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CHINA DAILY

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Jiangsu encouraged to play major role

President Xi calls on the East China province to lead the integration of sci-tech, innovation

By XU WEI
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President Xi Jinping underlined on Wednesday the need for Jiangsu province, one of China's economic powerhouses, to lead the integration of sci-tech and industrial innovation, the deepening of reform and high-level opening-up, and the nation's common prosperity drive.

The president, who represents

Jiangsu as a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, told his fellow deputies from the province that the nation's economic powerhouses must take the lead as China strives to achieve its targets set out in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military

Commission, made the remarks in Beijing when he took part in a deliberation with his fellow lawmakers during the third session of the 14th NPC.

He spoke after six deputies shared their insights on issues such as accelerating green and low-carbon transformation and advancing industrial and technological innovation.

He explained that sci-tech and industrial innovation is the fundamental pathway for the development of new quality productive forces — featuring high technology, high efficiency and

high quality, and aligning with the country's new development philosophy.

The president highlighted the need to advance education, science and talent development in tandem — both to generate more technological breakthroughs and to transform them into tangible productive forces.

In driving industrial innovation, the nation must anchor its efforts in the real economy, balancing the upgrade of traditional industries with the cultivation of strategic emerging sectors and future industries, he stressed.

The role of enterprises as key drivers of innovation must be further bolstered to ensure a seamless connection between innovation and industry, he added.

The president set out high expectations for Jiangsu to further deepen reform and opening-up.

Jiangsu's GDP grew 5.8 percent year-on-year to 13.7 trillion yuan (\$1.89 trillion) in 2024, registering the greatest increase in GDP volume in the nation last year, according to the provincial government.

See *Jiangsu*, page 2

WORLD WATCH
By Keith Bennett

London summit failed to solve any problems

Participants at the London summit for Ukraine on March 2 tried to put on a brave face even as multiple dilemmas confronted the Europeans.

It's noteworthy that the summit was planned before President of the United States Donald Trump met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House, but it acquired a radically different context following the acrimonious Oval Office showdown.

The Europeans are putting up a lot of show to cover what, for them, is a bad situation while trying to think of doing something.

The Europeans — at least most of them — are trying to temper their public criticism of Trump, and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, in particular, is really going out of his way to avoid any public criticism of the US president.

But that doesn't actually solve the main problem they are facing. They're putting up a lot of show to cover what, for them, is a bad situation while trying to think of doing something.

We also have to look at the fact that after the summit, Zelenskyy met with King Charles III. The meeting was organized at Zelenskyy's request.

That was typical of the kind of theater that Zelenskyy has engaged in on the international stage for the last three years. The meeting with King Charles III made for good optics, and he'll doubtless want to use the photos and footage to try to take the attention away from the humiliation he suffered at the hands of Trump and company.

But the meeting with the British monarch has absolutely no practical bearing on the current situation. It doesn't improve Ukraine's position on the ground.

See *Ukraine*, page 12

Echoes of Marco Polo

Performers in traditional Chinese attire are pictured during the Venice Carnival at San Marco Square in Venice, Italy, on Tuesday. Local Chinese expatriates, passionate about spreading traditional Chinese culture, voluntarily organized a performance troupe. They presented a series of China-themed performances for the tourists, including fashion shows, Dunhuang dances, and *guzheng* performances.

ALBERTO LINGRIA / XINHUA



Poorest New Yorkers struggle to afford food, housing

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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New York is one of the wealthiest cities in the world with more than 349,000 millionaires in its ranks, but it is also home to low-income families who battle each day to afford basic necessities such as housing, food and visits to the doctor.

At least a quarter of the city's residents are living in poverty, a record number not seen since 2022, the Poverty Tracker report by Columbia University and Robin Hood, an anti-poverty charity found. Out of more than 2 million New Yorkers who live in poverty, 1.6 million are adults and 420,000 are children.

Elisa, 35, who declined to give her surname, is a mother of six young children. She is unemployed, barely survives on public assistance and lives in a shelter in Brownsville. She is fed up with the effects of inflation.

"Things keep going up in the grocery store. I think it's ridiculous, especially the price of eggs, \$12 for a dozen," she told China Daily. "I mean honestly, I just have to pay for it. I go to BJ's and other places that have things on sale because it's really ridiculous. I feel like it's going to get to the point that there's going to be food that

"I'm really choosing whether to pay this or pay that or don't get this and don't get that so we can eat."

Daren McMillan, 56, from Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, New York

2 million

Number of New Yorkers living in poverty

we are not even going to be able to eat. Pantries could do a better job.

"My family and a lot of people I know are going through things because of the prices, and for a lot of people it's a struggle, people are sick, a lot of people are on disability. Housing costs too much," Elisa said.

While poverty is scattered across most boroughs of the city, some of the poorest New York neighborhoods include the South Bronx, which has one of the highest rates of poverty, and Brownsville in Brooklyn.

Around 14 percent of residents

in Brownsville were unemployed in 2018, data from the US Census shows. At least 28 percent live in poverty.

Staff at local supermarkets and food pantries say that the families they see daily are in desperate need and simply cannot afford both food and rent.

Several local churches in the area give out donated free food throughout the week, including Glover Memorial Baptist Church, which has a soup kitchen, God's Deliverance Temple Inc and the New Hope Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ.

Tom Williams, a retired 75-year-old welder, said he is having a hard time dealing with the rising cost of living as a senior on a fixed income. Originally from the Caribbean, he immigrated to the US in 1971. He has watched as things have gotten very tough for everyone.

Williams told China Daily: "People around me are crying over the high prices. They can't manage. Last week I went into a store about four blocks away on East 98th Street. The Dollar General Brownsville. I used to buy canola oil there for \$5; now it's \$10. That's too much."

"I'm alone and I don't do excessive, enormous shopping. I would say my increase right now is about like, \$50 a week. You just budget

and you just take your time and make adjustments. As a senior, there's some privileges that other people might not get. There are programs. You can get subsidies to help pay rent. But it's never enough."

Throughout Brownsville, rows of low-cost shops include a pizza parlor and a 99-cent store. The discount stores Dollar General and Family Dollar are located across the street from each other. Prices there can be as low as \$3 for household goods and tinned food. Both shops were packed with families on a Monday afternoon, all carefully budgeting for what they can afford.

Darren McMillan, 56, from Bedford-Stuyvesant, works in Brownsville and said he's been forced to scale back on some things he used to buy to cope.

McMillan told China Daily: "I'm really choosing whether to pay this or pay that or don't get this and don't get that so we can eat. I think that the community that we don't know of, we have to become more familiar with. That way we can work together to heal problems."

"I think that we have to stop looking for outside help to do it. No one is going to help us, not the government, no one," he said. "I don't have much, but what I do have I share with people and help

people. We need more of that."

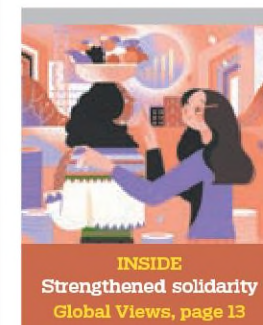
President Donald Trump pledged to bring prices down on "day one" if he got back into office. A month into his second term, grocery prices remain high.

Trump's move to enact a 25 percent tariff on goods from Mexico and Canada and an additional 10 percent tariff on Chinese goods on March 4 could mean households pay an extra \$1,600 to \$2000 for items per year, the Yale Budget Lab, a nonpartisan public policy research center found.

The US imported more than \$1.3 trillion in goods from China, Mexico and Canada in 2024. Mexico is a huge source of food imports into the US. Canada delivers oil and cars, and China exports clothing and electronics.

New York's poverty rate of 25 percent is nearly double the national rate of 13 percent. The poverty threshold for a family of four that rents their home is \$47,190.

While the poor carefully watch every dollar they spend, the Big Apple is also home to 60 billionaires, 744 centimillionaires (with investable wealth of more than \$100 million) and the highest number of millionaires of any city in the world, according to immigration consultancy Henley & Partners. Together their combined total wealth is \$3 trillion.



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TWO SESSIONS

New quality productive forces sought

Modern industrial system could help fuel long-term economic growth

By FAN FEIFEI
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China's emphasis on developing new quality productive forces based on local conditions and accelerating the establishment of a modern industrial system will provide strong momentum for long-term economic growth while enhancing the resilience and competitiveness of its industrial and supply chains, national legislators, political advisers and experts said.

They called for efforts to boost enterprises' independent innovation capabilities, achieve breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields and drive industrial upgrades by integrating cutting-edge digital technologies with the real economy.

Their comments followed the release of this year's Government Work Report, which states that China will pursue integrated advancements in technological and industrial innovation, push forward new industrialization, and expand and strengthen advanced manufacturing to foster new growth drivers and upgrade traditional ones.

"The cultivation of new quality productive forces is a key focus in promoting high-quality economic growth and a strategic choice in the new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation," said Zhou Yunjie, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress and chairman and CEO of Chinese home appliance manufacturer Haier Group.

Zhou said the industrial internet, as a new type of infrastructure, has played a pivotal role in driving the development of new quality productive forces, advancing new industrialization, and accelerating the digital transformation and upgrading of enterprises.

As China strives to become a manufacturing powerhouse, more efforts are needed to promote the innovative application of the industrial internet and fully unlock the value of massive data resources, Zhou said.

He added that Haier will continue to pursue technological innovation and integrate artificial intelligence technology with the manufacturing sector.

Cao Peng, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and chairman of e-commerce giant JD's technology committee, said, "Scientific and technological innovation is the core element for nurturing new quality productive forces, while digital technologies represented by AI have become an important engine driving their development."

Cao called for accelerating the

construction of computing power infrastructure to expand the application of large language models across more fields and lower computing costs for enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized ones.

Luo Zhongwei, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Industrial Economics, said, "Fostering new growth drivers and upgrading traditional industries by leveraging cutting-edge digital technologies such as AI, 5G and big data have been high on China's development agenda."

Luo said China has sent a clear signal that it will further implement an innovation-driven development strategy to shift from old growth drivers to new ones. He emphasized the importance of developing new quality productive forces based on local conditions and avoiding blind investments in specific fields.

China's move to accelerate the building of a modern industrial system will support the intelligent, high-end and green transformation of traditional industries, consolidate economic recovery and bolster the country's ability to navigate external challenges and uncertainties, Luo said.

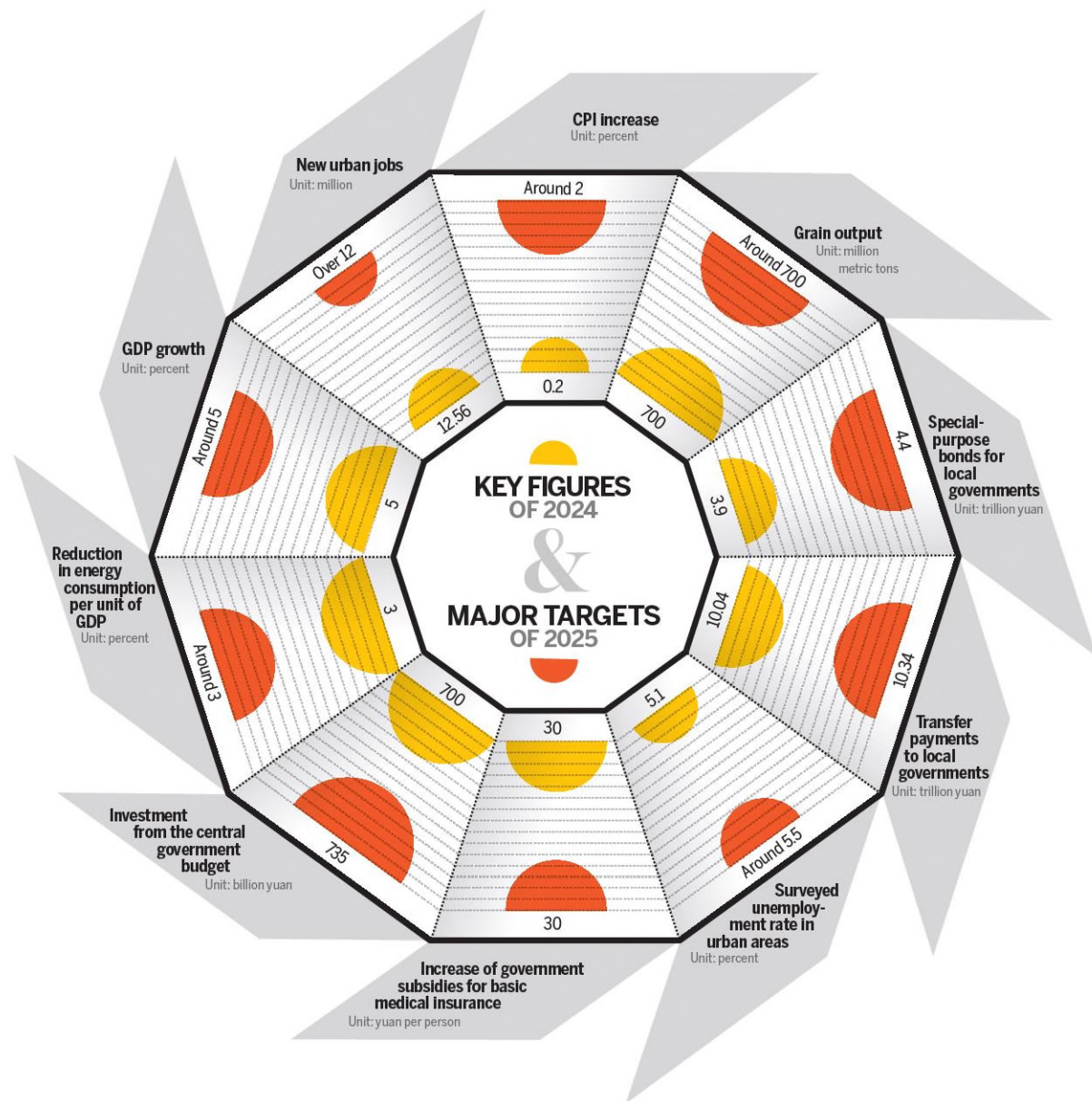
The Government Work Report also said China will promote the integrated and clustered development of strategic emerging industries, establish a mechanism to increase funding for industries of the future and foster sectors such as biomanufacturing, quantum technology, embodied AI and 6G technology.

