundamental change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait" is the fact that the US distorts the one-China principle and persists in using Taiwan to contain China, and the Taiwan authorities rely on the US to seek "independence" with the support and connivance of the US, he said.

Lin reiterated that the Taiwan question is "the most important, sensitive and dynamic issue in China-US relations".

"If the US does not look to spark a conflict, it should stop crossing the line on the Taiwan question," he added.

## Dialogue, consultation

Regarding US tariffs on China, Lin said there are no winners in trade and tariff wars.

"China is willing to work with the US to resolve concerns through dialogue and consultation on the basis of equality and mutual respect, and will, at the same time, take all necessary measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests," the spokesman said.

Referring to the Asia-Pacific region, he said it is "a high ground for cooperation and development, not a chess board for geopolitical gaming".

History and reality have proved time and again that the US is used to treating other countries as chess pieces or even cannon fodder, he said.

## Uganda battling Ebola outbreak as two lives lost

By EDITH MUTETHYA

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Uganda is battling an outbreak of Ebola virus disease that has so far claimed two lives and affected nine, as its Health Ministry, with the support of the World Health Organization, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and other partners, works to contain the outbreak.

The ministry declared the outbreak on Jan 30, after a 35-year-old man who worked as a nurse at a hospital tested positive for the virus following his death on Jan 29. The second fatality was a 4-year-old who

succumbed to the virus on Feb 25.

Tedros Ghebreyesus, director-general of the WHO, termed the death of the child heartbreaking.

"It is essential that the comprehensive response continues, including contact tracing to identify cases early, so people can receive care rapidly," he wrote on X. "The WHO will continue to work with the Ministry of Health Uganda to end the outbreak."

The WHO said on Saturday that together with Uganda's Health Ministry and partners, they are working to strengthen surveillance, active case searching, contact listing, and tracing.

This is in addition to infection prevention and control in health

facilities, case management and community engagement to halt the spread of the virus.

The second death was reported a week after the Health Ministry discharged eight patients who were receiving treatment for the virus in the capital Kampala and the eastern town of Mbale. However, 216 contacts remained in quarantine at various facilities across the country.

Jean Kaseya, director-general of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, said on Thursday that the organization continues to support Uganda's efforts to combat the current Ebola outbreak, ensuring swift action to contain the

virus and protect communities.

A total of 91 contacts had been identified and were under close monitoring, he said, while investigations continue to determine the source of the outbreak and prevent future occurrences.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said 10 districts in Uganda have been identified as high-risk areas during the outbreak, which is Uganda's eighth Ebola outbreak since 2000.

According to the American Medical Association, the Ebola virus is characterized in part by its profound effect on healthcare professionals in the countries where it spreads.

## Anora sweeps the Oscars with 5 awards

LOS ANGELES — *Anora*, the story of a New York sex worker who gets a chance at a new life when she marries a wealthy Russian client on a whim, won five Academy Awards on Sunday, including the coveted best picture Oscar.

In addition to best picture, Sean Baker won for best director, original screenplay and editing to tie the record for most Oscars won by an individual in one year with Walt Disney who won for four different films in 1954.

The movie's 25-year-old star, Mikey Madison, was named best actress.

*Anora* was made for \$6 million, a tiny sum by Hollywood standards. It emerged as the winner in an unpredictable Oscars race that included papal thriller *Conclave*, Jewish immigrant story *The Brutalist* and blockbuster musical *Wicked*.

"If you're trying to make independent films, please keep doing it. We need more. This is proof," Baker said.

Madison scored an upset over Demi Moore, who had been favored to win best actress for her role in *The Substance*.

"I grew up in Los Angeles, but Hollywood always felt so far away from me," Madison said on stage.

"To be here standing in this room today is really incredible."

*Anora*, released by independent distributor Neon, has generated \$40 million at global box offices. *Wicked*, by comparison, has hauled in \$728 million.

Adrien Brody claimed his second best actor Oscar for his role as a Jewish immigrant and architect who chases the American dream in *The Brutalist*. The 51-year-old New York native had previously won for *The Pianist*, when he became the youngest best actor winner at 29.

"Acting is a very fragile profession," Brody said. "No matter where you

are in your career, it can all go away. I think what makes this most special is the awareness of that."

Zoe Saldana was named best supporting actress for her role as the fixer for a Mexican drug lord in *Emilia Perez*, a Spanish-language musical released on Netflix.

Kieran Culkin received the best supporting actor award for playing one of two cousins who travel to Poland to study their family's roots in *A Real Pain*.

*No Other Land*, a film showing Palestinian West Bank resistance to Israeli soldiers tearing down their homes and evicting residents to create a military training ground, won the documentary feature film Oscar.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

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# WORLD

## Japanese PM walking a thin line of diplomacy

Ishiba's balancing act toward China, US more complex than it appears: Analysts

By CAI HONG  
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Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba is carefully navigating a delicate balance between China and the United States, but experts question whether his approach will succeed.

Ishiba has indicated his next priority is a visit to China, with Japanese media reporting that he hopes to make the trip in May or June.

Simultaneously, his administration is working to arrange a potential visit by US President Donald Trump to Japan. According to The Yomiuri Shimbun, Ishiba stated on a Japanese TV program on Feb 9 that Trump may make an official visit during the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, which runs from April to October.

Shigeaki Koga, a former official of Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, noted that Japan-US relations are at a pivotal moment. Historically, Japanese prime ministers from the Liberal Democratic Party were perceived as subservient to the US, with little choice but to follow Washington's lead. However, by signaling an intention to improve relations with China, Ishiba has sought to shift toward a more independent "Japan First" foreign policy, balancing relations between China and the US.

"While 'balancing diplomacy' may sound promising, if executed poorly, it could be perceived as 'playing both sides', leading to a loss of trust from both nations," Koga warned.

This challenge became apparent when Liu Jinsong, director-general of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, summoned Japan's Charge d'Affaires in China Yokochi Akira, lodging sol-

emn representations and expressing grave concern and strong dissatisfaction over Japan's recent negative moves related to China during the Japan-US leaders' meeting.

According to a statement, Japan and the US discussed the Diaoyu Islands and South China Sea issues, and the Taiwan question.

Despite the diplomatic tensions, Koga pointed out that Japan's strategic position between the two major powers could be an advantage if leveraged wisely. "Recognizing this geopolitical advantage is crucial for Japan to steadily take steps toward a truly independent foreign policy," he said.

However, analysts argue that Ishiba's diplomatic balancing act appears far more complex than it seems. His recent visit to the US, which on the surface seemed like a routine diplomatic engagement, was, in reality, a carefully orchestrated effort to appease Washington.

### Little choice

The US remains Japan's key ally and a cornerstone of its economic and security framework. Given Washington's aggressive trade policies and pressure on Japan to boost defense spending, the Ishiba administration has little choice but to take steps to placate the US and avoid greater friction.

Following Trump's announcement of a 25 percent tariff on all steel and aluminum imports starting March 12, Tokyo is reportedly considering sending Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yoji Muto to Washington to seek an exemption.

According to Tokyo-based international relations analyst Yang Wenkai, Ishiba's current strategy toward the US is to maintain a low profile and

keep Japan off Trump's radar for as long as possible. "He hopes to cultivate a personal rapport with Trump, akin to the approach taken by the late Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, as a means of crisis management."

However, Yang cautioned that such a relationship cannot be built on mere wishful thinking.

"Japan faces a dual challenge: on the one hand, increasing geopolitical tensions necessitate securing American protection, while on the other, its deep economic ties with China make severing relations with Beijing impractical," Yang said.

In a sign of Japan's economic pragmatism, a delegation of approximately 200 Japanese business leaders visited China on Feb 16-21 to explore bilateral economic cooperation.

Chen Zilei, director of the Japanese Economic Research Center at Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, pointed out that Japan desperately needs US support for its "Indo-Pacific" strategy. However, Washington's commitments often lack concrete assurances. While Japan prioritizes countering China strategically, the US remains focused on securing tangible economic and political benefits.

"It is evident that Japan is attempting to position China as a hypothetical adversary to reinforce its ties with the US. However, even with US commitments, Japan still lacks the necessary security guarantees. As a result, it is likely that Ishiba will continue pursuing a balanced diplomatic approach between China and the US," Chen said.

As Japan grapples with this diplomatic conundrum, the question remains: Can Ishiba maintain equilibrium between the two major powers without alienating either?

"Walking this tightrope will be the defining foreign policy challenge in the coming years," Chen said.

### Food for the needy



Afghan children receive food aid from a local charity amid snowfall, during the Islamic holy fasting month of Ramadan in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, on Sunday. Ramadan is seen as a time of religious reflection and worship, charity, and community, as Muslims fast from sunrise until sunset.