Dong Mingzhu, a deputy to the 14th NPC and chairwoman of Gree Electric Appliances, said manufacturing enterprises must strengthen their independent innovation capacities in cutting-edge technologies and continuously improve the quality of products and services to foster new quality productive forces.

Li Dongsheng, a deputy to the 14th NPC and founder and chairman of consumer electronics company TCL Technology Group, said, "Chinese enterprises should play a bigger role in boosting technological innovation."

He said TCL will strengthen its innovative capabilities in original technologies and increase investment in AI, augmented reality, virtual reality and next-generation display technologies.

Advancing new quality productive forces requires further stimulating technological innovation, continuously investing in scientific research and talent development and supporting the intelligent transformation of industries, Li said.



Other goals

300 billion yuan

Ultra-long special treasury bonds totaling 300 billion yuan will be issued to support consumer goods trade-in programs

20 yuan per person

The minimum basic old-age benefits for rural and non-working urban residents will increase by 20 yuan per person per month.

Sources: Government Work Report, Report on the Implementation of the 2024 Plan for National Economic and Social Development and on the 2025 Draft Plan for National Economic and Social Development, Report on the Execution of the Central and Local Budgets for 2024 and on the Draft Central and Local Budgets for 2025

CHINA DAILY

China to increase defense budget by 7.2% again

By ZHAO LEI
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According to a draft budget report submitted to the national legislature on Wednesday, the Chinese government is seeking a defense budget of 1.78 trillion yuan (\$246 billion) for the 2025 fiscal year, a 7.2-percent year-on-year increase.

If approved by lawmakers, the proposed expenditure will maintain single-digit growth for the 10th consecutive year since 2016, and the percentage increase will be the same as it was during the past two fiscal years.

The figures were included in the report prepared by the Ministry of Finance and distributed to lawmakers at the opening meeting of the third session of the 14th National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

At the NPC session last year, the central government proposed a defense budget of 1.67 trillion yuan for the 2024 fiscal year, a 7.2 percent

year-on-year increase. The 2023 defense budget was proposed at 1.55 trillion yuan, also up 7.2 percent from the previous year.

The annual Government Work Report, released at Wednesday's opening meeting, says that over the past year, significant progress has been made in national defense and military affairs.

"In the new year, we will thoroughly implement Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military, and follow the military strategic guidelines for the new era. We will... spare no effort to achieve the goals set by the Party for the centenary of the People's Liberation Army," the report reads.

"We will further advance military training and preparations for war, accelerate the development of new combat capabilities and establish a modern military theory system with Chinese characteristics. We will firmly safeguard China's sovereignty, security and development interests," it says.

At a news conference on Tuesday,

Lou Qinjian, spokesman for the third session of the 14th NPC, said that China's military strength is needed by the country and is also good for the world.

"Peace requires strength to safeguard," Lou told reporters at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. "A China with strong national defense capabilities can better defend its national sovereignty, security and development interests, more effectively fulfill its international responsibilities as a major country, and better maintain global peace and stability."

He said the proportion of defense spending to China's GDP has remained below 1.5 percent for many years, lower than the world average.

A military observer in Beijing who wished to be identified only as Wu said on Wednesday that considering the increasingly sophisticated scenarios in international geopolitics, it is necessary and important for China to continue strengthening its defensive capabilities so that

it could better safeguard its security and interests.

"Everyone can see that China is facing a growing number of threats and provocations from some foreign countries willing to use every method to hinder our nation's development and create troubles for us," he said.

"A strong, even formidable military is the guarantee of a country's peaceful development. This has been proved through numerous cases in history."

In addition, it takes a lot of money to improve service members' overall treatment and their family members' livelihoods, which also justifies a moderate defense budget increase, Wu noted.

The world's largest spender on military affairs is the United States, whose proposed military budget for 2025 is \$850 billion. A large proportion of the money would be used against China, according to the US' National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025, which lists China as an "adversarial nation".

Ready to convene



Deputies arrive at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing before attending the opening meeting of the third session of the 14th National People's Congress on Wednesday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

Jiangsu: Level playing field must be offered

From page 1

The per capita disposable income of urban and rural residents in the province reached 66,000 yuan and 32,000 yuan, respectively, last year.

The province must take the lead in deepening reform and opening-up and keep removing obstacles and boosting momentum, Xi said.

He urged the province to promote urban-rural integration and regional coordination, optimize the layout of productive forces, and focus on driving high-quality development.

A level playing field must be offered to businesses of various ownership types, and continuous efforts must be made to improve the business environment, Xi said, adding that the province must expand

institutional opening-up and keep expanding the room for international cooperation.

The president encouraged Jiangsu to play a proactive role in the nation's major strategies, including the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta and the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, adding that it is important for the province to step up its alignment with strategies such as the coordinated development in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

He also highlighted the need for the region to better integrate itself into the high-quality building of the Belt and Road, guarantee that its farmland will not fall below the red line, ensure food

security and protect its ecology and environment.

Xi then made the case for the nation's major economic powerhouses to lead the way in the common prosperity drive. Jiangsu, with a population of 85.26 million in 2023, should take solid steps in advancing comprehensive rural vitalization, urban-rural integration and consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation, he said.

He also called for efforts to deliver more practical results in strengthening fundamental, inclusive and safety-net social welfare, while addressing the pressing concerns of the people.

Efforts will be made to improve the social security system and enhance the balance and accessibility of basic public services, the president added.



TWO SESSIONS

Developing sci-tech talent encouraged

Education minister says focus should be on meeting national strategic needs

By ZHAO YIMENG
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China is intensifying efforts to develop a new generation of talent aligned with the country's strategic science and technology goals and evolving industry needs, Education Minister Huai Jinping said on Wednesday after the opening meeting of the third session of the 14th National People's Congress.

The rapid emergence of new technologies, exemplified by a surge of interest in the large language model DeepSeek and robotics, underscores both the challenges and opportunities for education reform, Huai said.

"We should focus on technological development and national strategic

needs, enhance innovation capabilities, optimize higher education and adjust discipline structures and talent cultivation models," he said.

The Government Work Report, delivered by Premier Li Qiang at the opening meeting of the NPC, the nation's top legislature, highlights the need for a highly skilled workforce. It also pledges to develop experts in strategically important fields and expand efforts to train top-tier innovators and urgently needed personnel in key areas.

To strengthen the integration of education, science and industry, China is expanding its Outstanding Engineer Education and Training program. Huai said that 40 national-level academies have

been established, with more than 2,000 chief engineers and 10,000 enterprise engineers collaborating with universities to codvelop curricula and mentor students.

China is accelerating the development of fundamental disciplines and emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, new energy and new materials. The initiative to cultivate top talent in mathematics, computer science and other core areas vital to technological innovation will be promoted, Huai said.

The Ministry of Education aims to establish demonstration zones for industry-education integration, leveraging the strengths of leading universities and research institutions, he said.

Huai also noted that "vocational education made a considerable contribution to the development of the country's modern manufacturing".

Zhang Yunkai, vice-president of Hebei Jiaotong Vocational and Technical College, said the structure of vocational education programs needs to be more adaptable to align with industrial and regional development.

Vocational colleges often struggle to accurately grasp industry development trends and the needs of enterprises, leading to a disconnect between program offerings and market demand, said Zhang, who is a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body.

"There is still an information gap between schools and enterprises or industries," Zhang said, adding that local governments are expected to establish an information-sharing mechanism involving regional industry development and talent supply and demand.

"Based on regional economic development plans and emerging industry trends, they should conduct statistical analysis and forecasting on the scale and level of skilled-talent demand, while regularly releasing relevant information," he said.

Education Minister Huai said a national monitoring system will track supply-and-demand trends for students with different academic degrees, including vocational education, ensuring that reforms keep pace with technological and industrial development.

"The education system should not only adapt, but also appropriately stay ahead of technological changes," he said.

China is committed to fostering talent to drive scientific and technological innovation while contributing to national development and global progress, Huai said.

New GDP target shows emphasis on necessity, feasibility

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo and PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong

China's determination to keep its economic growth target for this year at around 5 percent, unchanged from the previous year, reflects a realistic and pragmatic approach in the face of external headwinds and internal economic adjustments, global experts said.

They also applauded China's continued commitment to opening-up, which is expected to strengthen the country's global economic position amid rising protectionism led by the United States.

"The 2025 GDP growth target was set at around 5 percent with careful consideration to avoid excessive restraint or being perceived as passive while also ensuring feasibility. This reflects an emphasis on balancing stability and progress," said Satoshi Tomisaka, a professor at the Institute of World Studies at Takushoku University in Tokyo, Japan.

Noriyuki Kawamura, emeritus professor at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies in Japan, said: "The target of around 5 percent GDP growth is considered reasonable, as it balances necessity and feasibility. However, concerns remain that sluggish domestic consumption and tariffs imposed under Trump 2.0 could weigh down GDP."

In 2024, the Chinese government implemented a trade-in subsidy policy, which yielded positive results, but a new concrete consumption policy is needed to replace it, Kawamura said.

Vigorously boosting consumption is the top priority among the major tasks in 2025 outlined in the Government Work Report, which was delivered by Premier Li Qiang on Wednesday.

Premier Li's emphasis on boosting consumption and improving people's livelihoods as key drivers of the economic policy is a strategic shift from investment-led growth to a more sustainable domestic demand-driven model, said Anna Rosario Malindog-Uy, vice-president of Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies, a Manila-based think tank.

According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, final consumption expenditure accounted for 44.5 percent of the country's economic growth in 2024.

"In contrast, consumption contributes over 65 percent to GDP growth in developed economies. A stronger focus on domestic demand will make China's economy more resilient to external shocks," Malindog-Uy said.

This policy direction is crucial for sustaining economic growth, fostering innovation and maintaining China's competitiveness in a shifting global landscape, she said.

Promoting openness

In the Government Work Report, Li emphasized that regardless of changes in the external environment, China should remain steadfast in its commitment to opening-up.

Kawamura, from Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, stressed that further deepening of reform and opening-up is a crucial policy for both China's economic development and the achievement of Chinese modernization.

"In particular, as the US government advances economic decoupling as part of its containment strategy against China, promoting openness and implementing preferential policies for foreign enterprises will be highly effective. At the same time, these measures could serve as a counterstrategy against the tariff increases imposed under Trump 2.0," Kawamura said.

Tomisaka, from Takushoku University, highlighted that China is pursuing stable growth amid the uncertainty of policies, such as US President Donald Trump's tariff measures, by strengthening regional networks and bilateral frameworks. He also pointed out the significance of linking this approach to the development of domestic industries, noting that it could play a key role in stabilizing supply chains.

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Key deliberations highlight economy, people's well-being

By CAO DESHENG
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Premier Li Qiang called on Wednesday for proactive steps to push for the consistent upturn of the Chinese economy, in order to continuously enhance people's well-being and maintain social harmony and stability.

Li, who is also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks while participating in a deliberation on the Government Work Report with his fellow deputies from Yunnan province at the third session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

Noting that Yunnan plays a significant role in the overall development of the country, Li urged the province to leverage its unique advantages and accelerate the pace of industrial transformation and upgrading to chart a new path of high-quality development through deepening of reform and opening-up.

Yunnan should strengthen its role as a gateway for opening-up in Southwest China to enhance connections with the rest of the world, he said, adding that efforts should also be made to promote rural vitalization and effectively consolidate and expand the achievements in poverty alleviation.

Members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi, as well as Vice-President Han Zheng, also participated in deliberations on the Government Work Report with their fellow NPC deputies on Wednesday afternoon.

During discussions with the deputies from Sichuan province, Zhao Leji, who is also chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, said that amid increasing external pressure and internal challenges in the past year, China made solid strides to promote its modernization drive, achieving hard-won and inspiring success.

It is hoped that Sichuan will make contributions to the comprehensive promotion of Chinese modernization with concrete efforts based on its own circumstances and realities, Zhao said.

Speaking with the deputies from Guizhou province, Wang Huning, who is also chairman of the National

Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, underlined the need to further strengthen the determination and confidence in advancing Chinese modernization.

He expressed the hope that Guizhou will comprehensively deepen reform, take coordinated steps to advance the transformation of traditional industries, strengthen development of its advantageous industries, and promote the healthy and high-quality development of the private economy.

While taking part in a deliberation with his fellow deputies from Liaoning province, Ding Xuexiang, who is also a vice-premier, said that to successfully achieve this year's development goals and tasks, it is essential to study and effectively apply Xi Jinping Thought on Economy to promote high-quality growth.

Efforts should be made to expand domestic demand, especially in terms of consumption, making it the driving force and anchor in stabilizing the country's economic growth, Ding said.

During discussions with NPC deputies from Fujian province, Li Xi, who is also secretary of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, urged the province to develop new quality productive forces according to local conditions, accelerate the construction of a modern economic system, focus on promoting regional coordinated development and urban-rural integration, and continuously explore new paths for integrated development across the Taiwan Strait.

He also called for exercising rigorous governance over the Party and strengthening anti-corruption efforts to improve the conduct of the Party.

While deliberating with his fellow deputies from Shandong province, Han Zheng emphasized the need to comprehensively boost domestic demand, promote high-level scientific and technological self-reliance, and develop new quality productive forces with technological innovations.

Efforts should be made to further deepen reform and opening-up in all respects and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, he said.