ATIF ARYAN / AFP

### Briefly

#### AUSTRIA New gov't takes office, keeping far right out

Austria's centrist coalition government, the first three-party alliance since the aftermath of World War II, took office on Monday, ending Austria's longest-ever wait for a new government and keeping the far-right Freedom Party, or FPÖ, in opposition. Although the FPÖ won September's parliamentary election with about 29 percent of the vote, it failed to form a coalition government. When the FPÖ last month gave up trying to agree on a government, the conservative People's Party, Social Democrats and liberal Neos revived a bid to form an alliance.

#### JAPAN 2,000 firefighters battle forest blaze

More than 2,000 firefighters are battling Japan's biggest forest fire in three decades, officials said on Monday, as some 4,600 residents remain under an evacuation advisory. One person died last week in the blaze in the northern region of Iwate, which follows record low rainfall in the area and last year's hottest summer on record across Japan. The fire near the city of Ofunato has burned through some 2,100 hectares since Thursday, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said on Monday. It is estimated to have damaged 84 buildings by Sunday, the agency said.

#### SYRIA Committee formed to draft legal reference

Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa announced on Sunday the formation of a committee to draft a constitutional declaration for the country's transition after the overthrow of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad. Syria's new authorities have repealed the Assad-era constitution, and Sharaa has said rewriting it could take up to three years. In late January, Sharaa promised a "constitutional declaration" to serve as a "legal reference" during the country's transitional period.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

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## LIFE



From left: The Friends of Latin America choir performing at the Mexican embassy in Beijing last year. The choir preparing to sing *El Condor Pasa* (The Condor Passes) at an event organized by the Peruvian embassy in Beijing on Feb 20. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Every Monday morning, members of the choir gather at a small community hall in Beijing's Dongcheng district to practice. MO JINGXI / CHINA DAILY

## Singing their way to solidarity

Beijing's only Latin America-inspired choir revels in the power that music has to unite hearts and minds, **Mo Jingxi** reports.

Every Monday morning, as commuters go to work and children go to school, a group of elderly people gather at a small community hall in Beijing's Dongcheng district. With an average age of 71, they are no longer just someone's grandparents or spouses, but proud members of the Friends of Latin America choir.

Established in 2018, the choir stands out as the only one of the hundreds of choirs in the capital that performs in Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese. With 40-plus members — the eldest being 82 — their journey has been one of passion and dedication.

"We were initially started by former Chinese diplomats who had worked in Latin American countries, journalists, and Spanish teachers. Now, most of our members have never studied Spanish, and are learning the language from scratch," says Yang Mingjiang, founder and head of the choir.

Last month, they were invited to perform *El Condor Pasa* (The Condor Passes), a song composed by Daniel Alomía Robles that is based on a traditional Andean folk song, at an event hosted by the Peruvian embassy in Beijing. The choir's vibrancy and colorful Andean tribute costumes won applause from the audience.

The choir is not funded, and the annual membership fee has been 100 yuan (\$13.78) since it was set up, so they make most of their costumes themselves.

For example, the vests the men wore for the performance were actually a Chinese ethnic group costume, and the women's floral blouses were simple white shirts with different floral patterns they bought online and sewed themselves.

"The men's black hats originally only had a red feather, but to infuse them with more Peruvian flair, we added colorful pom-poms," Yang says.

A greater challenge, however, is the language.

Chen Xiaoming is one of the few original members of the choir. The 79-year-old was one of Yang's middle school classmates. "I joined the choir to support her," he says.

Chen had never studied Spanish before. After learning for several years, he cannot only sing songs, but also hold conversations.

To learn the song lyrics, he wrote the notes and words onto cardboard sheets so that he could practice anytime, anywhere. "At first, my grandson thought it would be a disaster for the choir if I was the lead singer, but now he's proud of me and says his grandpa is quite good," Chen says.

Other members use Chinese characters to grasp the Spanish pronunciation more quickly, but Yang does not recommend this approach, because in her view, it is not "professional".

Grabbing free moments as they wait for the bus, walk the dog, or take care of grandchildren, members have learned to sing more than a dozen songs. They attribute this



Top: The choir poses after practice on Feb 24. Above: Some members write the notes and lyrics of songs onto cardboard sheets so they can practice whenever they like. PHOTOS BY MO JINGXI / CHINA DAILY

achievement to Yang.

The 78-year-old graduated with a bachelor's degree in Spanish from the Beijing Foreign Studies University and earned her master's degree from Peking University. Before retiring, she worked in the Ministry of Culture on cultural exchanges and cooperation, and visited Latin

America eight times, traveling to most of its countries.

Yang describes herself as "dedicated to spreading Spanish, and Spanish-language songs". In 1988, she translated a play she had seen in Mexico, *Bellas Imágenes Sociales* (Beautiful Social Images), and after some persistence, was able to

stage it in China.

Yang single-handedly translates, arranges, and choreographs the songs, because not all of them have existing sheet music, and some require her to transcribe the melody and lyrics line by line. Now they have been compiled into a thick songbook.



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"I am just an ordinary music lover. I've had to learn the accordion, the piano, composition, and arranging on my own. But I am willing to do my part to help the choir grow and through these songs that reflect the friendliness, openness, warmth, and passion of Latin American countries, inspire more Chinese," Yang says.

Chen says one reason he follows Yang is her professionalism. "If you want to sing a song, the pronunciation must be accurate; otherwise, neither Chinese nor foreigners will understand," he says.

Li Shanlin has been part of the choir for over a year. "I really appreciate Yang's arrangements. But I'm almost 70 years old and my memory is declining, so I think about quitting. However, Yang has refused to let me, and even invited me to participate in the event organized by the Peruvian embassy. My wife also supports and encourages me to continue," the 68-year-old says.

The Friends of Latin America choir has participated in several events hosted by Latin American embassies in China, gaining recognition within the Spanish-speaking diplomatic community.

Pei Shu joined the choir after watching their performance at the

Mexican embassy in Beijing last year.

"The Chinese and Latin Americans have similar experiences, such as resisting aggression and fighting for national independence," 66-year-old Pei says, adding that this is why songs like *La Paloma* (The Dove) and *El Condor Pasa* resonate with him.

But 68-year-old Luo Jian believes that singing is the least thing worth mentioning of all they have learned in the choir.

"I used to be a bit depressed, but I have totally recovered. I think that people, no matter how old they are, always have the ability to learn new things, even at 80. In this choir, we have learned to maintain an optimistic spirit and work together," she says.

Yang believes that although China and Latin America have enjoyed closer relations in recent years, exchanges and understanding could be improved.

During the nationally televised CCTV Spring Festival Gala this year, many people learned about *El Condor Pasa* for the first time through a performance by Chinese and Peruvian artists.

"This song has instantly brought the peoples of the two countries closer together," Yang says.

On sunny Saturdays, the choir often practices at a pavilion in Beijing's Ditan Park, a popular scenic spot for foreign tourists. Once, they encountered some Mexicans, who upon hearing their singing, were reluctant to leave.

"We immediately sang *Cielito Lindo* (Lovely Sweet One) and *Besame Mucho* (Kiss Me a Lot) for them. They said they were so touched to hear songs from their home country in China, and that the performance was so touching and heartfelt," Yang says.

In March 2019, several members of the choir and their friends traveled to Latin America, visiting Mexico, Cuba and Panama, where they communicated through songs.

Zhang Lingmin, the 74-year-old deputy head of the choir who doesn't speak Spanish, was on the trip.

"As we traveled, we sang. It's the songs that brought us closer to people. We feel we have made our own contribution to people-to-people exchanges," she says.

Liang Yunan is from Kunming in Yunnan province. The 71-year-old moved to Beijing to take care of her grandchild. As a former choir member, Liang felt fortunate to have found the choir, which she joined last summer.

"Spanish is not easy to learn, but the choir is like paradise for me. I love the passion and vibrancy of Latin American songs, they make me happy," she says.

Yang says the choir feels honored and proud to serve as the grassroots-level envoy for promoting exchanges between China and Latin America. "We are willing to continue doing this meaningful work," she adds.

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## Veteran Belgian equestrian takes young riders through paces

YINCHUAN — At an outdoor show-jumping arena, Philippe Le Jeune is teaching riders and their horses to jump over a series of obstacles.

"I was very surprised to have such nice accommodation here. It's very professional and nice to work. The riders are also very talented," says the 64-year-old Belgian equestrian coach, who is visiting China for the first time.

During his two-week stay, Le Jeune is tasked with helping the team from Ningxia Hui autonomous

region hone their skills in preparation for China's 15th National Games this November.

The training center where he is working is located in a village near the Yellow River in Yinchuan, Ningxia's capital. It was set up in 2023, the same year the Ningxia equestrian team was founded.

With 50 years of experience, Le Jeune has had much success in five-star competitions, and became world champion in 2010 riding his beloved horse, Vigo.

Surprised at the development of

the sport in China, the Belgian veteran says his work is really positive. "What the young men lack is experience in international competitions. They also need to understand there is no bad horse but (only a) horse badly ridden," he says.