Performing duties



Deputies attend the opening meeting of the third session of the 14th National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Wednesday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Ambassadors laud China's growth prospects and positive messages to the world



Khamis Mussa Omar
Tanzania

The two sessions are very important sessions for China. China is one of the largest countries in the (Global) South. So it's very important for South-South cooperation. China also has its own place within the global economy. Whatever has been planned in China has huge ramifications elsewhere. So it's very important for us to listen.

The diplomatic community follows very closely the deliberations at the two sessions. For me, my focus is mostly on the economy. Now we are going through very challenging times. One of the key areas that all countries will be focusing on is the economy, especially global trade, because we are integrated in global trade.



John Busuttill
Malta

The global economy is in a very difficult situation right now. We all know what's happening with all these tariffs coming from the United States.

Europe is also facing challenges. But we hope that the situation of the Chinese economy improves and that the plans from today will especially help. Because if the Chinese economy improves, the global economy will also improve. A better Chinese economy should help improve a better global economy.

And also we hope that relations between the European Union and China, as well as the trade, will continue to grow, because the more trade there is, the more prosperity there will be for the people.



Peter Lizak
Slovakia

China has been developing in a tremendous way in the last 40 years.

It is really a situation where you are now turning from an extensive development to an intensive development, from quantity to quality.

As your president formulates, it is a renovation of the country. So you are focusing on the most prominent, more modern part of the economy.

China is one of the most important players in the world, and the partners expect from China a stable and reliable approach for solutions to world questions.

One of the global challenges is climate change where we are working together.



Fernando Lugris
Uruguay

The government of China announced that the expectation of this year's economic growth is around 5 percent, which is a very good indication for the world economy. This is a reaffirmation of China's role as the engine of the global economy.

Then there is a clear reaffirmation of the reform and opening-up policy. I think it's very reassuring to continue hearing positive messages from China.

And the third thing is the transformation in (the) energy and environmental protection (sectors) where China has a leadership position in the world and has achieved great advancements last year.



Majintha Joseph Priye Jayasinghe
Sri Lanka

One thing I have seen is that there is a lot of high-level

democracy in China — from the rural areas to the major cities, where interaction is done at all levels and where people are engaged. You can see the representation in every angle, from the grassroots to the top. In every single field, people are interacting.

China's development is not only for the leaders; it's for the people of the country. And I see that. Also, China's modernization is not only for China; it's for everyone to share.

You see the sessions taking place with a lot of hope. To give hope is important.

CHINA DAILY



TWO SESSIONS

By ZHANG YUNBI

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China intends to use its position on the global stage to work with partners to promote peace and hedge against rising uncertainties, according to members of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

These members, mostly officials and scholars focused on foreign policy, are gathered in Beijing to attend the two sessions, the annual meetings of China's top legislature and top political advisory body.

They noted that China will host a range of international events this year and how it can navigate its ties with major countries, including the United States, and help shore up global peace and development.

The political advisers said efforts should be made to advance the world's multipolarity and economic globalization, reject bloc confrontation and protectionism, boost public diplomacy and build on the Belt and Road Initiative.

This year, China holds the rotating presidency of the intergovernmental Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and will host the 25th meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO.

China will also celebrate the 80th anniversary of the victory of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and the World Anti-Fascist War, as well as the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.

Through these events, Beijing will send out the "common voice of the SCO member states on major international and regional issues," said Zhang Hanhui, a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee and Chinese ambassador to Russia.

In the 20 years between 2001 and 2020, the total value of annual trade between China and SCO member states rose 20-fold to \$245 billion.

"China is the one who empowers the SCO's pragmatic cooperation," Zhang wrote in an article published in Russian media on Feb 28.

The annual trade volume between China and Russia reached \$244.8 billion last year, showcasing an impressive potential for development, he said.

"China promotes the in-depth synergy of the Belt and Road Initiative with SCO countries to boost the sense of gain of the people of those countries in terms of SCO cooperation," he said.

China is also set to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting in 2026, after receiving support and endorsement from other APEC economies in November.

China has hosted the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting twice, in 2001 and 2014.

The Asia-Pacific region accounts for one-third of the world's population, more than 60 percent of the world's total economic output and nearly half of global trade.

This makes it the most dynamic region in the global economy, contributing 70 percent of the world's economic growth.

Liu Xianzhong, director of the Department of Russian History and Culture at the Institute of Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee, said the outlook for the Asia-Pacific is optimistic.

"In the context of the world economy's overall downturn, the economy of the Asia-Pacific region has maintained a good momentum of growth," he said.

According to a report from the International Monetary Fund in November, the Asia-Pacific's economic growth rate was expected to reach 4.2 percent in 2024, much higher than the global growth rate of 2.9 percent.

As of November, China was the largest trade partner of 13 APEC economies, contributing 64.2 percent to Asia-Pacific economic growth, according to the Foreign Ministry.

"The momentum of economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region also adequately proves that: only through solidarity and collaboration can we overcome difficulties together, only through mutually beneficial cooperation can we develop together, and only through openness and sharing can we benefit the mankind," Liu said.

At the same time, this momentum "is also a response to unilateralism, protectionism and the increasing fragmentation of the world economy," he added.

President Xi Jinping put forward a slew of proposals at the 31st APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in



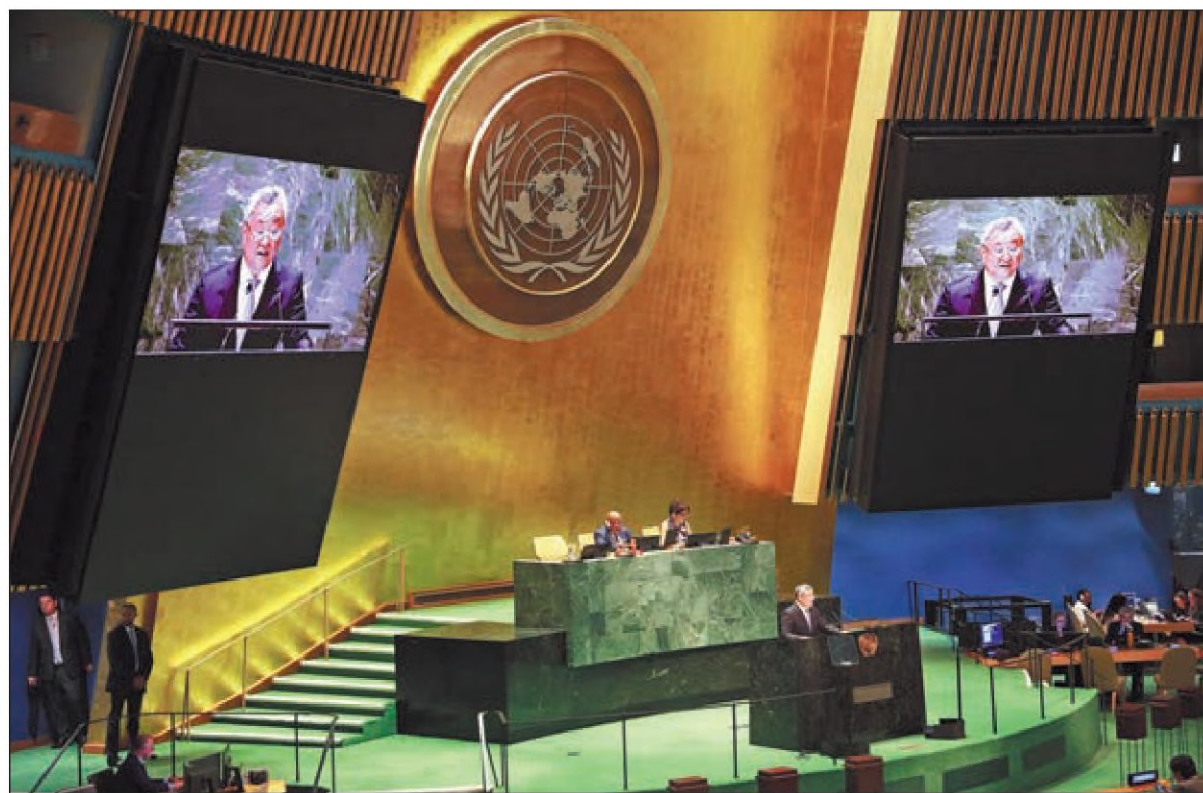
Left: Ibrahim Thiaw (center), executive secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, tries a beverage made from goji berries from China at the China pavilion of the organization's COPI6 meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Dec 7. WANG DONGZHEN / XINHUA

Right: Soldiers of the 27th Chinese peacekeeping troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo receive the UN Peace Medal of Honor in Bukavu, DR Congo, on April 9. XINHUA



China's actions beneficial for global development

Working with partners, nation utilizing its role as major country to promote shared future for mankind



Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, introduces a proposal put forward by China and other countries to establish the International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations, at the UN headquarters in New York, United States, on June 7. XIE E / XINHUA



Left: Fang Wenjun (left) and a co-worker check the parameters of a geothermal power plant in Nakuru, Kenya, on Sept 9. The 35-megawatt plant was constructed by Chinese firm Kaishan Group and has been powering the country with green energy since its completion in June 2023. HAN XU / XINHUA Right: Shi Zhihui, an engineer from the China Harbour Engineering Company, donates school bags and stationary to students in Kribi, Cameroon, where a deepwater port project of the CHEC is under construction. KEPSEU / XINHUA



Lima, Peru, in November, such as making green innovation a catalyst for the Asia-Pacific.

Liu said, "This demonstrates China's sense of duty as a responsible major country in deepening Asia-Pacific cooperation, jointly addressing the challenges it faces and promoting common development in the face of various challenges to Asia-Pacific cooperation."

The Asia-Pacific region should earnestly shape the course of economic globalization, and it should not follow some nations' approach of seeking exclusive hegemony, he said. It should push economic globalization to release more positive effects and enter a new stage that is more dynamic, more inclusive and more sustainable, he added.

Human touch to ties

When addressing the 2025 Duke-UNC China Leadership Summit via video link on Feb 28, Xie Feng, Chi-

nese ambassador to the US, recalled his visit to Duke University over 10 years prior where he discussed the international situation and China-US relations with the students.

"While I cannot join you in person today as I am attending the annual two sessions in Beijing, I am glad to see so many young friends continue to care for China-US relations," said Xie, who is also a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee.

Last year, two-way trade between China and the US exceeded \$680 billion, and around 73,000 companies from the US have invested in China.

"Any attempt to decouple and disrupt supply chains would cause a heavy blow, and any trade war or tariff war would inflict greater injury on oneself than others," Xie said.

He noted that in the past year, around 16,000 young people from the US visited China under President Xi's initiative to invite 50,000 American

youths over five years.

Noting the fact that during World War II, the two peoples "forged a friendship amid the trials of blood and fire," Xie said his hope is that American students will continue to take an active part in the "50,000 in five years" initiative.

He called on them to "reach out to and make friends with your peers in China, and encourage our two countries to respect one another with empathy, manage differences in awe, and expand cooperation with a sense of mission."

Zhao Mei, a senior research fellow at the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee, suggested inviting more young scholars from the US who are active in academic and strategic circles to visit China.

The goal is to "give them more opportunities to personally experi-

ence the real situation of China's politics as well as its economic and social development," she said.

She noted that the elder generation of US experts on China such as Ezra F. Vogel, a renowned scholar of East Asian studies at Harvard University, had witnessed the thawing of China-US relations, US president Richard Nixon's visit to China, as well as China's reform and opening-up.

"They have seen firsthand China's transformation from a destitute country to a prosperous and strong nation, and they have a deeper affection for China."

She cited the example of Vogel, who began studying Mandarin at the age of 40, and embarked on a three-month field survey in South China's Guangdong province for a deeper understanding of the nation.

Following the passing of Vogel in 2020, the younger generation of US experts on China studies have joined the ranks of Washington's policymak-

ers in charge of China policy.

"They have grown up in the context of China's rapid development, the narrowing of the gap in strength between the two countries, China's increasingly important role in the international arena, and the West's hyping of the 'China threat,'" she said.

"Many of them do not have so deep a bond with China as the elder generation of scholars. Therefore, their attitudes toward China are markedly different from those elder scholars."

As a result, it is of great importance to work with young people from the US to strengthen communication and exchanges with the younger generations on both sides, she said.

Benefiting Global South

This year marks the 12th anniversary of the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, and over the past 12 years, more than 150 countries and international organizations have signed cooperation agreements with China, according to the Foreign Ministry.

Major infrastructure projects, such as the China-Laos Railway and the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, have been completed and are now in operation.

Lin Songtian, a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee and deputy director of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the CPPCC National Committee, said the BRI has driven the development of participating countries. "The BRI has optimized their environment for investors, built a number of special economic zones and industrial parks, created a massive amount of jobs and improved people's livelihoods," he said.

It has also enabled Chinese enterprises' operations overseas with industrial parks and supporting infrastructure, policies, laws and services, he told reporters on Tuesday.

Speaking of the benefits created by BRI flagship projects, he cited the example of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, which has helped Ethiopia fast-track its poverty reduction and development by providing a gateway to the sea for a population of over 100 million people.

China-Europe Railway Express freight services, another major BRI project, reaches 25 countries and more than 220 cities in Europe, "creating a new land transportation corridor between Asia and Europe, and building a strong bond of interest between China and Europe in terms of friendship and common development," he said.

"Actions have proved that building the Belt and Road is beneficial to the countries and their people, connecting the five continents and benefiting all mankind, and it is a monumental project in this century that serves and benefits this generation and beyond," Lin said.

"We are convinced that under the joint efforts of various parties, high-quality co-building of the Belt and Road will make the Chinese people's dream journey to the world more accessible, and enable more people in the world to share the opportunities for development and prosperity," he added.

Yang Guangbin, a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee and dean of the School of International Relations at the Renmin University of China, said that an increasing number of countries, including Global South nations, are seeking cooperation involving the BRI and the initiative of building a community with a shared future for mankind, which means "an interaction network based on equality and fairness."

The world is witnessing the "constant advance of a new type of economic globalization," and the Chinese path to modernization is benefiting the Global South, he said.

In recent decades, the Global South developed rapidly, and "the total economic output of the Global South has approached that of the developed economies," Yang noted.

China has been the world's largest exporter of commodities for many years, and with industrial products made in China, many Global South nations can enjoy the convenience brought by modern technology, Yang said.

"For example, China is not only one of the world's largest smartphone markets, but also the world's largest smartphone shipper, and Chinese cell phones have attracted a large number of users in the Global South because of their good quality and low price."

By providing high-quality, low-cost photovoltaic products, China is helping Global South countries to seize the opportunities presented by economic globalization, and promoting the transformation and upgrading of the global energy structure, Yang added.



TWO SESSIONS



Clockwise from top: Zhang Yufei, an Olympic gold medalist in swimming, arrives at the Great Hall of the People ahead of the opening meeting of the third session of the 14th NPC in Beijing on Wednesday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY Liu Guoliang, president of the Chinese Table Tennis Association, attends a meeting of the sports panel of the third session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee in Beijing on Wednesday. Yang Yang, China's first Winter Olympic champion and vice-president of the World Anti-Doping Agency, speaks at a sports panel meeting of the third session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee in Beijing on Wednesday. PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Sports delegates raise concerns about fandom culture

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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Fanatic, disrespectful and sometimes toxic — the overzealous fan support of celebrity athletes has raised concerns across China's sports community, with the country's policy advisers and legislators lobbying against such blind idolization.

With the frenzy of her fan following apparently having gone too far, China's diving phenom Quan Hongchan even needed an anti-drone system deployed near her home in Maihe village in Zhanjiang, a coastal city in Guangdong province, to avoid invasions of her privacy by some extreme die-hard fans mobbing the neighborhood during Spring Festival this year.

The protective measure, prepared and confirmed by village officials before Quan's return for the holiday, has exposed the severity of irrational adulation and worship toward China's sports stars, known as the "fandom" culture, which has turned heads at the ongoing two sessions.

Yang Yang, China's first Winter Olympic champion, Zhang Yufei, a world-class swimmer, and Liu Guoliang, president of the Chinese Table Tennis Association, are among the high-profile sports representatives attending the two sessions — the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee — who have voiced

“I think there should be a fine line between supporting athletes in a passionate way and idolizing them blindly at the cost of rules and respect.”

Yang Yang, member of the sports panel of the CPPCC National Committee

their support on curbing the trend.

“I think there should be a fine line between supporting athletes in a passionate way and idolizing them blindly at the cost of rules and respect,” said Yang, a gold-winning short-track speed skater at the 2002 Winter Olympics and a member of the sports panel of the CPPCC National Committee, China's top political advisory body. “Such behavior (by overzealous fans) will eventually hurt the athletes they support themselves, leaving a negative influence on the mental and physical well-being of their beloved athletes.”

Yang, who is also the current vice-president of the World Anti-Doping Agency, added, “I hope we can all promote the true passion for sports and appreciation for

athletic achievements in a fair way among fans.”

As arguably China's most-followed swimmer, Zhang, a two-time gold medalist at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, has urged fans to pay more attention to the essence of sports rather than the personal lives of athletes and the rumors about them.

“We all appreciate the fans' support very much. Yet, I wish that the focus would be placed on the athletic achievements we made in a respectful manner,” Zhang, an NPC deputy, said on Tuesday before reporting to the annual meeting of the top legislature.

The invasion of fandom culture — which once only targeted pop singers and movie stars — into China's sports community has seen reckless fans obsessing over athletes' personal lives, cyber-bullying their idols' opponents and interfering in competition operations and match officiating.

In the latest episode of overzealous fandom, an all-Chinese women's singles final between favorite Sun Yingsha and her teammate Wang Manyu at the Asian Cup table tennis tournament on Sunday resulted in Sun's legion of fans booing and cursing Wang loudly after she beat the top-ranked Sun 4-0 at the Universiade Center in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

“I thank them for their vocal support, and I hope they take care of their throats,” a poker-faced Wang said during her victory speech, amid boisterous chants of

“We only love Sun Yingsha!” echoing at the sold-out arena.

The overenthusiastic support for Sun, who has over 10 million followers on micro-blogging platform Weibo, also turned her teammate and Paris Olympics gold medalist Chen Meng into a victim of online abuse, after Chen outplayed Sun 4-2 in the singles final last summer to defend her Olympic crown.

The growing influence of fandom culture has since emerged as a pressing issue to tackle by China's sports authorities, with the General Administration of Sport of China and multiple governing bodies, including the CTTA, having proposed a series of measures and regulations to safeguard athletes' rights and educate fans on giving fair and responsible support for their heroes.

Citing the undesirable behavior of some supporters, such as smearing opponents and leaking their personal itineraries, an increasing group of high-profile athletes — including men's Olympic champion swimmer Pan Zhanle, table tennis sensation Wang Chuqin and tennis superstar Zheng Qinwen — have disbanded their official fan groups on Chinese social media in recent months.

“I think it's a critical process for a sporting event's promotion that we need to better educate fans and persuade them to enjoy the event and support their beloved athletes in a responsible and civilized way,” said Liu, CTTA president and a CPPCC National Committee member.

Key investment program to be expanded more

Early-stage startups, long-term R&D projects to benefit from fund allocation

By LIU ZHIHUA and WANG KEJU

China will guide its banking and insurance sectors to channel more funds into early-stage startups, long-term research and development projects, and hard tech sectors, said Li Yunze, head of the National Financial Regulatory Administration, on Wednesday.

To this end, an equity investment pilot program by financial asset management companies, which now covers 18 cities across the country, will be further extended to more areas this year, coupled with a plan to allow more financial institutions to participate in the initiative, Li said.

Moreover, greater efforts will be made to support the pilot program aimed at facilitating insurance funds making long-term stock investments, Li said.

On Tuesday, the government approved an additional 60 billion yuan (\$8.26 billion) to be channeled into the program, Li said, adding that before that, the initiative had attracted over 100 billion yuan in investments.

The government will also fine-tune its mergers and acquisitions loan pilot program for tech companies, Li said, detailing that the key changes include increasing the maximum proportion of M&A financing that can be covered by these loans from 60 to 80 percent, as well as extending the loan tenure from seven to 10 years.

Also, Li said the administration, together with the China National Intellectual Property Administration and the National Copyright Administration, will work on a comprehensive pilot initiative to establish an intellectual property financial ecosystem.

The plan is to launch a pioneering trial in innovation-driven regions to resolve long-standing challenges such as IP pledge registration, valuation and disposal, truly transforming intellectual property into tangible aids for enterprises seeking financial services and accelerating its translation into real-world productive forces.

China's financial industry achieved stable development last

year as reflected by healthy key industry indicators, steady financial reforms, improvement in financial services and industry governance, among others.

Data from the administration showed that the banking sector's capital adequacy ratio has risen to 16 percent, the insurance solvency ratio has climbed to 200 percent, and the non-performing loan ratio has declined to 1.52 percent.

Notably, last year China intensified efforts to dispose of non-performing assets, resolving a record 3.8 trillion yuan in bad debts.

The coordination between central and local financial authorities has been significantly strengthened, and regulatory oversight has continued to

increase, thanks to steady reforms in the financial system, Li said, adding progress can be summarized in three key aspects of increased funding supplies with reduced costs, improvement in quality and efficiency of financial services, and enhancement of financial governance.

New funds provided by the banking and insurance sectors last year reached over 30 trillion yuan, with the average interest rate for newly issued loans dropping by 0.6 of a percentage point. This has facilitated smoother and more orderly economic and financial circulation, Li added.

Growth rates in loans for key sectors such as sci-tech and advanced manufacturing significantly surpassed that of the average level of all sectors.

At the same time, the capital replenishment mechanism has become increasingly robust, with the earlier release and implementation of the so-called 10 new guidelines for the insurance sector, the steady improvement of wealth management capabilities by asset management institutions and a higher level of financial opening-up.

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Regulations to streamline online trading platforms

By CHENG YU
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China will promote the development of its burgeoning platform economy to be healthier and more well-regulated, and will introduce new policies to regulate unfair practices in sectors such as e-commerce, said the country's top market regulator at the sidelines of the ongoing two sessions on Wednesday.

Luo Wen, head of the State Administration for Market Regulation, said the country plans to step up the introduction of a regulatory rule for online trading platforms to establish a long-term mechanism that aims to safeguard the rights of all relevant parties.

Platform companies mainly refer to those leveraging online marketplaces to do business. In China, a group of platform companies, including Alibaba Group, Tencent Holdings and Meituan, have played a big role in driving internet and tech development.

Luo said the market regulator will take steps to prevent those platforms from engaging in price wars, in which businesses are forced into unsustainable price-cutting to stay competitive, he said, adding that a compliance guideline for online trading fees will also be launched.

“The above measures aim to introduce clearer pricing rules and push platforms to optimize their fee structures, helping small and medium-sized businesses lower costs and improve efficiency,” Luo said.

He also disclosed that the administration will launch a new rule to supervise the booming livestreaming sector to address concerns over false advertising, counterfeit goods and exploitative marketing practices.

According to him, such moves are part of the country's strong efforts to support platform enterprises in their roles of driving growth, creating jobs and competing internationally.

Currently, some gig workers such as food delivery riders and consumers have reported concerns over opaque algorithms, price discrimination driven by big data and fake orders

that manipulate rankings by platforms.

To address this, Luo said the regulator will work with relevant departments to enhance comprehensive governance, urging platforms to increase algorithm transparency and genuinely protect the rights of gig workers and consumers.

“We will push platforms to optimize algorithms and ensure ‘platforms for good’ and fair treatment for all participants,” he said.

In addition, Luo said that the problem of arbitrary inspections involving enterprises will be further rectified this year.

“For industries that do not involve safety and life and health, a ‘no disturbance’ list will be established. On-site inspections will no longer be carried out for enterprises within the scope of the list,” he added.

World's tallest bridge in Guizhou nearing completion

By YANG JUN
and CHEN MEILING

The Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge in Guizhou province, set to become the world's tallest bridge, is 95 percent complete, with installation of the bridge deck panels expected to finish by mid-March, a deputy to China's top legislature said during the ongoing two sessions.

Zhang Shenglin, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said the bridge's main structure was completed in January, and engineers have overcome key technical challenges. The focus has now shifted to installing the deck, followed by anti-corrosion work on the main cables and infrastructure projects such as

mechanical and electrical equipment.

“When the bridge opens in the second half of 2025, this super project spanning the ‘Earth's crack’ will showcase China's engineering capabilities and boost Guizhou's goal of becoming a world-class tourist destination,” said Zhang, who is also chief engineer of Guizhou Highway Engineering Group Co.

The bridge's main span stretches 1,420 meters, with a height of 625 meters from deck to water — comparable to a 200-story building — surpassing the 565-meter-high Beipanjiang Bridge as the world's tallest.

It is also the world's longest span bridge to be built in a mountainous area.

“Its steel trusses weigh about 22,000 metric tons — the equivalent of three Eiffel Towers — and were installed in just two months,” said Zhang.

The bridge connects Liuzhi to Anlong and is a key link in southwestern China's highway network. Once operational, it will cut cross-river travel time from about two hours to just two minutes.

Beyond transportation benefits, Zhang said the bridge is expected to boost the local economy by promoting sales of agricultural products and ethnic handicrafts, as well as encouraging development of homestays and restaurants. At a nearby village, more than 100 young people have returned to their hometown to invest in tourism projects such as cliff hotels

and camping sites, she said.

The Guizhou Transportation Investment Group, responsible for the bridge's “integrated development of bridge and tourism” program, said it is seeking investment from companies and individuals.

The project includes the Yundu service center, a commercial complex spanning 21,100 square meters with dining, shopping, entertainment and tourism facilities. The development plan features 13 subcategories, including sightseeing suspension bridges, canyon cable cars, rock climbing, food markets, cultural products, resort hotels, holiday campsites and sky cafes, the company said.

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TWO SESSIONS

PERSPECTIVE

Development agenda lauded as a global win

Professor shares thoughts on China's initiative in common prosperity

By XING YI in London
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China's commitment to high-quality development and its efforts to foster "new quality productive forces" should contribute significantly to the government's common prosperity agenda, a goal that, if achieved, would be a "big win" for the world, according to an emeritus professor at Oxford University.

James Crabbe, a supernumerary fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford University, whose research spans biomedical and environmental sciences, has collaborated with Chinese scientists for two decades, loves reading Chinese literature, and follows the country's societal and economic development.

Crabbe has come to appreciate China's "common prosperity" initiative and believes it is an essential topic for discussion at the two sessions. Chinese lawmakers and advisers should discuss how to "bring the common prosperity agenda with the latest elements of high-quality development and new productive forces, and make sure that they can work in harmony", he said.

Since his first visit to China in 2005, Crabbe has collaborated extensively with Chinese researchers. Over the past two decades, he has traveled to the country once or twice a year, witnessing improvements in rural living standards and rapid urbanization in major cities.

"The common prosperity program has helped because it's raised the standard of living of people in the Huaihe River basin and elsewhere in those sorts of rural areas," said Crabbe, reflecting his observation while working with Chinese scientists in tracking pollutants in rivers.

Crabbe also praised entrepreneurship in China but emphasized that the key is ensuring a socialist framework that profits benefit everyone. "People everywhere — whether in America or China — want this. If China can achieve it, it will be a big win for the world," he said.

Regarding China's science and innovation capability, Crabbe lauded its fast development as "fantastic" and said he has "seen it firsthand".



James Crabbe

As a former editor-in-chief of an international academic journal, Crabbe recalled that early submissions from China were often of lower quality. However, over time, he observed a remarkable improvement in both the quality and quantity of Chinese research papers.