"Philippe is really experienced and patient. I have learned a lot from him, especially the connection with my horse," says 30-year-old Jiang Zhixiang, a two-time silver medalist in China's National Equestrian Jumping Championship.

Le Jeune believes that young

horses need to be treated with great patience. "The horses are unbelievable, gentle, and very strong animals. The animal doesn't know their own strength, but they're very honest and brave. They normally do what the rider asks," he says.

Born into a poor family, the Belgian's passion for horses began when he first saw a pony at the age of 7. "I was in love with ponies when I was 12, but my parents couldn't afford to support me," he says.

Discussing future dreams and ambitions in the classroom, Le Jeune's answer was very different to those of his classmates, who favored becoming electricians or engineers.

"I want to live with horses," he told his class.

"Are you crazy? Living with horses won't bring you money!" Despite his teacher's response, Le Jeune stuck to his childhood dream.

He left school at 15 and got a job cleaning the stables and horses at an equestrian training center. "The nights were long, but I don't regret anything. I had a fantastic life, a very

hard life, but a very good life," he says, smiling.

In recent years, he has traveled the world training inexperienced riders and young horses. "Every morning, I get up with a smile, because I'm going to ride a horse, because it's my life."

"There are a lot of people in the world who don't love their work but they have to do it because they must earn money for their family," he says, "but I live for my passion."

XINHUA

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Tel Aviv's cutting off aid to Gaza attempt to force Trump's hand

Despite the strong opposition of the United Nations and other humanitarian aid providers, in an alarming move that the UN warns violates international law, Israel unilaterally cut off the entry of all food and other goods into Gaza on Sunday.

The move, which came the moment the first phase of the ceasefire ended, pushed the more than 2 million Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip to the brink of famine.

To divert attention from it being the party walking away from the hard-earned three-phase ceasefire agreement, Israel has said it supports what the Benjamin Netanyahu government calls a new United States' proposal to extend the first phase of the ceasefire through the Jewish holiday of Passover in mid-April instead of beginning negotiations on the far more difficult second phase.

Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire.

The US administration has not issued any statement about Israel's announcement, and as of Monday it had kept a studied silence over Israel's decision to cut off aid. According to media reports, US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff had been expected to visit the Middle East again last week, but that visit never materialized and it is not clear when he will visit the region.

So it is with the seeming connivance of the US that Tel Aviv warned it could resume the attacks on Gaza after the first phase if it believes the negotiations are ineffective.

The negotiations on the second phase were meant to start a month ago, increasing the uncertainty around the fragile truce. Although Hamas has insisted that those talks begin, Israel has tried to find fault with the militant group's execution of the first phase — as well as the UN — in a bid to delay the second phase negotiations or find an excuse to abruptly end the ceasefire process.

Israel has blamed the shortages of humanitarian assistance in Gaza on what it called the UN's inability to distribute it, and accused Hamas militants of siphoning it off.

But the reason why Israel has exhausted all means to prevent the second phase is that once it starts, its withdrawal from Gaza will be put on the agenda under international scrutiny, which is against the Netanyahu Cabinet's war goals that have remained unchanged since day one: to remove Hamas from Gaza, and annex the Palestinian enclave in whatever form. According to the agreement, in phase two, Hamas is to release the remaining living hostages in return for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and a lasting ceasefire, making it the most crucial stage of the whole arrangement for the resolution of the Gaza crisis.

The US under the Joe Biden administration pressed Israel to allow more aid into Gaza, threatening to limit weapons support. But the incumbent President Donald Trump is proposing the displacing of all Palestinians from Gaza. Trump said last month shortly after Netanyahu's visit to the US that he is "committed to buying and owning Gaza" and turning it into the "Riviera of the Middle East".

Although Trump's proposal has stirred widespread criticism and is opposed by several Arab nations as well as the US' allies in Europe, Tel Aviv apparently takes that as evidence that Israel has succeeded in binding its interests with the US' under the new administration, thus heralding its Sunday move.

By cutting off the aid to Gaza, Netanyahu has in effect kicked the ball into Trump's court again.

As Chinese ambassador to the UN said in a recent UN Security Council meeting on the issue, the Gaza ceasefire agreement must be fully and continuously implemented to ensure a permanent ceasefire. In particular, provisions on access of humanitarian aid and release of detainees, among others, must be implemented strictly, seriously and in good faith.

In this process, the dignity of all, including the deceased, should be respected. Since negotiations on the second phase have been deferred, the international community should encourage and support the parties in moving ahead with the negotiations as soon as possible. In particular, countries with major influence on the parties should play a role to that end.

## Europe should get own house in order

Speaking after the summit of European leaders on Ukraine on Sunday, United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer stressed that there would be potentially grave global repercussions if the European conflict was to continue.

His remark has served to underscore the urgent need for all the parties concerned to keep the window of opportunity open for dialogue.

But while the participating leaders at the summit affirmed their shared commitment to devising a strategy to halt the hostilities and seek a sustainable peace resolution, that primarily seems to comprise providing Ukraine with more military aid and engaging with the United States to persuade it to act as the backstop security guarantee for a peace agreement.

The European leaders are essentially doubling down on their existing position.

Yet the recent fluctuations in US policy toward Ukraine have presented a formidable challenge for European leaders to navigate the divergences with their long-standing ally and craft a unified strategy to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the enduring crisis in Europe. The hastily convened defense summit in London, which brought together a multitude of European heads of state and government, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, seems to have fostered some cohesion; however, it falls short of aligning US President Donald Trump with Europe's stance on supporting Ukraine's demands for peace negotiations. The warm welcome these leaders extended to the Ukraine leader in London and their reiteration to stand together with Kyiv have struck a quite different tune to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's rumbustious meeting with the US leader and amplified the divide between Europe and the US on the Ukraine issue.

In this regard, the outcome of the summit that was scrambled together in haste on Sunday is unlikely to be enough to bring the US president on Europe's side to offer what Zelensky insists is needed before Ukraine sits at the negotiating table with Russia.

Trump has signaled his intention to not only amend the US' ties with Russia but also broker a peace deal that will require compromises from Ukraine. The onus is on these other Western leaders to persuade Trump to change his stance on the issue if they want him to accept their plan.

Rather than pursuing a course that has seen the conflict enter its fourth year, the summit-attending leaders and others in Europe should rethink and reshape their perspectives on the continent's security. But instead, at the London summit, the participating European leaders agreed to spend more on defense as a concession to Trump's demand that the continent must rely on itself for security protection.

While some in Europe may still view Washington as the continent's primary security guarantor, the shock wave the Trump administration has sent so far over the Ukraine crisis has necessitated European countries contemplating the previously unthinkable: that the US security guarantee might not be a given. It will certainly come at a price.

Yet they are still reluctant to accept they are being forced to pivot from their traditional security reliance on the US toward greater strategic autonomy.

Such a reassessment of Europe's situation is clearly belated. It has been the reliance on NATO and that organization's expansionism and relentless roll toward Russia's border that has been a principal factor in triggering the conflict.

In fact, with the focus on relations between Kyiv and the US administration amid the fallout from the two sides' fractious entrenching of positions during their televised talks in the White House, Starmer's most significant remark that "a deal will have to involve Russia" might easily go unnoticed.

It is imperative that Europe cast off the shackles of the past and take accountability for its own security issues, especially now that Ukraine is better armed and funded than most NATO countries.

Russia has long viewed NATO and European Union expansion in Eastern Europe as a threat to its security and sphere of influence. And Ukraine's aspirations to join these Western institutions have been a major point of contention between the two countries.

China supports all efforts conducive to peace in Ukraine, including the recent engagement between the US and Russia. And it is willing to continue playing a constructive role in helping engineer a political resolution to the crisis. It hopes that the window of opportunity that has opened to bring an end to the conflict will not be squandered.

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Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Private sector calls for strengthened interdepartmental coordination

The People's Bank of China and multiple departments recently held a joint meeting to come up with specific measures to support the high-quality development of private enterprises.

They will implement a moderately loose monetary policy, give full play to the role of structural monetary policy tools, and increase credit for private and small and micro enterprises. Besides, a series of previously adopted concrete measures supporting the private economy will be better implemented to support private enterprises.

The meeting stressed that policy coordination and interaction will be enhanced among departments to improve financing mechanisms,

and greater efforts will be made to solve the difficult and expensive financing problems private enterprises face, so they can play a bigger role in the country's high-quality development.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, the central authorities have made continuous efforts through deepened reforms to improve the basic system of the market economy, stimulating the vitality and internal impetus for the development of the private sector. To that end, the authorities have accelerated the drafting of a law to promote the private sector, and to accord equal treatment to State-owned as well as private enterprises at both the insti-

tutional and legal levels.

In order to create a fair market environment, more efforts should be made to accelerate the formation of a unified national market, break down market access barriers, and establish an open and transparent market access system consisting of equal competition, clear powers and responsibilities, and strong supervision.

Meanwhile, as said, different departments should further strengthen their coordination in the policymaking and the implementation of relevant policies related to the private sector, and constantly improve the efficiency of government supervision and services.

— WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

## Building an inclusive elderly care system

The National Development and Reform Commission and some other ministries jointly issued a notice recently to address the problems faced in the provision of elderly care services, namely poor coverage, high costs and uneven quality.

Domestic elderly care resources are generally in short supply while in the absence of relevant regulation, the quality of service provided falls short of people's expectation. With affordable and quality home and community care resources being scarce, a significant number of beds in institutional care facilities remain vacant.

The notice aims to resolve these problems by expanding the coverage of inclusive elderly care services through a collaboration mechanism involving the government, enterprises, families and society, besides employing technology to ensure more elderly people benefit from the services.

It aims to promote the construction of inclusive elderly care facilities based on existing assets such as training and recuperation institutions, unused property and schools, encouraging the upgrading of existing elderly care homes and vacant school buildings in rural areas.

The notice also stresses the importance of establishing a sound pricing mechanism for service institutions that accord with the law of the market.

For these measures to be implemented, certain principles need to be followed. The first principle is to clearly define the functional boundaries between the government and the market. The government should formulate local regulations for inclusive elderly care services based on local realities; and dynamically monitor institutional qualifications, fee transparency, and facility safety. Enter-

prises should optimize resource allocation efficiency through chain and group operations, activate the silver economy industry chain, and reduce the operational costs of elderly care services.

While State-owned enterprises are expected to play a leading role in providing the services, operating the facilities, and cultivating talents, private enterprises need to expand operations, especially take roots in rural areas where elderly care resources are needed.

It's necessary to promote the application of new technology in the elderly care sector. Enterprises need further support in developing low-cost, easy-to-use age-friendly smart wearable devices to reduce the burden on family and community care and improve the efficiency of elderly care services.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## Sessions: Pro-growth policies to be major focus

From page 1

One data point offers good news for China, which has regularly contributed about one-third of global growth in recent years: The monthly purchasing managers' index for February shows that production activities are on the upswing and optimism has increased for the overall economy.

Additional foreign direct investment data, to be released later this month, will provide another indicator of optimism. It already registered an impressive month-on-month growth in January. Western analysts were quick to discuss why foreign investment in China fell in 2024 to levels not seen in more than two decades, and China is quickly moving to address this reality. The lucrative telecommunications sector, for example, has already been opened up wider for international investors, and the Chinese authorities have also announced expansion of opening-up trial programs for healthcare and education sectors.

Meanwhile, China's commitment to high-quality development is well known. One demonstration of that is through technology, an area

where China continues to shine. Consider, as just one example, the attention devoted to DeepSeek, the Chinese artificial intelligence start-up, which released its new DeepSeek R1 model in January. One US-based publication defined DeepSeek as "matching leading US models' performance at a fraction of the cost by using compute and memory resources more efficiently". One leading US university praised DeepSeek for its "capacity for clever engineering and algorithmic innovation".

Technology also plays an important role in other industries, including agriculture. Recognizing the international realities associated with climate change and food insecurity, China continues to push for ways to improve all aspects of food production, distribution and security. A few days ago, the government released this year's No 1 Central Document, with agriculture and the rural economy front and center. Agricultural innovation is seen as a critical means to achieve the important goal of grain security.

In other words, both the CPPCC and the NPC are expected to analyze how self-developed technologies are helping various industries

and people at home and abroad.

Although it may not be a major direct agenda item this year, there is an important reality connected to the two sessions: the whole-process people's democracy. It is an outcome-based model that puts the people at the center of all government decision-making and is judged by how well the government is able to improve the people's socioeconomic conditions and serve their needs. And such an approach to democracy will be central to what will take place in the country's political life over the next few days.

Sober and serious conversations will be evident when the CPPCC and the NPC are in session. When one remembers that in other parts of the world, some leaders seem more interested in bombast and bluster, a political gathering that functions professionally should be welcomed all across the globe.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

DAVID MONYAE

## Stimulus for development

Almost a year since its adoption, the Dar es Salaam Consensus is still relevant as a guide for more productive China-Africa relations going forward

The 13th meeting of the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum, held last March in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, adopted the Consensus Among African and Chinese Think Tanks on Deepening Global Development Cooperation — a document which identified key and priority areas of cooperation between China and Africa.

The consensus, also known as the Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus,

embraced the founding principles of China-Africa relations, which include respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual benefit, openness and common prosperity, among others. Underpinned by these principles, the relationship between the two parties has blossomed and become a model of South-South cooperation. The consensus endorsed China's Global Development Initiative, which is compatible with the African Union's Agenda 2063. The forum stressed the importance of pursuing people-centered development and promoting modernization processes in tandem with national priorities and cultures.

This is very important because African countries have endured decades of imposed development programs and models that yielded little in terms of driving development. The imposition of economic policies on African countries by the Bretton Woods institutions through the Structural Adjustment Programs was a violation of independence and sovereignty which has kept Africa underdeveloped and playing a peripheral role in the global economy.

As such, a modernization philosophy that emphasizes the agency and independence of each country is a more attractive proposition. With almost one-third of the people (467 million) in Africa living in extreme poverty, the Global Development Initiative can serve as a better alternative development model. China knows a great deal about eradicating poverty having lifted 800 million of its people out of abject poverty. The country is already Africa's most important development partner, with initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, trade (especially duty-free access to the Chinese market

granted to Africa's least developed countries), investment and development finance playing a critical role in addressing economic development in the continent.

In 2024, trade between China and Africa reached \$295 billion, up 4.8 percent from 2023, further cementing China's position as Africa's largest trading partner. It is important to note that trade between the two sides is not just the flow of imports and exports. It has a developmental character. Since December, China has implemented the zero-tariff policy for 33 least-developed countries in Africa. If the concerned countries are able to take advantage of this offer, Africa's trade deficit with China will further narrow down generating more jobs and revenue for African countries. The BRI — a global program aimed at connecting countries in Asia, Europe and Africa through infrastructure development — has helped to improve Africa's infrastructure across the energy, transport and communications sectors. Over 50 African countries and the AU have signed cooperation memorandums with China under the BRI framework. In 2023, African countries concluded deals worth over \$21 billion under the BRI framework, including investments in roads, ports, railways and power plants. Access to sustainable funding for infrastructure is essential for the realization of the African Continental Free Trade Area. These projects are decided and implemented on principles of respect for sovereignty and win-win cooperation, as emphasized in the Dar es Salaam Consensus.

Moreover, one of the points raised in the consensus was the need to improve and expedite Africa's access to development finance at reasonable rates and without crippling conditions. China is leading by example in this regard, having availed over \$13 billion to fund key development projects of their choice in African countries. At the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summit in Beijing in September, President Xi Jinping announced almost \$51 billion in funding for Africa over the next three years in the form of investment, development assistance projects and credit. As such, it is up to African countries to make full use of this opportunity to advance African development.

China and Africa have long expressed solidarity in calling for the reform of the global economic governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. The Dar es Salaam Consensus added its voice to this call. The two parties can take advantage of South Africa's 2025 presidency of the G20 meeting to firmly place the reform of these key institutions on the global agenda.

Further, as part of the efforts to reform the international financial architecture, China and Africa should accelerate efforts to create an alternative international credit rating agency that will provide fair and objective risk analysis of developing countries. African countries have long suffered from the opaque and biased risk-profiling methods of Western credit rating agencies, which make access to credit prohibitively costly. The advent of the second Donald Trump administration in the United States has unleashed a sustained assault on multilateral institutions with the US pulling out of the Paris Agreement, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Human Rights Council. Africa and China will have to work to maintain and protect multilateralism, as only through multilateral platforms can the world address some of the most urgent challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic and the deteriorating climate situation have demonstrated the indispensability of multilateral institutions. Further, with the US' nationalist approach to international security, China's Global Security Initiative that emphasizes the indivisibility of global security provides an opportunity for Africa, which is currently struggling with violent conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique and Sudan, to play a meaningful role in the global peace and security landscape. As such, almost a year since its adoption, the Dar es Salaam Consensus is still relevant and can act as a guide for more productive China-Africa relations going forward.

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WANG HENG

## Crucial driver of continent's modernization

Africa's young population and vast market potential, combined with China's technological strengths, create strong complementarities for AI cooperation

In recent years, rapid advancements in artificial intelligence have fueled a new wave of technological revolution and industrial transformation, presenting significant opportunities for Africa's development and China-Africa cooperation. As Africa's largest trading partner, China is actively expanding AI-driven innovation collaborations with African countries, which is crucial for fostering economic growth and sustainable development



across the continent.

In August 2024, the African Union released the Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy, focusing on AI development in governance, skills, research and infrastructure. Several African countries, including Mauritius, Kenya, Egypt, Algeria and Benin, have introduced national AI strategies and policies to drive technological progress.