"There are now more scientific papers published by authors from China than in the United States, which is wonderful. And I think that's a tremendous testament to the value China has given to the world in our science understanding," he added.

To further advance China's new quality productive forces, Crabbe stressed the importance of international scientific collaboration. "That's what I try to do with my Chinese colleagues. We can all help each other, as we can feed our different cultures and how our minds work differently in our collaboration and then get something out of that," he said.

One of Crabbe's key Chinese collaborators was Zhong Yang, a renowned botanist and professor at Fudan University. The two met during Crabbe's first visit to China in 2005 and worked together until Zhong's passing in 2017. Crabbe continues collaborating with many of Zhong's former colleagues and doctoral students.

Amid rising geopolitical tensions between China and the West, which have begun to affect scientific cooperation, Crabbe emphasized the need for mutual trust and understanding.

To better understand the Chinese way of thinking, Crabbe has read all four great classical novels of China, his favorite being *Outlaws of the Marsh*. "Geopolitics operates at one level, but scientists are individuals. *Guanxi* (connections) linked me with Zhong Yang on a personal level, and we worked well together," he said. "A lot of my friends go to international academic conferences, both in China and in the West. We have that rapport and sing the same hymn all the time. 'We can't give up collaboration.'"

"It's got to happen. Because without it, we're all sunk," he added.



Hu Xiaochun checks the health of Yingkesong, or the Guest-Greeting Pine, in the Huangshan Mountain Scenic Area, in Huangshan city, Anhui province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Deputy safeguards treasured pine tree

By ZHU LIXIN
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At 7 am on Feb 28, as the first group of tourists arrived at the peaks in the Huangshan Mountain Scenic Area, Hu Xiaochun, a deputy to the National People's Congress, put on a thick cotton coat, slung his tool bag over his shoulder, and headed toward an iconic pine on the Yuping Peak.

The ancient pine, over 1,000 years old, extends its branches on one side, resembling an outstretched arm welcoming visitors, hence its name Yingkesong, or the Guest-Greeting Pine.

Born in 1980 and an army veteran, Hu started working with the scenic area as a fireguard in 2006. Four years later, he became the 19th guardian of the pine, a position established in 1981.

Huangshan Mountain, located in Huangshan city of East China's Anhui province, is a UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage site, a World Geopark, and a World Biosphere Reserve.

"For me, guarding this pine, a symbol of Chinese etiquette culture, makes me feel proud and honored," he said.

After inspecting whether the trunk was stable, branches were regular, and the support frames were intact, he opened his diary and wrote: "Feb 28, no abnormalities." "No abnormalities are the happy-

"I will base myself on my position (NPC deputy) and actively offer suggestions and strategies for the integrated development of the ecology and the economy."

Hu Xiaochun, NPC deputy and a guard of the Guest-Greeting Pine

est thing," Hu said with a smile. "It means the pine is safe and healthy."

In the past years, his diaries for the pine have totaled approximately 1.6 million Chinese characters.

On Feb 20, the snow depth on the mountain reached 20 centimeters. Before the heavy snowfall, Hu and the emergency protection team had set up support frames in advance to provide physical support for the pine.

"We need to carefully check the snow depth on the canopy, the pressure on the branches, and whether the support frame is secure," he said.

"Sometimes, we use snowblow-

ers to blow snow off the branches, reducing the pressure on the pine."

During moments of abrupt severe weather, Hu reminisced about the time he and his colleagues transported bamboo up the mountain to construct a support platform for the pine tree years ago.

His professional dedication earned him the "Good Samaritan of China" title in 2021.

In 2022, President Xi Jinping replied to a letter from Hu and Li Peisheng, a cleaner of the scenic spot and another "Good Samaritan of China", expressing the hope that they shall continue to play their roles as role models.

"Over the years, you have been working to keep Huangshan Mountain clean and beautiful, and tending the millenary Guest-Greeting Pine with care and love day after day, fully demonstrating the spirit of dedication and professional ethics," wrote Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, in his letter.

Hu not only assists passing tourists but also educates them on the protection of the Huangshan pine, a unique species that originated in the area.

He was elected as a deputy to the National People's Congress in 2023.

To actively fulfill his duty, he visits and surveys the local residents, engages in dialogue with tourists,

and listens to their opinions and demands regarding ecological civilization, tourism development, and economic and social progress.

For the ongoing two sessions — the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference — he brought forward some proposals to promote the internationalization of Huangshan tourism.

China's visa-free transit policy was extended to 240 hours over that time span and to more cities for ports of entry, including Hefei and Huangshan, two cities in Anhui, by December.

Hu sees this as an opportunity for the development of Huangshan.

To support opening more international routes at the Tunxi International Airport in Huangshan, he suggests that the Civil Aviation Administration of China strengthen its support for small and medium-sized airports in infrastructure planning, flight route approvals, and general aviation development policies.

"I will base myself on my position and actively offer suggestions and strategies for the integrated development of the ecology and the economy," Hu said.

"I will contribute to help my hometown achieve a win-win situation of beautiful ecology and prosperous people."

What NPC deputies say



Geshe Wangmo, director of a nursing house in Barkam, Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province

I was admitted to Barkam's nursing house when I was 18. I met some problems initially, but I didn't give up and I've shown my sincerity to the elderly to win their trust in past decades. Last year, our nursing house was relocated, with improved facilities and more professional staff members, and we are starting to offer outpatient services with the help of the local hospital. It's my third year serving as an NPC deputy and I care most about pension and nursing services at the grassroots.



Zhang Tianren, Party secretary of Xinchuan village, Changxing county, Zhejiang province

I've witnessed significant changes the village has experienced in the past 27 years. We've shut down 10 more mining and highly resource-consuming companies while encouraging local residents and companies to get involved in new energy industrial chains and developing leisure agriculture and tourism in the past decades. Now, the villagers have an average annual income of about 150,000 yuan (\$20,644) with a better living environment.



Zhang Junjie, vice-president of Nanjing First Hospital in Nanjing, Jiangsu province

In May last year, authorities in Jiangsu established a digital platform that aggregated copies of medical films at all public institutions in the province. With a mouse click, a doctor can access patients' imaging data anytime and anywhere, eliminating the need for patients to carry X-ray films around. The platform is expected to save patients about 2 billion yuan (\$275 million) annually by reducing duplicated examination fees. With advances in technologies and policies, I believe we will soon achieve universal availability of these medical documents nationwide, making it more convenient for patients.



Zhang Dongxu, commander of a combined combat battalion of the People's Liberation Army Ground Force

In recent years, my unit has tapped into new combat capabilities through advanced weaponry and "information-firepower integration" tactics. Meanwhile, cross-service training with naval and air units has further tightened joint operational systems. All of us feel that our armed forces have become good at interservice operations and we continue to bolster our fighting capabilities. Our confidence in defending the nation and overcoming adversaries grows stronger than ever.

CHENG SI, WANG XIAOYU AND ZHAO LEI

CPPCC members' insights on AI in education

During China's ongoing two sessions, AI technology is a hot topic among deputies to the NPC and members of the CPPCC National Committee. Discussions revolve around how artificial intelligence can empower various industries, ensure the healthy and secure development of AI, and cultivate talent in the field.

As a feature reporter, I'm here to cover the third session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee. This is a precious opportunity to speak with CPPCC members who excel in various fields. Beyond my interview tasks, I asked a question that concerns me, "In this era of a global AI wave, how should people with liberal arts backgrounds prepare for the future?"

DeepSeek has become a buzzword this year, surprising the world with its capabilities. Meanwhile, many individuals with liberal arts backgrounds, myself included, marvel at its efficiency in knowledge output and its exquisite organization of language and logic. At times, its output even carries a touch of humanistic flair. Yet, at the same time, we cannot help but feel a sense of anxiety.

The first CPPCC National Com-



Xing Wen
Reporter's log

mittee member I approached was author Jiang Shengnan, who believes that AI currently serves only as an assistant in literary creation. It challenges standardized, impersonal, and uncreative works. "If you do something ordinary, you will be eliminated. What matters is finding our uniqueness," she said.

Liu Tsee Ming, a CPPCC National Committee member from Hong Kong and chairman of Elite Industrial Holdings Ltd, believes that while AI may eliminate specific jobs, it will also create new demands for roles requiring human-machine interaction. "The current situation requires us to keep learning and master new AI tools," Liu said.

Chu Liangyin, vice-president of Sichuan University, agrees that AI is a tool that both liberal arts and science students should master, and it also has the potential to empower the education industry. Wu Wenke, a researcher at the

Chinese National Academy of Arts, said that he often encounters inaccuracies in the information provided by AI while using the technology. "In my personal opinion, AI serves an auxiliary role. Although AI has broad prospects, we should not overly chase trends or rely too heavily on these tools at this stage, as it might lead to setbacks," he said.

Huangfu Yichuan, a researcher at the China Film Art Research Center, mentioned that in the recent hit animated film *Ne Zha 2*, AI technology was integrated throughout the production process, from animation generation to special effects production, script creation, and audience preference prediction.

"AI indeed represents a leap in development, offering limitless possibilities. While AI can empower artistic creation, we should not let AI control us," he said.

"Good filmmaking is rooted in observations and experiences of life, as well as the exploration of emotions and stories — something AI is far from achieving."

These conversations took place after the opening meeting of the third session of the 14th CPPCC

National Committee on Tuesday in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. As I left the grand building, I felt a wave of emotion, recalling the moments of connection with various individuals during interviews in the past couple of years. Perhaps these are among the instances where I can "find my uniqueness".

I opened the DeepSeek app on my phone and typed, "How should features reporters adapt to the AI era?" The answer provided was:

"In the AI era, feature reporters should embrace AI tools for efficiency and insights, while focusing on human stories and ethical reporting. They must develop AI literacy, enhance multimedia skills, and adapt storytelling techniques to engage audiences. Staying updated on trends, collaborating across disciplines, and promoting media literacy are also crucial for maintaining relevance and credibility in a rapidly evolving media landscape."

This is indeed a challenging yet exciting era to navigate, I thought to myself.

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TWO SESSIONS

Liu Shangxi

Income tax reform boosts social fairness

The government work report delivered by Premier Li Qiang on Wednesday mentioned that "tax break policies will be placed under better regulation". Taxes are a crucial source of public revenue and a fiscal tool for providing public goods and redistributing social wealth.

Last year, the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed to improve the direct tax and personal income tax systems, regulate the taxation policies on incomes generated from businesses, capital and property, and deepen the reform of individual income tax (IIT).

As part of the IIT reform, it proposed to improve the system that combines comprehensive and categorized IIT, implement unified taxation of labor income, standardize the tax policies for business income, capital income and property income, and increase IIT deductions related to childbirth, child-rearing and education costs, so as to foster a more rational and just fiscal structure.

Labor income in China is diverse, ranging from wages and salaries to royalties and business gains. If the current tax model continues, taxation disparity will persist given the significant variations in the tax rates and collection standards across income types.

By consolidating labor income under a unified tax rate and standard, the reform can address the inequity issue plaguing the existing taxation system.

The previous reform saw the merging of some types of labor income with wage income. The new reform will take the next logical step by potentially including business income under the unified tax framework.

It is not yet clear which specific labor income types will be unified, although business income is likely to be the main target for integration in the reform. While business income is primarily derived from labor input, it may also involve capital input, making it fundamentally different from wage-based labor income. Hence, when merging business income, it is crucial to carefully consider cost deductions, and set a detailed standard for such deductions to ensure smooth integration.

As economies develop, countries must strike a delicate balance between pursuing economic efficiency and ensuring social fairness. However, social fairness demands that income disparities be mitigated. Many countries address this by adopting fiscal policies that promote more balanced public services and increased transfers to low-income groups, thus narrowing the consumption gap and promoting social equity.

To build a fairer society while maintaining efficient economic mechanisms, it is essential that tax reforms help reduce income inequality and boost economic dynamism that drives growth.

As China's economy continues to grow and per capita income rises, the



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

number of people paying taxes will increase, broadening the tax base and increasing the overall tax revenue. This will allow the tax system to play a bigger role in promoting social fairness.

The current special additional deductions, which cover areas such as childbirth, mortgage interest, children's education and eldercare, reflect the reality of family burdens and human capital investment. These deductions can be dynamically adjusted based on factors such as living standards, cost of living and inflation, ensuring that the tax system responds to the needs of society.

Currently, China's highest marginal tax rate of 45 percent is relatively high by international standards, while income from wages and salaries is taxed under a progressive rate system, with the highest rate capped at 35 percent. High-income groups contribute a significant part of individual income tax revenue. Hence, raising the tax rate for this group alone will likely lead to diminishing returns in terms of income redistribution, and may even encourage high-income individuals to use more sophisticated tactics to evade taxes.

Most countries use different tax structures for capital and labor income, recognizing the distinct economic functions they serve. Capital, being highly mobile, can easily flow to coun-

tries with more favorable tax rates. If capital income is taxed very heavily, it risks relocating to jurisdictions with lower taxes, undermining the ability of any given country to attract investment.

Therefore, many countries have adopted relatively lenient tax policies for capital income, aligning with the broader objective of fostering investment and stimulating economic growth, thus maintaining a competitive tax environment while ensuring fairness in the taxation of labor income.

So rather than focusing solely on increasing the tax rate for high-income groups, the emphasis should be on strengthening tax collections and enforcement mechanisms. Closing loopholes, improving the tax system, and cracking down on tax evaders will ensure that all individuals, regardless of their income level, fulfill their tax obligations. In this context, the principle of "supporting the low and expanding the middle" should guide policy decisions, fostering an environment that encourages all members of society to create wealth, increase their income and contribute to sustained economic growth.

The new round of individual income tax reform will directly affect the lives of people. For the reform to be successful, effective communication with all sectors of society is essential. Public understanding and acceptance of the reform

can only be achieved through an open, transparent process that encourages public input and participation.