Leveraging platforms such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation have helped in intensifying China-Africa exchanges in emerging technologies, new energy and advanced industries. China-Africa AI cooperation, in particular, is gaining momentum, characterized by improved institutional mechanisms, expanding collaboration fields and strengthening participation in global AI governance.

In September, President Xi Jinping delivered a keynote address at the opening ceremony of the 2024 FOCAC summit in Beijing, announcing 10 partnership action plans to deepen China-Africa cooperation. These actions explicitly call for the joint establishment of a China-Africa digital technology cooperation center and the implementation of 20 digital infrastructure and digital transformation demonstration projects by Chinese enterprises in Africa.

Additionally, China and Africa have set up mechanisms such as the China-Africa Internet Development and Cooperation Forum and the China-Africa Digital Cooperation Forum to drive AI collaboration. In 2024, the China-Africa Internet Development and Cooperation Forum announced the creation of a China-Africa cybersecurity and informatization exchange and cooperation base, while China and 26 African countries jointly released the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan, exploring cooperation in AI, 5G/6G, high-performance computing and

quantum communication.

China-Africa AI cooperation is expanding, with a strong focus on digital infrastructure development while extending into technology R&D and innovation, industrial collaboration and talent development. Since the establishment of the FOCAC, Chinese enterprises have helped African nations add or upgrade 66,000 kilometers of transmission and distribution lines, 120 gigawatts of installed power capacity and 150,000 kilometers of backbone communication networks, providing network services to nearly 700 million user terminals. They have also built large-scale data centers and provided cloud computing services, facilitating Africa's digital transformation and AI development. AI and digital talent training are also deepening. For example, in 2021, Egypt's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology partnered with Chinese enterprises to launch the Digital Egypt Builders Initiative, offering 1,000 annual scholarships to students. Huawei has collaborated with African universities to establish Huawei academies, offering digital skills training.

China and Africa are also enhancing their cooperation in global AI governance. In 2023, China released the Global AI Governance Initiative, advocating for mutual respect and equal benefits in AI development. The AU's Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy highlights the importance of regional and global collaboration, strengthening public-private partnerships, and enhancing Africa's international influence. In 2024, the China-Africa Internet Development and Cooperation Forum issued the Chair's Statement on China-Africa Cooperation on AI, emphasizing the need for closer coordination within multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations, to enhance the representation and voice of developing countries in AI's global development and governance.

As a strategic emerging sector, AI is a crucial driver of Africa's modernization. Africa's young population and vast AI market potential, combined with China's technological and financial strengths, create strong complementarities for China-Africa AI cooperation.

First, aligning development strategies is crucial to drive new quality productive forces. AI is unlocking new opportunities for China-Africa cooperation. Based on China's New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan, which sets strategic goals for 2030, China and Africa should align their AI cooperation

with the AU's Continental AI Strategy and national AI strategies across African countries. Given the varying stages of AI development across Africa, priority should be given to partnerships with South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria and Rwanda, leveraging collaborations with these regional leaders to extend AI benefits to more subregional economies.

Second, enhancing technical support and improving the integration of industry, academia and research. China and Africa can explore driving bilateral efforts through technological leadership and application, strengthening technological independence and industrial progress, and enhancing economic innovation and international competitiveness. The two sides can build the China-Africa digital technology cooperation center, strengthen fundamental research on general AI and key technology development, carry out joint research actively, experience sharing and technical exchanges, and explore innovations in critical core technologies.

In terms of technological application, China and Africa can deepen cooperation based on Africa's concerns and needs. For example, 49 percent of AI applications in Africa focus on agriculture, and 26 percent on climate actions. Therefore, China and Africa should focus on application-oriented and problem-oriented approaches, addressing Africa's practical development challenges. Also, in terms of talent development, they can improve the China-Africa science and education cooperation mechanism by implementing "AI plus education", "AI plus healthcare" and other projects to empower people's livelihoods.

Last, building consensus on AI governance is necessary to strengthen the influence of the Global South. The rise of general AI models has introduced ethical, security and governance challenges, making AI regulation a shared global concern. The United States, the United Kingdom and other Western powers are actively shaping AI standards and governance rules to maintain dominance. As members of the Global South, China and African nations should collaborate through various multilateral platforms to enhance the voice of developing countries in global AI governance.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

## BUSINESS

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# Major steps set to boost private firms

Sector's role in leading innovation becoming increasingly significant

By ZHOU LANXU, LIU ZHIHUA and OUYANG SHIJIA

China is expected to take significant and coordinated steps to facilitate the financing of private businesses as their role in innovation becomes increasingly significant, signaled by the latest symposium between top financial regulators and private enterprises, policy observers and executives said.

Apart from extending loan support to the private sector, they also stressed the urgency of encouraging government-backed funds to invest in innovation-oriented privately owned startups, making financing via the stock and bond markets more accessible, and expediting the development of supply chain finance.

They made the comments as the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, together with other top regulators, convened a symposium on Friday to discuss measures for boosting private enterprises' high-quality development and vowing to help the private sector "grow stronger, better and bigger".

The meeting, jointly convened by the PBOC, All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, National Financial Regulatory Administration, China Securities Regulatory Commission and State Administration of Foreign Exchange, stressed supporting the private sector as an inherent priority for financial services and a manifestation of upholding the political and people-centered nature of financial work.

Analysts said it is not the first time for the central bank to convene symposiums on supporting private enterprises, with similar meetings held in 2018 and 2023, for instance. Friday's meeting, however, featured wide participation by various authorities, indicating that all-out, coordinated efforts to strengthen financial support for private enterprises are underway.

"Private and small businesses, known for their flexible structures, play a crucial role in driving technological innovation," said Lou Feipeng, a researcher at Postal Savings Bank of China, emphasizing the need for stronger financial support for the private sector amid the latest wave of technological revolution.

In terms of direct financing, eligible private enterprises should be supported in raising funds through bond issuances and IPOs, Lou said. On the indirect financing front, banks should improve first-time loan services for private businesses, expand access to credit-based lending, implement loan renewals without principal repayment and develop supply chain finance.

Tian Xuan, head of Tsinghua University's National Institute of Financial Research, said it is important to deepen reforms in the primary market to encourage investment by

State-backed institutions in tech-driven startups, extend evaluation periods for their investment performance and enhance tolerance of their investment failures.

"With the US administration intensifying restrictions on investments in Chinese companies, State-backed investment funds and State-owned enterprises are increasingly filling the gap left by the exit of US venture capital," Tian said.

Echoing Tian's remarks, Song Qing, president of Baheal Pharma Group, said the symposium has bolstered the confidence of private enterprises like itself, which has established investment funds worth billions of yuan that were invested in innovative projects across artificial heart, radiotherapy equipment and nuclear medicine drug sectors.

"We hope to attract more municipal and national-level funds to work together and provide strong financial support for innovative enterprises in the healthcare sector, while leveraging favorable capital market policies to facilitate our invested sci-tech companies going public," Song said.

The symposium emphasized strengthening bond market innovation and reaffirming boosting private enterprise financing through capital markets — including support for tech-driven firms, mergers and acquisitions, and industrial upgrades.

The meeting also called for good use of structural monetary policy tools, increased credit access for private and small businesses, equal treatment of all ownership types by financial institutions, improvements to credit enhancement systems for smaller businesses and accelerated rollouts of supply chain finance regulations.

Xia Hua, chairman of fashion and apparel company Eve Group and an attendee at the symposium, suggested that financial institutions better meet private businesses' funding needs in areas such as technological upgrading and intelligent manufacturing in order to foster their innovative development.

It is also advisable for financial institutions to introduce convenient and supply chain financial services to drive the collective digitalization of enterprises throughout the industrial chain, Xia said.

As of the end of 2024, China's outstanding loans to technology-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises surged by 21.2 percent year-on-year. The issuance of bills specializing in supporting sci-tech innovation in the interbank market exceeded 604.2 billion yuan (\$82.9 billion) last year, up 49 percent year-on-year, the PBOC said.

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An employee works on a solar panel production line in Huaibei, Anhui province. LI XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Clean tech use surges in China

By ZHENG XIN [zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn)

Clean-energy technologies made up more than 10 percent of China's economy last year for the first time ever, with sales and investments worth 13.6 trillion yuan (\$1.9 trillion), according to a think tank.

These sectors grew three times as fast as the Chinese economy's overall growth rate, accounting for 26 percent of all gross domestic product growth in 2024, according to data released by the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

The clean-energy sectors drove a quarter of the country's GDP growth last year and overtook real estate sales in value, it said.

The sectors, according to the organization, include renewables, nuclear power, electricity grids, energy storage, EVs and railways, which used technologies and infrastructure needed to decarbonize China's production and use of energy.

China's clean energy sector continued to soar last year, with the total installed capacity of wind and solar power surpassing 1.4 billion kilowatts, according to data released by the National Energy Administration.

The record combined capacity of wind and solar energy further reinforced the country's role as a global leader in renewable energy development, said industry experts.

Installation of renewable capacity in China has surged in recent years and the momentum has not been slowing, said Zhu Yicong, vice-president of renewables and power research at global consultancy Rystad Energy.

The global consultancy forecasts the country's solar sector to break records in the coming years, with total installed solar PV capacity expected to cross the 1,000 gigawatt mark by the end of 2026.

As China, the world leader in electricity production from such energy sources, prioritizes renew-

ables in its energy strategy, it has shown clear leadership in global solar PV installations, and a large proportion of such installations are expected to be generated from the country in 2025, Zhu said.

This is echoed by the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air, which believes that there is likely to be further growth in clean-energy investment in 2025 as major projects race to finish before the end of the country's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

According to the center, there has been a growing role for clean technology in China's economy, particularly the "new three sectors" — photovoltaics, lithium-ion batteries and new energy vehicles.

Of the three sectors, batteries and solar continued to dominate in terms of the economic contribution of clean energy in China, generating three-quarters of the value added and, overall, attracting more than half of all investment in the sectors, it said.

## Hong Kong accelerates integration into national development strategy

HONG KONG — The Second Agreement Concerning Amendment to the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement Agreement on Trade in Services (agreement II) was implemented on Saturday, allowing Hong Kong to accelerate its integration into the overall national development.

The agreement II further opens up the services market of the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong, enabling Hong Kong businesses and professionals to enter the mainland market with more preferential treatment.

This move was welcomed by various sectors in Hong Kong, and the industry is looking forward to making good use of the central government's policies to support Hong Kong and promote high-quality economic development, further integrating into the national development.

The agreement II introduces new liberalization measures across a number of service sectors where Hong Kong enjoys competitive advantages, such as financial services, construction and related engineering services, testing and certification, telecommunications, motion pictures, television and tourism services.

The liberalization measures take various forms, including removing or relaxing restrictions on equity shareholding and business scope in the establishment of enterprises; relaxing qualification requirements for Hong Kong

professionals providing services; and easing restrictions on Hong Kong's services exports to the mainland market.

Most of the liberalization measures apply to the whole mainland, while some of them are designated for pilot implementation in the nine Pearl River Delta municipalities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Paul Chan, financial secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government, said earlier that according to the agreement II, the restriction for the mainland branches of Hong Kong banks to conduct bank card business will be lifted starting from March, which will facilitate them in expanding their businesses in the mainland.

By the end of last year, the cumulative Customs duty concessions under CEPA had exceeded 10.2 billion yuan (\$1.39 billion). Last year, the total trade in goods between the mainland and Hong Kong exceeded HK\$4.8 trillion (\$617.19 billion), more than three times the amount before the implementation of CEPA, with an average annual growth rate of 5.6 percent.

The number of sectors in which the mainland has fully or partially opened up to Hong Kong's services sector has increased to 153, accounting for 96 percent of all 160 service trade sectors.

The agreement II also brings along institutional innovation and collaboration enhancements. It includes the addition of "allowing

Hong Kong-invested enterprises to adopt Hong Kong law" and "allowing Hong Kong-invested enterprises to choose for arbitration to be seated in Hong Kong" as facilitation measures for Hong Kong investors; and removal of the period requirement on Hong Kong service suppliers to engage in substantive business operations in Hong Kong for three years in most service sectors.

Jonathan Choi, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and chairman of the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce of Hong Kong, recently pointed out that the agreement II covers multiple important system innovations, not only providing convenience for Hong Kong businesses entering the mainland market, but also offering broader legal service options for investors in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

It encourages more foreign investors to use Hong Kong as a springboard to invest in the Greater Bay Area, further consolidating Hong Kong's role as a "super-conductor" and "super value-adder", Choi said.

The mainland and Hong Kong signed the CEPA in 2003. CEPA has now been upgraded to a comprehensive and modern free trade agreement and has brought significant economic benefits to Hong Kong.

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## Phonak launches AI-based hearing aid device

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou [qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn)

Phonak, a brand of Switzerland-based multinational hearing solutions provider Sonova, has launched a new family of hearing aid devices based on its innovative Infinio platform in China, aiming to help more people with hearing loss in the country.

As understanding speech amid background noise remains the biggest challenge for people with hearing loss, the devices are the world's first hearing aids powered by a dedicated real time artificial intelligence chips with speech-from-noise separation, according to the company.

Development of the new products took about five years, as self-development of new chips for the devices was very challenging, said Andi Vonlanthen, senior vice-president of Hearing Instrument Research and Development, Sonova.

"If we use normal chips that everybody can buy, the hearing devices may not run for more than one hour — the new chip we are using now has lower power consumption," Vonlanthen said during the recent launch event in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province.

Phonak's proprietary Deepsonic chip is a first of its kind, providing real-time AI processing to instantly separate speech from background noise, according to the company.

"Unlike existing technologies, Deepsonic offers dynamic and real-time adjustments, allowing users to engage in conversations from any direction," Vonlanthen said.

The product will become the perfect solution for people with hearing loss in the Chinese market, which has a huge number of hearing-impaired people and a growing elderly population, according to Vonlanthen.

Booming technologies such as AI will play a bigger role in improving hearing aid devices, according to Vonlanthen.

"We have to find new technologies to further improve our products — about five or six years ago, we realized that AI would be the right technology to do that," Vonlanthen said.

With an increasingly aging population, the number of elderly individuals with hearing loss has rapidly increased in China. However, the rate of hearing aid placements in the Chinese market is less than 5 percent, according to Bu Xingquan, an expert on deafness prevention at the World Health Organization.

"How to make technology truly serve people and improve the accessibility of hearing technology for individuals with hearing loss has always been a challenge faced by the hearing health industry," said Bu.

Currently, hearing loss is widespread in China, yet its impact on health is greatly underestimated, according to Lu Wei, chairman of the hearing rehabilitation committee of the Chinese Association of Rehabilitation Medicine.

"The application of AI in hearing aids has not only brought breakthroughs to the industry, but also provided more avenues for the development of AI technology in the field of hearing health," Lu said.

New technologies like AI will reshape the hearing industry across the entire chain, from assisting in diagnosis and rehabilitation intervention to health management, according to Lu.

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## Powering edible fungi



Two staff members of Zhumadian Power Supply Co visit over the weekend Chinagreen Biological Technology Co Ltd in Queshan county in the prefecture-level city of Zhumadian, Henan province, offering on-site help in power consumption. The company, employing over 500 workers, is a large-scale producer of edible fungi products, driving the development of local upstream and downstream industries. ZHANG YONGSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

### Briefly

#### Chinese EV brands lead sales in Israel

Chinese automaker BYD topped electric car sales in Israel in the first two months of 2025, according to figures issued by the Israel Vehicle Importers Association. BYD, which currently offers four electric

models in Israel, sold 2,386 units in the January-February period. Last year, the Chinese EV giant ranked first in Israel car sales with 16,690 units sold. Xpeng Motor, another Chinese EV manufacturer, took second place, selling 1,592 units of the three models it offers in the country.

#### BYD, DJI launch smart car-based drone tech

Chinese automaker BYD and drone giant DJI have launched an intelligent vehicle-mounted drone system, aiming to transform cars into mobile entertainment and exploration platforms. The system — Lingyuan —

integrates a drone with the vehicle, offering a vertical field of view to capture travel moments in real time. It will be available in all BYD models, the company announced at a launch event on Sunday in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

# BUSINESS



A Mixue mascot strikes a gong during the company's listing ceremony at the Hong Kong bourse on Monday. LAM YIK / REUTERS

## Mixue reaps sweet gains as stock soars on HK debut

Chinese mainland bubble tea giant sees shares surge 43.2% on first trading day

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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Mixue Group, Chinese mainland's largest fresh drinks producer by retail market share, made a strong debut on the Hong Kong stock exchange, opening 29 percent above its initial public offering price at HK\$262 (\$33.59) per share.

This gave the company an initial market capitalization of HK\$98.79 billion. As the trading day progressed, Mixue's stock price soared more than 43.2 percent, pushing its total market value beyond HK\$109.3 billion.

The IPO set a record in the Hong Kong market, attracting subscription funds of HK\$1.77 trillion with an oversubscription multiple of 5.125 times.

The listing underscores the growing investor interest in China's freshly made tea beverage sector, which has emerged as one of the hottest categories recently.

Mixue's debut follows the recent listing of Guming Holdings Ltd, a leading midpriced freshly made tea brand, on the Hong Kong bourse.

Both Mixue and Guming operate

under a franchise-based business model, where revenue primarily comes from franchisee purchases of company-supplied ingredients and materials. This asset-light model has enabled rapid expansion.

Founded in 1997, Mixue operates 45,000 stores globally, of which 99 percent are franchised outlets.

Meanwhile, Guming, established in 2010, has expanded to 9,000 stores across China.

Both brands target lower-tier cities, with Mixue's products priced between 6 yuan (\$0.82) and 8 yuan, while Guming's range from 10 to 20 yuan.