Therefore, it is important that policy-makers engage with diverse social groups in devising a unified taxation plan. This will help ensure that the final plan aligns with the principle of social fairness, receives broad public support, and is effectively implemented.

Individual income tax reform is a complex, long-term undertaking with profound implications for both social fairness and economic development. The reform must be viewed with a dynamic, forward-looking perspective, continuously improving the system and management measures. While the pursuit of economic efficiency is important, ensuring the highest possible degree of social fairness must remain at the core of the reform. Only by achieving this balance can the tax system serve all citizens and robustly advance Chinese modernization.

Liu Shangxi is former president of the Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The article is based on his interview with China Daily's Li Wei.

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

Zhao Ziyi

People-centered urbanization propels Guizhou's transition

The Government Work Report on Wednesday emphasizes the importance to refine the mechanisms for implementing the coordinated regional development strategy, and take a people-centered approach to promoting high-quality urbanization.

Urbanization is a fundamental driver of modernization and development, and in China, it is closely related to the pursuit of higher living standards and greater social equity. With the continuous advancement of the new urbanization process, Guizhou has undergone dramatic transformations.

In Guizhou, one of the country's most diverse and geographically challenging provinces, urbanization is not only a policy to build infrastructure or modernize cities but a means to improve the quality of people's lives. The province's human-centered approach to urbanization offers an important lesson for how cities can grow in ways that benefit the people.

Over the past decade, Guizhou has undergone a profound transformation. From 2012 to 2024, the urban population in Guizhou grew by 9.19 million, while the rural population shrank by 5.42 million, a shift emblematic of China's broader urbanization trend. People have migrated from rural to urban areas in search of better jobs, education and healthcare. Guizhou's success is evident in its ability to alleviate poverty and its commitment to build a moderately prosperous society for all.

Guizhou's urbanization is people-centered. The province accords priority to improving people's lives and livelihoods, and makes sure urban growth is not just about infrastructure or economic growth but also about meeting people's needs. The province's urbanization policy aligns with the broader goals of national development, integrating industrial growth, agricultural modernization and urban development into a cohesive framework. By focusing on sustainable and people-first policies, Guizhou has ensured the benefits of urbanization are shared by all the people.

The province has adopted a highly flexible approach to development, ensuring its urbanization policy suits the conditions and resources of different regions.

Guizhou's urbanization model lays emphasis on population concentration in key urban centers, which allows it to allocate resources more efficiently, provide better public services, and develop industries that can better serve the needs of a larger population. The province has focused on fostering growth in strategic urban areas such as Guiyang and Gui'an New Area, ensuring these areas become engines of economic development.

While the province's population continues to grow, the provincial government has carefully managed this increase by making sure urban areas can absorb new residents without overwhelming existing infrastructure.

Also, Guizhou recognizes the importance of industrialization in driving urbanization. Industries create jobs that attract rural residents to cities. But Guizhou's industrial structure limits its ability to absorb the increasing flow of workers and, hence, a significant number of the province's rural workforce migrates to other regions for work. To address this issue, Guizhou has been developing key industrial bases and clusters, strengthening county-level industries and fostering innovation and new business models to boost the urban economy and ensure urbanization is balanced.

Guizhou's urbanization focuses on integrating rural migrants into the social and economic fabric of urban life by developing infrastructure and housing, and absorbing rural migrants in urban society by removing many of the barriers to urban residency.

By implementing policies that allow easier access to urban areas and offering vocational training and entrepreneurship support, the province has helped migrants settle in urban areas, start businesses and contribute to local economies.

Another prominent feature of Guizhou's urbanization is its adaptability. The province has adopted a highly flexible approach to development, ensuring its urbanization policy suits the conditions and resources of different regions. For example, some areas have capitalized on their natural resources, such as phosphate mines in Fuquan city, to drive industrial growth, while others have focused on developing tourism, for instance, Rongjiang county has gained online popularity due to its "super village league" football matches. Kaiji city has been actively promoting the involvement of enterprises, rural talents, and urban residents in rural vitalization efforts, whereas Xingyi city has been establishing itself as a haven for senior citizens, focusing on providing quality nursing care services.

Guizhou's urbanization rate increased from 36.4 percent in 2012 to 56.65 percent in 2024, narrowing the gap with the national average. Disparities persist between urban and rural areas, with some cities struggling to keep up with the pace of population growth.

Nevertheless, Guizhou's human-centered approach to urbanization offers ways to address these challenges, setting an example for other regions to follow, because the provinces' urbanization is not just about building more infrastructure but also about ensuring economic growth is sustainable and equitable, and improving the people's lives.

The author is a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress and dean of the Guizhou Institute for Urban Economics and Development, Guizhou University of Finance and Economics.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Zhou Hongyi

2025 a crucial year for AI applications

The Government Work Report on Wednesday highlighted new achievements including integrated circuits, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum technology, and other areas.

In fact, a new wave of AI technology, led by large language models, has been sweeping across the globe since 2023, prompting many countries to make AI development part of their national strategy, with the United States adopting the "All in AI" strategy to dominate the global AI industry. China, too, has expedited its AI development, launching the "AI plus" initiative and implementing policies to make AI a core engine of development for new quality productive forces.

Previously, China's large AI models had certain limitations in terms of computing power and data. But innovators such as DeepSeek have recently made significant progress in AI reasoning through reinforcement learning, pioneering a new direction for AI. By embracing an open-source approach, Chinese innovators have broken the technological barriers of leading models, accelerating the commercialization of large models. This breakthrough is not only a technological leap for Chinese AI companies vis-a-vis US giants such as OpenAI, it also narrows the gap in AI capabilities, dispelling concerns over chip limitations and showing China's ability to develop a global technology paradigm.

With the widespread adoption of AI applications such as DeepSeek-R1 and Nano AI Search, smart technology including AI is gradually becoming accessible to all. Also, an increasing number of local governments and businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises, are adopting large model systems to accelerate industrial applications and digital transformation.

The global competition for large models has entered a critical stage, and to gain an advantage in this competition, China should continue to achieve more breakthroughs in core technologies and their applications. Thanks to its diverse industries and development environments, China has a unique advantage in using large models to power a new industrial revolution. I believe 2025 will be the year of AI applications, with the key to success lying in seizing the opportunities created by DeepSeek, and combining local advantages with different application scenarios to stay ahead in the global AI competition.

DeepSeek has triggered an application explosion by making industries more efficient, reducing costs and reconstructing products. In fact, startups empowered by DeepSeek are seizing the new opportunities, creating an "iPhone moment" for industries. Based on DeepSeek's capabilities, breakthroughs can be achieved in six fields.

The first application of large models will lead to "universal intelligence" for

all. Given DeepSeek's open-source and low-cost features, individuals can now own large models and become "super individuals".

The second is "intelligent everything". As AI transforms smart hardware, and large models shrink in size, AI devices — from smart-connected cars to personal computers and mobile phones — will become the standard. And with AI's help, the scope of smart hardware application will also expand.

The third is the empowerment of traditional industries to "digitally transform and innovate". Large models' multi-modal capabilities can process and generate data from images, videos and audio clips or pieces, transforming unstructured data into knowledge. This will prepare the ground for large models in business applications, boost core competitiveness and expedite the digital transformation of traditional industries.

The fourth is "future industries". With lower costs and reduced computing power requirements, large models can be used in intelligent devices like robots. For instance, predicting driving sequences for fully autonomous cars or the movement of robots enhances embodied intelligence.

The fifth is "scientific research". DeepSeek's strong inference model can help users leverage professional knowledge in scientific fields for reinforcement learning, creating specialized scientific models. Large models are changing how fundamental scientific problems

are studied, and addressing issues such as energy development.

The sixth is "AI security". As DeepSeek expands, challenges like hallucination and prompt injection attacks arise. Injection attacks occur when attackers exploit weaknesses in how software or systems handle user input prompts. By cleverly crafting malicious input, they trick the system into performing unintended actions, with the goal of accessing sensitive information, disrupting operations, or gaining unauthorized entry. To ensure the application of large models in enterprises, they need to be linked to specialized knowledge databases and IT systems, which in turn could increase security risks.

However, to deal with such issues, 360 Security Group has introduced a new solution — "model-driven security" — to address potential security issues arising out of large model applications. The 360 group also has formed a large model security alliance, which includes industry partners, research institutions and end-users, to resolve security issues and build a collaborative model for the AI security industry.

The author is founder and chairman of Chinese cybersecurity company 360 Security Group, and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

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CHINA

Landmark gala show for impaired fans



Tai Lihua films a scene for the accessible broadcast in Beijing on Jan 17.



Tai Lihua guides a hearing-impaired dancer during a rehearsal in Beijing on Dec 23.



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Wang Yabin performs during the recording of the Spring Festival Gala's accessible broadcast program in Beijing on Jan 16. PHOTOS BY ZHANG XIMENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

By CHEN NAN

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From hearing the swell of orchestra, to seeing the swirl of pirouette, and understanding the nuance of a playwright's joke — experiencing the thrills of a performance can be a daunting task for vision- and hearing-impaired audience members.

Chen Jing, who has had hearing damage since she was 2-and-a-half years old, knows this frustration well. "I felt bored though the crowds on TV were roaring with excitement," she said, adding that she tried to sense the atmosphere at a show through people's expressions and body language, sudden changes in lighting and the intensity of the performers' gestures.

Humor is often conveyed through words and timing. But Chen found it hard to grasp the jokes in TV comedy sketches, often leaving her feeling isolated from the joy that filled the family home.

Despite these hurdles, Chen fell in love with dancing in 2005 when she was 8 years old when watching a dance performance aired during the China Media Group Spring Festival Gala. Titled *The Thousand-handed Goddess of Mercy*, the performance was given by 21 deaf and mute dancers from the China Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe.

Now, Chen, in her late 20s, is a member of the same troupe.

Her dream of conveying the essence of a performance has been realized through her own efforts. As an actor, she uses sign language to communicate the melody and rhythm of music and the meaning of jokes for hearing-impaired viewers.

On Jan 28, she joined the "accessible broadcast" of the Spring Festival Gala hosted by the CMG. She was one of 13 deaf performers from the troupe that staged the special performance for hearing-impaired viewers. It was the first time a full show, catering to both hearing- and vision-impaired people, had been aired.

One of the songs Chen interpreted for the TV broadcast was the *Tide Rising Dance*, a high-energy song with complex rhythms and fast beats. It was the most challenging performance she has done with sign language, she said.

The rhythm of the traditional Chinese musical instruments, such as the gong and drum, flowed naturally. But Chen said in her early attempts at interpreting the song, the movements were always out of sync with the verses.

To overcome this, she practiced in private. Every night, she held a bass speaker to feel the vibrations of the music, while watching a video of the conductor's lip movements to try and memorize the melody and rhythm.

Eventually, she more clearly sensed the music's tempo — whether it was fast or slow, urgent or calm. "There were no shortcuts, only repeated practice," Chen said.

What made her proud was the positive feedback from the deaf and blind community after the special performance aired on TV. Many commented they felt as if they could "see" and "hear" the magnificent stage and experience the joyful atmosphere of the show.

Improvised solutions

"When I first heard about the accessible broadcast, I was not entirely sure what to expect," recalled Tai Lihua, president of the China Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe, and a key figure behind the success of the accessible broadcast.

"Initially, I thought my role was only to help with sign-language translations for a few songs. However, as I got more details, I realized that our task was far more extensive — it was the entire gala's sign-language broadcast."

Tai began to lose her hearing at the age of 2 after being given an overdose of an antibiotic to treat a high fever. In primary school, her teacher brought a drum to class and started to beat it. Tai was thrilled by the rhythmic vibrations that passed over her body.

She fell in love with dancing and started professional dance training at 15.

Tai rose to fame in 2005 as a lead dancer in *The*

Thousand-handed Goddess of Mercy performance during the CMG Spring Festival Gala.

She said the most difficult part of this year's accessible broadcast was expanding the scope of sign language to include sketch comedies, crosstalk performances, and other verbal segments.

"How could we ensure the sign language was accurate but also artistic, capturing the humor and the fast-paced dialogue? We had to find ways to express these nuances beautifully without losing the original meaning," she said.

"In sign language, there are no direct equivalents for every word, so we had to use natural sign language, adjusting the speed and gestures to match the performers' expressions and emotions," she noted.

For years, the China Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe has been participating in the annual gala with artists singing or dancing onstage. "This time, we didn't just create art, but created a world where everyone can participate, no matter their physical challenges," said Tai.

For blind and vision-impaired people, the Spring Festival Gala took on a new dimension thanks to audio descriptions.

As the performances unfolded on screen, narrators provided detailed verbal descriptions of everything, from the grandeur of the stage set, to the intricate movements of the dancers.

The narrators not only described the visuals but also captured the nuances of particular scenes — such as the bright, celebratory lighting, or the delicate swishing sound of the performers' costumes as they twirled.

One blind viewer remarked: "For the first time, I could feel the beauty of the costumes and understand the gestures of the performers. It's not just about hearing the music — it's about feeling part of the story. I was finally able to experience the gala as if I were seeing it with my own eyes."

Dong Lina narrated the dance piece *Yi Ren*, or *The Beautiful Lady*, performed by Tan Yuanyuan, the

former principal ballerina with the San Francisco Ballet and the artistic director of Suzhou Ballet Theatre.

"The combination of auditory and visual elements provided through these descriptions allowed blind viewers to engage with the event in a way that was previously unimaginable, creating a truly inclusive cultural experience," she said.

Dong herself has inspired many others. She is the first vision-impaired person in China to obtain a master's degree in radio and television broadcasting.

Poetry and motion

Interpreting a ballet piece for blind or vision-impaired people involves focusing on sensory experiences beyond sight, primarily through auditory and tactile cues, she said. Detailed visual aspects, including the dancers' movements, expressions, choreography, and stage settings, need to be conveyed.