Despite the low prices, Mixue has demonstrated strong financial growth, driven by its vast store network and cost-efficient supply chain.

In 2023, the company generated 20.3 billion yuan in revenue, with net profit rising nearly 58.3 percent year-on-year to 3.2 billion yuan.

In the first nine months of 2024 alone, revenue reached 18.7 billion yuan, while net profit climbed 42.3 percent to 3.5 billion yuan.

Over the period, Mixue sold about

7.4 billion cups of freshly made drinks, showing its dominant market presence.

The company's competitive edge lies in its vertically integrated supply chain, which provides cost advantages and operational efficiency.

Mixue sources key ingredients from 38 countries and regions and operates five major production bases across China.

These facilities collectively produce around 1.65 million metric tons of syrups, jams, packaging materials and other ingredients annually.

"In today's consumer market, investors primarily focus on three key aspects when evaluating freshly made tea drink companies: supply chain capabilities, sustainable development and cost-effectiveness," said Zhu Danpeng, an independent food and beverage analyst.

Zhu said that Mixue's strong supply chain has given it a significant edge over competitors.

One example of its cost-efficient model is its lemon water product, launched in 2013. To secure stable raw material prices, Mixue directly partners with fruit farmers and signs price protection agreements.

In 2020, the company established a lemon supply base in Anyue, Sichuan province, the largest lemon-produc-

ing region in the country. By 2023, Mixue's annual lemon procurement volume had reached 115,000 tons, further solidifying its bargaining power.

Mixue also operates an extensive warehousing and distribution network, ensuring fast and cost-effective supply to its franchisees. The company has built 26 warehouses across China, covering a total area of over 300,000 square meters. As of Sept 30, 2023, Mixue had achieved 12-hour delivery reach across more than 90 percent of county-level markets.

Compared to developed markets, China's fresh-made beverage sector has significant growth potential.

In 2023, an average Chinese consumer drank 22 cups of fresh-made beverages annually, a number expected to more than double to 51 cups by 2028, according to Mixue's prospectus.

That year, fresh-made beverages accounted for just 1.6 percent of total water intake in China, compared to over 10 percent in developed markets.

By 2028, the market size of China's fresh-made beverage industry, measured by terminal retail sales, is projected to reach 1.16 trillion yuan, putting it on par with the ready-to-drink beverage sector as a trillion-yuan market.

## Zhuyeqing Tea brewing up success nationwide with efforts in e-tail

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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Zhuyeqing Tea, a major green tea maker in Southwest China's Sichuan province, said the nation's tea consumption market is undergoing significant changes, and it will further strengthen cooperation with e-commerce platforms to meet growing demand from young consumers.

In addition to drinking milk tea and fruit tea, young Chinese consumers have been more interested in going to teahouses or making freshly brewed tea at home, and Zhuyeqing believes that the sales growth potential of original leaf tea is significant in the country.

Facing changes in the tea consumption market, the company has continued to optimize its range of products. It launched its latest green tea for this spring, and introduced a new series of products in smaller tins and more fashionable packaging. Since Monday, its hundreds of stores nationwide had also launched events that allow customers to taste the latest spring tea.

"Chinese consumers have been paying more attention to the cost performance of tea and the functionality of tea as gifts. Tea has increasingly become a day-to-day drink to go with meals and to carry during business trips," said Tang Xianhong, president of Zhuyeqing.

"Besides, tea has become an emotional attachment of many people, indicating consumers' pursuit and celebration of better quality lives," Tang said.

Meanwhile, young people's interest in drinking tea has driven the online consumption volume of tea products, and search volumes for green tea have been climbing on major e-commerce platforms.

Zhuyeqing has signed agreements to further strengthen cooperation with e-commerce platforms JD and Tmall and launch more promotional activities online. The company also started cooperation with major on-demand services platform Meituan, which allows customers to participate in lucky draws online and get the products later at brick-and-mortar stores.

"By leveraging the stickiness of those platforms' customer base, we are expected to accurately reach more potential customers and enable more people to conveniently enjoy the freshness of spring tea," Tang said.

In addition, the Chinese people have been interested in exploring the country's intangible cultural heritage after the Spring Festival was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December.

Tea has a huge market size and sustained demand in China, and the country's tea sector has grown comprehensively in multiple dimensions, demonstrating its strong vitality and resilience."

Wang Qing, chairman of China Tea Marketing Association

Sanxingdui, an ancient archaeological site in Sichuan, has attracted public attention after new archaeological discoveries were made at the site. At the occasion of the launch of new spring tea this year, Zhuyeqing and Sanxingdui Museum officially cooperated to carry out more innovative interpretations of tea culture.

Currently, green tea accounts for nearly 60 percent of the total output of all kinds of tea in China, followed by black tea and dark tea. Sichuan stands as a major high-quality green tea production base in China, and Mount Emei has a tea planting history of over 4,000 years, according to the China Tea Marketing Association.

"Tea has a huge market size and sustained demand in China, and the country's tea sector has grown comprehensively in multiple dimensions, demonstrating its strong vitality and resilience. And the development of the tea sector significantly contributed to rural vitalization," said Wang Qing, chairman of the association.

Last year, domestic tea sales volume reached nearly 2.5 million metric tons, and total sales value hit 330 billion yuan (\$45.24 billion), the association said.

Meanwhile, tea export volume reached 374,000 tons last year, up 1.8 percent year-on-year. Export value was \$1.42 billion, down 18.4 percent. Some top exporting destinations include Morocco, Ghana, Uzbekistan, Russia, the United States and Japan, according to data from the General Administration of Customs.

For tea exports, green tea significantly exceeded other categories in terms of both export volume and value, with export volume of green tea about 10 times higher than that of black tea, said the China Chamber of Commerce of Import and Export of Foodstuffs, Native Produce and Animal By-Products.

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# Q&A WITH CEO

**Editor's Note:** This year marks a critical milestone as China concludes its 14th Five-Year Plan. To help in assessing the success of the process, we have asked multinational executives to share with our readers their insights about their business achievements in the past few years and further expectations in the years to come.

## Multinational execs bullish on two sessions



**Xia Fuliang**  
President of Evonik China



**Pablo Machado**  
Executive Vice-President of Suzano



**Dino Otranto**  
CEO of Fortescue Metals



**Henry Ding**  
President of 3M China

**Q1** What are your expectations for the two sessions? Do you expect any specific policy measures for further deepening reforms and expanding high-level opening-up? What more should China do to create a more enabling business environment for foreign investors?

**XIA:** Evonik is one of the world's leading specialty chemicals companies and we have been doing business in China for more than 90 years. China's unwavering focus on opening-up has reinforced our confidence in the market. As we look forward to the two sessions — the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference — we anticipate it will further solidify China's commitment to high-level opening-up and institutional reforms. In particular, we noticed that the recently released plan for stabilizing foreign investment has set a clear roadmap, and we expect the two sessions to prioritize its implementation through complementary policies. With China's steadfast focus on high-level opening-up, we look forward to contributing to this journey through innovation and sustainable partnerships.

**MACHADO:** The two sessions are a critical platform for shaping China's economic, social and development policies and there are high expectations for the sessions as the world faces multiple challenges in different dimensions. Suzano has been committed to China for more than 40 years, over which time we increased our trade, volume, operations and investments — both in China and with Chinese stakeholders. Particularly over the past three years, Suzano significantly increased its investments and presence in China, which is translated into different dimensions. Suzano is particularly interested in measures that promote sustainable development, green manufacturing and the circular economy. We are keen to see measures that can further boost demand and consumer confidence, which are important engines for the growth of our industry and others in China.

**OTRANTO:** China's economic development has made it a key player in the global economy, which will continue to shape global economic growth and technological innovation in the years to come. In the two sessions, we expect to see policy measures that reflect China's strategic priorities for the year ahead, including support for the private sector, technological advancement and fiscal stimulus to navigate current challenges and promote sustainable growth.

**DING:** China's robust supply chain, favorable policies, dynamic innovation ecosystem and vast market potential provide significant advantages for our local operations here, much like for other multinational companies. We also look forward to a more open platform to strengthen supply chain collaborations and academia-industry partnerships. As a global company deeply rooted in China for over 40 years, 3M is committed to co-developing localized solutions that address challenges together with industry stakeholders, aligning our global capabilities with China's evolving priorities.

**Q2** "New quality productive forces" is widely seen as key to helping China achieve industrial upgrade and "high-quality development". How can your company help cultivate such forces in China?

**XIA:** Innovation and green transformation are at the heart of China's high-quality development. With Evonik's latest innovative and sustainable solutions, we are helping to promote a green and low-carbon economy and contribute expertise to industrial upgrade. We have been enhancing product supply and reducing time-to-market, and continuously strengthening our R&D capabilities in specific technologies to support strategic emerging industries including electric vehicles, renewable energy and healthcare. We have established joint development laboratories and R&D strategic cooperation in China in sectors such as high-performance materials, oil additives and personal care products. These partnerships bring win-win results for both Evonik and domestic industries by driving innovation and accelerating market application.