"The goal is to help the listeners visualize the performance," she said, adding that the mood and emotions being conveyed through the dance were also incorporated in her interpretation.

Dancer-choreographer Wang Yabin was an interpreter for the dance piece *Xishang Zitou*, or *Joy on the Branches*, which featured 10 female dancers from the Beijing Dance Academy.

"Since the dance piece evokes an image of a flourishing and festive occasion, like the Spring Festival, my tone had to be very joyful and cheerful," said Wang. "Blind and vision-impaired audiences can hear the music, so I tried to vividly articulate the visual details — like the colors, textures, and movements — allowing the audience to 'see' through words."

In 2013, Wang played a blind massage therapist in the Chinese TV drama *See Without Looking*, adapted from Chinese writer Bi Feiyu's award-winning novel *Massage*.

To prepare for the role, Wang visited schools for the blind where she observed and learned how they live and work.

"People who are blind and deaf, or vision and hear-

ing impaired, often develop strong independence and resilience because they don't want to burden others," said Wang.

"They may put in extra effort to learn skills and adapt to the world around them."

As a dancer and choreographer, she discovers new ways of expressing movement that resonate not only with able-bodied individuals, but also with those who experience the world through different senses.

In 2021, Wang voiced a special video of a dance film, titled *He*, for the vision and hearing impaired, creating the possibility of equal enjoyment of art.

"Artists are powerful agents of change, and they hold a unique responsibility to shape experiences that are inclusive and accessible," Wang noted. "When an artist offers services to include disabled individuals, they are not just opening their work to a wider audience — they are expanding their creative horizons. Inclusivity in the arts is not about limiting creativity; it's about enhancing it."

Bridging the gap

There are other projects helping people with vision and hearing challenges. Guangming Cinema, or bright cinema, a public welfare initiative co-launched by the Communication University of China in 2017, helps vision-impaired people enjoy films through audio descriptions.

Yu Lei, who has been directing the CMG Spring Festival Gala for three years, said allowing impaired people to access the arts can be an empowering experience.

It offers them a sense of belonging, a chance to participate in society's cultural dialogue and an opportunity to feel recognized.

With more than 27.8 million people in China living with hearing impairments and over 17 million living with visual impairments, these efforts ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to cultural celebrations, she said.

Yu said when the idea of an accessible broadcast for the 2025 Spring Festival Gala was born, the accessibility efforts went beyond mere translation — they were a demonstration of how technology and thoughtful design can bridge the gap between audiences and art.

The integration of AR (augmented reality) virtual technology for the deaf brought the sign language interpreters into the broadcast visually, giving a more immersive and dynamic experience. The artificial intelligence-driven subtitled and precise language processing ensured that both the deaf and hard of hearing could access the dialogue in real time, offering them a direct connection to the gala's content.

Similarly, audio descriptions for the blind used advanced techniques to offer a deeper understanding of not only what was happening on stage, but also the emotions conveyed through the performers' gestures and music.

Through these combined efforts, the gala became more than just a broadcast — it became a shared experience where disabled viewers could see, hear and feel every moment.

The idea of an accessible broadcast for this year's gala started with a proposal from Zhao Zhihui, a young director from China Media Group, Yu said.

After graduating from Tianjin University of Sport with a major in special education in 2015, Zhao worked as a teacher at a special school in Tianjin for over a year before he joined the China Media Group in 2016.

"Many of the children I taught were vision impaired. They loved listening to radio programs. They love the arts just like many others. Since then, I have been desiring to help them in the field of accessibility," said Zhao.

"Lots of Chinese people have been watching the gala ever since they were kids. The inclusion of accessibility services for disabled individuals during the Spring Festival Gala is more than just a technological achievement — it is a statement about the importance of equity and inclusivity in cultural spaces."

Yu said the landmark initiative is just the beginning. The broadcast has set a new standard for future cultural programming of other creative productions, such as movies and theaters.



Top left and right: Performers record scenes for the accessible broadcast of the Spring Festival Gala show using virtual studio technology. PHOTOS BY ZHANG XIMENG AND JIA NINGZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY
Above: Hearing-impaired dancers pose for a group photo on Jan 17. ZHANG XIMENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

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

Report warns of S. Korea's debt increase, growth freeze

Fueled by the world's fastest aging population, South Korea's national debt is projected to surge sixfold to 7,000 trillion won (\$4.87 trillion), while the country's productivity is expected to nearly stagnate by 2072, according to the National Assembly Budget Office of the country.

The office detailed this grim outlook in its "Long-term Fiscal Outlook Report for 2025-2072", highlighting the significant impact of demographic shifts driven by a rapidly aging population and a declining workforce. The forecast is based on the assumption that existing laws and systems will remain unchanged.

According to the report, by 2050, the national debt is expected to reach a level where the country's production will no longer be sufficient to cover it, with the debt-to-GDP ratio projected to surpass 100 percent. Currently at 48 percent, the ratio is forecast to surge to 173 percent by 2072, meaning the country's debt will be 1.73 times its annual economic output.

The country's national debt is expected to increase nearly sixfold by 2072, rising from the current 1,270 trillion won to 7,300 trillion won. In the same period, the gross domestic product growth rate is projected to plummet to 0.3 percent by 2072.

"The total spending-to-GDP ratio is projected to rise as mandatory expenditures increase due to the growing number of public pension beneficiaries and escalating welfare costs from an aging population," the report stated, noting that this proportion is expected to grow from 25.5 percent in 2025 to 33.6 percent.

This translates to an average annual spending growth rate of 1.6 percent over the next 47 years. In contrast, South Korea's national income is anticipated to grow at only half that pace, averaging 0.8 percent per year until 2072.

Financial instability

Such a demographic change is set to undermine the financial stability of the country's social security programs, becoming a major driver of South Korea's rising fiscal deficit.

The largest of these programs is the national pension fund, which is projected to peak in reserves in 2039, before entering negative growth the following year, ultimately being depleted by 2057. Upon depletion, the fund's accumulated fiscal deficit could reach approximately 2,900 trillion won, or 60 percent of GDP, by 2072.

The report underscored that slowing population decline is critical to curbing national debt.

According to the report, the projected national debt-to-GDP ratio of 173 percent by 2072 is based on a "medium" population estimate of 36.22 million. If demographic trends improve and the population declines only to the "high" estimate of 42.82 million, the debt ratio could drop by 9.8 percentage points to 163.2 percent. Conversely, if the population shrinks to the "low" estimate of 30.17 million, the ratio could rise to 181.9 percent.

Hope lies in a potential rebound in the birthrate, as the report said: "Preliminary data suggests South Korea's total fertility rate will rise to 0.75 in 2024, surpassing the government's projection (of 0.68) and marking the first increase in nine years since 2016. ... It is crucial to maintain at least a 'medium' level of population structure to prevent a rise in the national debt."

THE KOREA HERALD, SOUTH KOREA



Empty cradles in the newborn room of a public postpartum care center in Seoul, South Korea, in 2023. YONHAP



Rising accidents in Japan's mountain trails highlight critical need for repairs

With hiking growing in popularity, maintaining mountain trails has become a pressing challenge. While some routes have attracted volunteers, there are still many trails that are not well maintained. These trails risk falling into disrepair, which could cause accidents.

There has been a concerning rise in the number of trail accidents. In 2023, there were 3,568 accidents in the mountains, according to a report from Japan's National Police Agency. "Getting lost" accounted for 34 percent of accidents, and "slipping and falling" and "falling down" each accounted for 17 percent.

Of the 1,127 trails that run through Japan's 34 national parks, nearly half of them have no one in charge of maintenance and preservation, according to a report released in December 2023 by the Environment Ministry of Japan.

This is due to concerns about having to assume responsibility if there is an accident, also because of a lack of funds, officials said.

Even some trails with people maintaining them are not repaired in a timely manner, and 300 trails were found to have "some" or "many issues."

Members of mountaineering groups and staff at mountain lodges, who have been responsible for trail maintenance, are aging in many regions, and some are no longer able to take good care of the trails, according to a group that studies the management of mountain trails.

"As the number of elderly climb-



Main and above: Hikers walk on mountain path of the Kumano Kodo in Taiki, Mie Prefecture, Japan, in 2024. YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP

ers increases and the mountain trails continue to deteriorate, the number of lost climbers will rise, and the risk of slips and falls will also increase," said Kenji Kubota, member of a trail study group of Japan.

Taking effort

Local governments and private organizations are taking action to maintain a safe climbing environment.

At Mount Fuji, the Yamanashi government started asking climbers to pay 2,000 Japanese yen (\$13.39) as toll last summer in addition to a voluntary 1,000 yen as conservation fee. The toll will be used for trail maintenance and other purposes. The Shizuoka government is also considering collecting a similar toll from this summer.

revival began in 2019. Wakana Fukushima, a TV personality who serves as "Mitake health ambassador," started to repair the route.

"I want to increase the number of climbers," she said. She recruited volunteers to cut weeds and restore the trail in 2020.

Fukushima, who still conducts maintenance on the trail twice a month, said, "You can climb the mountain only because someone is maintaining the trail. I hope that those who hike here will help maintain it."

In mid-October, a road was reopened on the 2,599-meter-high Mount Kinpu, connecting to the old Mitake Kodo trail in Kofu. The mountain, which flourished as a center of ascetic practices in ancient times, is on the border of Yamanashi and Nagano prefectures.

The road had been in disrepair and the trail was hardly used, but local mountain guides planned to revive it so that local culture and history could be kept alive. The Kofu city government and other local organizations raised part of the maintenance costs through a crowdfunding campaign.

According to the city, the restoration of the old trail has shortened a round trip to the summit by two hours, and the number of climbers rose to about 30 in the first month after the trail was restored.

"I hope the restoration of the trail will encourage locals to take a fresh look at their own mountains," a city official said.

Until five years ago, the trail was overgrown and abandoned. Its

THE JAPAN NEWS

Vietnam aid groups give lifeline for trafficked animals

In Vietnam, where thousands of wild animals are illegally trafficked each year, wildlife rescue centers have become a lifeline, saving these animals from death and returning them to their natural habitats.

Truong Ngoc Anh, a veterinarian at Save Vietnam's Wildlife, a nonprofit rescue center, explained that trafficked animals often arrive in dire conditions — dehydrated, malnourished and injured from traps.

Timely and continuous care is essential to their survival, making rescue work a demanding, round-the-clock job.

Tran Van Truong, another staff member at the center, said the joy of releasing rehabilitated animals back into the wild keeps him motivated. "After a long recovery process, seeing them return to nature feels like welcoming a new year," he said.

At the Endangered Primate Rescue Center in Cuc Phuong National Park, head keeper Do Dang Khoa described the relentless nature of the work.

Even during holidays, rescue calls can come at any time. Once, on New Year's Eve, his team was summoned to rescue a white-legged langur. They worked through the night, prioritizing the animal's urgent medical needs over celebrations.

"We were called to rescue a white-legged langur. We arrived at midnight and had to decline an invitation to celebrate because the animal needed immediate care," he recalled.

Months later, the langur not only recovered but also reproduced, a milestone Khoa likened to welcoming a new family member.

Tran Ngoc Anh, from the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park's rescue center, explained that many primates lose their natural behaviors and require years of care to relearn how to forage and interact.



After a long recovery process, seeing them return to nature feels like welcoming a new year."

Tran Van Truong, staff member of nonprofit wildlife rescue center Save Vietnam's Wildlife

He also said that in the past Vietnam often released confiscated animals directly into the wild without health checks or quarantine, which posed risks to local wildlife.

Today, rescue efforts are more structured, with input from experts and organizations, leading to higher success rates in rehabilitation and release, he added.

Engaging youngsters

Harold Browning, a British animal behavior expert who has volunteered in Vietnam for a decade, said that young Vietnamese are increasingly engaged in conservation efforts.

Recently, the Hanoi Wildlife Rescue Centre hired several young staff members who are eager to innovate and learn.

He expressed hope that one day, rescue centers will not be needed because illegal trafficking will end. Tan Lo Quay, a staff member at the rescue center in Hoang Lien National Park, shared the challenges of fieldwork, including conducting surveys at over 2,200 meters above sea level in freezing conditions.

To raise awareness, Quay has turned to social media, using his TikTok channel to share stories like that of Princess Bu, a rescued sun bear. Bu, who arrived at the center as a malnourished cub, has thrived under his care for over three years.

His videos have inspired many young people, sparking interest in wildlife conservation and the importance of protecting endangered species for future generations.

"It's taught me so much about wildlife conservation. We need to protect these animals for future generations," a TikTok user commented on his videos.

VIET NAM NEWS, VIETNAM

WORLD

EU defense spending push sparks differences

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's proposal on Tuesday to mobilize some 800 billion euros (\$853 billion) to boost the European Union's defense spending has received a mixed response in Europe.

The plan was made shortly after United States President Donald Trump announced a halt in US military aid to Ukraine.

"We are living in the most momentous and dangerous of times," von der Leyen said.

"We are in an era of rearmament. And Europe is ready to massively boost its defense spending, both to respond to the short-term urgency to act and to support Ukraine, but also to address the long-term need to take on more responsibility for our own European security."

The five points von der Leyen laid out were detailed in a letter she sent to leaders of the 27 EU member states who will meet in Brussels for an extraordinary summit on Thursday. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky is also expected to attend the meeting.

These points include a "new instrument" to provide 150 billion euros (\$160 billion) in loans to member states to finance joint defense investment in pan-European capability domains.

"This is basically about spending better — and spending together," von der Leyen said.

She said that if EU member states raise their defense spending by 1.5 percent of GDP on average, it could come up to \$694 billion in the next four years.

Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis voiced his support for the proposal.