**MACHADO:** Our pursuit of sustainable development through innovation well echoes the "new quality productive forces". We are committed to supporting China's industrial upgrade and high-quality development, with a focus on providing high-quality, renewable products that can serve multiple different industries, ranging from paper, packaging, hygiene, textile, fashion, energy and others, enabling downstream industries to innovate and grow with a lower carbon footprint. Some examples are our Ecolig lignin for the elastomer industry, the use of cellulosic fiber in the textile industry, replacing long fibers with Suzano's hardwood fibers in tissues, hygiene, packaging, paper, and fiber cement. These all enable the replacement of fossil-based materials, resulting in a lower final carbon footprint from end products.

**OTRANTO:** Fortescue and China share a strong track record of innovation, which is the basis for a continued beneficial partnership in the future. The biggest opportunity we see is working together to build a fully integrated green metal supply chain between Australia and China. This has the potential to provide massive economic and environmental value to both our countries by bringing together green sustainable mining, large-scale renewable power and green hydrogen to produce green iron metal.

**DING:** China's economy is at a crucial stage of high-quality development, with its manufacturing sector rapidly transforming. Material science, 3M's core competency, is the cornerstone that enables new technologies, business models and industries, and plays a key role in overcoming technological bottlenecks and fostering new productive forces. For over four decades, 3M has grown alongside China's economic development, continuously advancing R&D in materials and application solutions to help industries reduce costs and enhance efficiency. Looking ahead, 3M will strengthen local R&D and expand collaborative innovation with industry partners to provide expertise and solutions.

**Q3** DeepSeek has been a buzzword and surprised the world starting this year. AI technology has been deeply integrated with various industries around the world. What opportunities do you foresee for your business from AI technology? What's your view on China's ability to sustain innovation in breakthrough technologies in the coming years?

**XIA:** China's unique combination of extensive market scale and advanced digital infrastructure equips it to spearhead the AI-industrial revolution. At Evonik, we recognize that AI technology is revolutionizing industries worldwide. We see opportunities from AI integration across various facets of our operations, business development, customer service and even R&D. For example, Evonik has collaborated with IBM Research Europe and the MIT-IBM Watson AI Lab to explore how AI can help accelerate the development and optimization process of materials. This innovation dramatically shortens the time required to discover and commercialize new materials or improve its performance, reducing development cycles from over a decade to just a few months.

**MACHADO:** AI technology is transforming industries globally, and Suzano is already exploring the integration of AI into our operations to enhance efficiency, optimize supply chains and improve customer engagement. Just as an example, Suzano developed Tetrys, an AI algorithm to determine the right seedling clones to be planted in every specific region where we operate. But there is so much more yet to be explored and China has a lot to offer. The country's focus and investments on innovation, coupled with its vast talent pool, position it as a global leader in technological innovation. We are excited to collaborate with local partners and contribute to China's innovation ecosystem. We are also keen to learn from China and bring the technologies that China has been developing to our operations — not only in China, but also in other regions.

**OTRANTO:** AI is one of the most transformative innovations that is reshaping industries worldwide — and now we're also seeing it revolutionize the mining sector. There's no doubt that it holds enormous potential to change the way we do business at Fortescue. By embracing AI, we are driving efficiency across our business, using data to predict outcomes and optimize performance. This means we're now able to track every step of our supply chain — from the extraction process right through to delivery at the final point of sale.

**DING:** The rapid advancement of AI technology not only aligns with society's growing anticipation of its applications, but also supports 3M's ongoing transformation and upgrading. We continuously integrate cutting-edge technologies to enable smarter and more efficient manufacturing. For example, our plant in the Shanghai Chemical Industry Park uses a self-developed digital platform to optimize energy management, and harnesses AI technologies to further enhance energy efficiency, reducing carbon footprints while improving operational performance. We are confident in the future of technological innovation in China, supported by strong R&D ecosystems and favorable policy frameworks. 3M will continue to deepen our local innovations and collaborations in China, co-driving high-quality, innovation-driven growth with partners across industries.

**Q4** Driving domestic consumption is one of the top priorities for China to spur economic growth this year. How do you see China's potential to drive a consumption-led impetus for the economy? How will that affect your company's profitability this year?

**XIA:** China's shift toward a consumption-led economic model presents a multilayered opportunity and is redefining the entire value chain, emphasizing not just scale but value. By integrating our innovations into premium, green and digital ecosystems, Evonik is poised to turn policy-driven demand into sustainable profitability. We are dedicated to being both beneficiaries and enablers of China's trajectory toward high-quality consumption growth. The increasing demand from China's rising middle-income group for high-quality products — such as functional cosmetics, sports equipment and healthcare — necessitates the use of advanced materials provided by Evonik, such as bio-based ingredients, high-performance polymers and advanced bio materials. Green consumption transition such as green mobility has been boosting demand for EV battery materials, high performance lightweight materials, as well as energy-efficient and environmentally friendly additives for tires and interiors.

**MACHADO:** China has a vast and growing middle-income group, highly educated workforce, a robust research, development and innovation ecosystem and a critical manufacturing base. You couple those with top universities and high investments in education, science and technology — and policies and measures aimed at long-term development and prosperity — and you have a recipe for high-quality development. Given all the elements mentioned earlier, I see all the reasons to be confident that China will achieve its objectives. China's focus on driving domestic consumption is a strategic move and that will benefit the whole economy, not only in China but way beyond its borders, including the industry Suzano operates in.

**OTRANTO:** The government's targeted fiscal policies and incentive programs to stimulate consumer spending will likely push domestic consumption upward. There's also growing consumer interest in green, sustainable products which could see significant growth — green iron metal being just one example. China is well placed to encourage consumption growth, which will likely positively impact steel demand and iron ore consumption. In terms of Fortescue's profitability, we have longstanding relationships with our customers in China and our product is in strong demand. Our focus remains on the things that we can control — safety, production and cost — and in these aspects, Fortescue is positioned very strongly.

**DING:** China's recent implementation of a robust stimulus policy package, which includes targeted measures to boost consumer spending, will create significant opportunities for global businesses seeking to tap into the vast market and support the shift toward a consumption-driven growth model. I think our consumer business will benefit directly from the initiatives of consumption-led impetus. Moreover, our expertise in advanced materials science enables us to support diverse industries, benefitting from the expansion and upgrading of consumer demand in China. As a firm believer in the "local for local" approach, more than 85 percent of products 3M produces in China are consumed within the country. Through innovations in materials science, we aim to meet the evolving needs of Chinese consumers, aligning with public expectations for a smarter and more sustainable lifestyle.

**Q5** As China continues to pursue high-quality development along a Chinese path to modernization, what opportunities do you anticipate for your business as this process gains more traction? How will that affect investment in China in the coming years? How will you further expand your footprint in China?

**XIA:** China's unique modernization path, emphasizing innovation, sustainability and inclusive growth, is a field that the chemical industry can contribute to. Evonik wants to grow with the Chinese market and we are increasing our local footprint to better serve the market, with a focus on strategic industries such as e-mobility, renewable energy and healthcare. In 2025, we are expecting to see expansion in production capacity and investment in innovations for our local footprint in China, including a new specialty-grade hydrogen peroxide plant in Leshan, Sichuan province, which will complete and commence operations in November, serving sectors such as solar panels, semiconductors and food packaging. The expansion of specialty amine production at the Nanjing plant will also be completed in 2025.

**MACHADO:** China's pursuit of high-quality development and modernization presents significant opportunities for Suzano. We are particularly excited about growing demand for sustainable and renewable products in sectors like packaging, textiles, hygiene, construction and paper. As part of our long-term commitment to China, we plan to increase our investments in China and in our Chinese customers and partners, aiming to further boost demand for our bio-based products and support acceleration to a greener and lower carbon economy. We are also investing efforts in developing Chinese suppliers and further integrating them into our supply chains. Finally, our measures aimed at further facilitating cross-border investments, financial flows and opening-up capital markets will support and accelerate Suzano's investments in China.

**OTRANTO:** We see an enormous opportunity to work with China on decarbonizing the steel industry through the development of green iron metal solutions. We're in discussions with Chinese steelmakers to explore green iron technologies as well as working with Chinese renewable manufacturers. These collaborations are focused on finding ways to reduce the carbon footprint of steel production — a significant goal given China's large role in global steelmaking.

**DING:** China's pursuit of high-quality development presents significant opportunities for multinational companies like 3M. We are consistently working to position 3M to capitalize on emerging trends and focus on end-markets where we can succeed. Investments in sectors such as automotives, energy and electronics all represent key growth areas for 3M. China is a strategically important long-term market for 3M, and we are confident in the opportunities it presents. We will continue to invest and expand our presence in the Chinese market, looking forward to further supporting the evolution of China's economy toward a healthier future, as we have done for over four decades.