"I welcome President von der Leyen's REARM Europe plan as a significant step toward strengthening our collective European security. We must now work out the details to ensure that all member states benefit, regardless of their current defense spending," he wrote on X.

In Germany, the most likely next chancellor Friedrich Merz announced a new 500 billion euros (\$534 billion) plan to boost defense and infrastructure.

Merz announced on Tuesday that his Christian Democratic Union — which together with ally Christian Social Union and likely coalition, the Social Democrats — will present a joint bill in parliament next week to ease the country's debt brake.

"I want to say that very clearly in view of the threats to our freedom and peace on our continent, our defense must now apply 'whatever it takes,'" he told a news conference in Berlin with leaders of Christian Social Union and Social Democratic Party.

"Don't look now, but Europe is now preparing for war with Russia," Patrick Henningsen, a geopolitical analyst in the United Kingdom, commented on the "ReArm Europe" plan on X.

Veto threat

EU leaders have sharp differences in the defense funding. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban and Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico have threatened to veto any call for increased military assistance to Ukraine.

Carlos Martinez, a London-based commentator, described people such as von der Leyen as "deeply, deeply cynical."

"And they must think we are stupid," he wrote on X.

"No, Europe must not urgently rearm. Europe is not under any military threat," he said, adding Russia's military operation in Ukraine has very limited and well-defined aims related to ensuring Russia's own security in the face of an increasingly aggressive NATO.

Dave Keating, a Brussels-based commentator, said, "The name of today's EU package — #ReArmEurope — does beg the question of why the hell Europeans allowed their naive belief in America to cause them to Disarm Europe in the first place?"

Tariffs delayed for US automakers

Trump listens to 'Big 3', but tells them to start moving to shift production to US

By HENG WEILI in New York
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US automakers got a one-month stay on Wednesday from US President Donald Trump's tariffs on cars imported from Canada and Mexico, and Wall Street breathed a sigh of relief.

The reprieve came after Trump spoke with leaders of the "Big 3" automakers — Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, according to White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt.

But 25 percent tariffs for everyone else importing from Canada and Mexico took effect on Tuesday, as did a 20 percent across-the-board levy on China, which was doubled from 10 percent.

"He told them (the US automakers) that they should get on it, start investing, start moving, shift production here to the United States of America where they will pay no tariff," Leavitt said.

The White House announced that automakers who comply with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) get the 30-day exemption, which is set to expire on April 2. "We spoke with the Big Three," Leavitt said, adding that Trump didn't want the companies to be put at an "economic disadvantage."

"As America's top auto producer, we appreciate President Trump's work to support our industry and exempt auto companies complying with USMCA," Ford said in a statement Wednesday. "Since President Trump's successful USMCA was signed, Ford has invested billions in the United States and committed to billions more in the future to both invest in American workers and ensure all of our vehicles comply with USMCA."

Through February, nearly half of all new vehicles sold in the United States were built domestically, but



A truck loaded with produce from Mexico and Canada passes through Pharr, Texas, on Tuesday. ERIC GAY / AP

“He told them that they should get on it, start investing, start moving, shift production here to the United States of America where they will pay no tariff.”

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt

more than 17 percent were assembled in Mexico, and 74 percent in Canada, according to Edmunds.com.

Kevin Roberts, director of economic and market intelligence at CarGurus, an online auto-shopping site, told The New York Times that it was unrealistic to expect that the automakers could move their factories to the United States in one month's time.

"The auto industry is so global and so highly interconnected, you're not going to be able to shift a large amount of production in a month's time," Roberts said.

He estimated that a 25 percent tariff would add almost \$12,000 to the average price of a car Canada, and \$10,000 to one from Mexico.

Shares of GM, Ford and Stellantis all finished higher on Wednesday. The

S&P 500 rose 1.1 percent to rebound from a selloff that had erased all of its gains since Election Day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 485 points, or 1.1 percent, and the Nasdaq Composite gained 1.5 percent.

"The economic impact and consumer impact is still ahead of us," said Sameer Samana, head of global equities and real assets at Wells Fargo Investment Institute. "It comes back to what no one really knows, and that is how long these tariffs stay in place."

Ford CEO Jim Farley said at an investor forum last month that the automaker could tolerate the levies in the short term, but that they "would blow a hole in the US industry that we've never seen."

Ford has three plants in Mexico; it exported just under 196,000 cars

to North America in the first half of 2024, with 90 percent going to the US, according to Mexico's AMIA. The plants in Mexico also assemble two of Ford's new EVs.

GM imported roughly 750,000 vehicles from Canada or Mexico in 2024 to the US, with most made in Mexico, according to GlobalData. The autos include the Chevy Silverado, GMC Sierra pickup trucks and mid-sized SUVs. GM's three plants in Canada produce electric vans, the Chevrolet Silverado Heavy Duty truck, and the V8 engine and dual clutch transmission.

Stellantis operates assembly plants in Mexico making Ram pickups and vans, as well as the Jeep Compass mid-sized SUV. The group owns two assembly plants in Canada: one where it makes Chrysler models, and another scheduled to restart output of a new Jeep model this year.

S&P Global Mobility on Tuesday — before the one-month delay — predicted that roughly a third of automobile production in North America could have been cut by next week due to the 25 percent tariffs, CNBC reported.

The forecasting firm reported that 25 automakers on average produce 63,900 light-duty passenger vehicles in North America each day, with about 65 percent built in the US; 27 percent in Mexico, and 8 percent in Canada, the website said.

On social media, "Melanie" wrote on X: "Once again President Trump is picking winners & losers in regards to tariffs. The big 3 auto makers have a one month reprieve but other companies, including small businesses suddenly have 25% more cost. Many companies don't work on a big profit margin so this 25% is very damaging."

"FOUR whole weeks to ship supply chains, production lines, and to qualify new domestic suppliers?" wrote Ryan King on X.

Agencies contributed to this story.

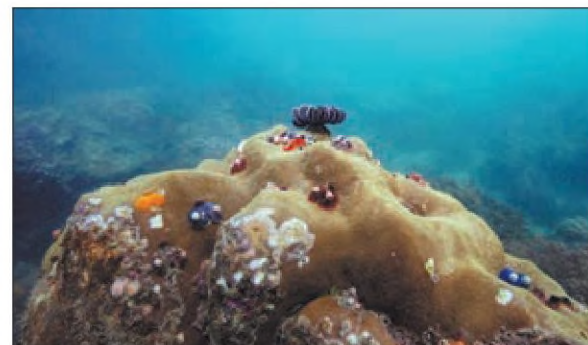
Once-thriving coral reefs in Vietnam face collapse

NHA TRANG, Vietnam — The gentle waves off the coast of central Vietnam's Nha Trang obscure an open secret: The life-giving coral reefs below are dying. The waters are eerily devoid of fish. The bounty of the ocean is coming to an end.

This is why Binh Van — who has fished in these waters for more than two decades — now charts his boat to Vietnamese tourists wanting to experience the thrill of fishing in the deep waters.

However, there is only squid, which is flourishing in oceans warmed by climate change, to catch. It was not always like this. There was a time when he would catch 70 kilograms of fish in one night. He cannot make money on squid.

Southeast Asia's coral reefs make up more than one-third of the world's coral reefs. But most of these are now at risk of being destroyed. Only 1 percent of Vietnam's reefs are



Coral reefs are visible off the coast of Nha Trang, Vietnam, on Oct 24. YANNICK PETERHANS / AP

still healthy, and that is because of their remoteness, according to the World Resources Institute.

The coral reefs of Nha Trang have also had to contend with local pres-

ures as Vietnam's economy boomed and coastal towns grew.

This has affected not only the local fishing industry but also Vietnam's tourism industry, especially among

divers from all over the world who flock to the country because of its long coastline.

Tourism and reefs can go hand in hand if they are well-managed, said Emma Camp, a coral expert at the University of Technology Sydney in Australia. There are instances of tourism supporting marine conservation and programs to help reefs recover, she said.

Konstantin Tkachenko, a professor of marine ecology at Russia's Samara University who has been studying Vietnam's reefs for years, said the country could do more to protect them.

It could create more marine parks where protections are actually enforced, obligate the tourism industry to restore vegetation on the coasts to reduce sediment pouring into the ocean, and regulate fisheries.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

France-Algeria diplomatic row escalates over immigration

By MOHAMMAD ARIF ULLAH
For China Daily

A dispute over immigration has ramped up tensions between France and Algeria.

The row flared after Algeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected France's demand that it take back deported Algerian nationals.

In a statement on Feb 27, Algeria declared that it "categorically" rejected the ultimatum set by Paris, triggering a diplomatic dispute that worsened when the wife of Algeria's ambassador to Mali was denied entry to France the following day.

Just two weeks earlier, the same treatment had been meted out to Abdelaziz Khellaf, former chief of staff of Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune.

France's push to get Algeria to take back the individuals France wanted to deport included an announcement by French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou on Feb 26 that his country may seek to revise its 1968 immigration agreement with Algeria.

"France will ask Algeria to reconsider the 1968 agreement," Bayrou

told a news conference, warning that if Algeria refused to accept the deportees, the agreement could be scrapped.

The 1968 agreement gives Algerians special immigration privileges in France. However, many French politicians, especially those on the right, argue it is outdated.

The crisis is one of the severest between France and Algeria recently. A similar diplomatic conflict flared in 2005 when France passed a law recognizing the "positive role" of its colonial history in North Africa. However, Algeria did not react as strongly then as it has now.

Relations between the two countries have been tense since July 30, when Algeria withdrew its ambassador from Paris after French President Emmanuel Macron officially recognized Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, a highly sensitive issue for Algeria.

Another key issue in the current dispute is the exemption of diplomatic passport holders from visa requirements. Under an agreement signed in 2013, officials from both countries can travel without visas. However, France is reviewing that arrangement.

On Feb 27, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told TV channel LCI that France had imposed "restrictive measures" on some Algerian officials.

"These measures are reversible, depending on Algeria's level of cooperation," he said, without providing further details.

Strong reactions

The dispute has sparked strong reactions from politicians across France's political spectrum.

On RMC radio on Monday, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said, "No historical pain gives anyone the right to insult my country, France."

He also warned that France has the means to respond if Algeria continues to refuse to cooperate.

"There are ways of gradual retaliation on the table," he said.

On the other side of the debate, some French politicians have criticized the government's handling of the crisis.

On Feb 26, left-wing lawmaker Eric Coquerel told BFM TV: "What France is doing to Algeria is a rare mistake and a historic blunder. I call for calm. Bruno Retailleau should step back — it is the French diplomatic corps, not

the interior minister, that should handle relations with Algeria."

Similarly, Francois Gemenne, a professor at the HEC Paris business school and a researcher at the University of Liege in Belgium, said on LCI TV on Feb 27: "The issue of immigration is being used as a diplomatic tool. The people who will suffer the most are those who need to travel."

Meanwhile, right-wing politicians have urged Macron to take a tougher stance.

On Tuesday, lawmaker Sebastien Chenu told Europe 1 radio: "Not canceling the 1968 agreements is a shame. Emmanuel Macron is afraid. How can we be governed by a president who is afraid?"

The diplomatic crisis has also exposed tensions within the French government. In an interview with French daily Le Figaro, Macron made it clear that decisions on the 1968 agreements were his responsibility.

His remark was widely seen as a warning to Bayrou and Retailleau, both of whom have taken a hard-line approach on immigration policy.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Musk's bid to halt OpenAI shift denied

A US judge on Tuesday denied billionaire Elon Musk's request for a preliminary injunction to pause OpenAI's transition to a for-profit model but agreed to a fast-track trial this fall, the latest turn in the high-stakes legal fight. Musk does not have "the high burden" required for a preliminary injunction "to block the conversion of OpenAI," said US District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers in Oakland, California. Musk and OpenAI, which he co-founded as a nonprofit in 2015 but left before it took off, have been embroiled in a yearlong legal battle.

DR CONGO

Conflict affects 2,500 schools, says minister

More than 2,500 schools have been affected by a continuing conflict between the M23 rebels and the government in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a senior official said on Tuesday. Raissa Malu, state minister in charge of national education, said at a news briefing that the schools have either been destroyed or occupied in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces during the conflict, adding that more than 1 million students have also been affected.

SINGAPORE

Govt splashes millions on coffee shop toilets

Singapore will allocate up to \$7.5 million in grants to support the renovation and deep cleaning of coffee shop toilets, according to the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment. A "Public Toilets Taskforce" was formed by the ministry last year to identify lavatories that consistently fared poorly in cleanliness surveys. However, "toilets that demonstrate excellence in design and cleanliness will be able to apply for HTP (Happy Toilet Program) certification," said the ministry in a statement on Tuesday.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

WORLD

Think tank hosts talks on two sessions

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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US experts gathered at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, or CSIS, on Monday to discuss China's ongoing two sessions. Hosted by CSIS Vice-President of Communications Alex Kisling, the briefing featured insights from the participants on the potential priorities and global implications of the political event in China.

The two sessions, the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, serve as a critical platform for China's leadership to outline its agenda. The meetings offer a window into Beijing's strategies amid domestic challenges and international tensions.

Scott Kennedy, CSIS senior adviser and trustee chair in Chinese business and economics, said that economic recovery would dominate the two sessions' agenda.

Kennedy mentioned a stimulus push from the Chinese government last September and China's low consumption rate compared to advanced economies as a key challenge.

"There have been some shoots of growth, increase in domestic travel, some areas of consumption, some private investment," Kennedy said.

Kennedy suggested that boosting demand through a stronger social safety net is essential to reduce precautionary savings and spur sustainable growth.

While economic matters lead the agenda, security and foreign policy provide a crucial backdrop, according to Brian Hart, deputy director and fellow with the CSIS China Power Project. Beyond the main sessions, Hart highlighted Foreign Minister Wang Yi's news conference as critical for gauging China's foreign policy stance, particularly on US-China tensions and trade disputes.

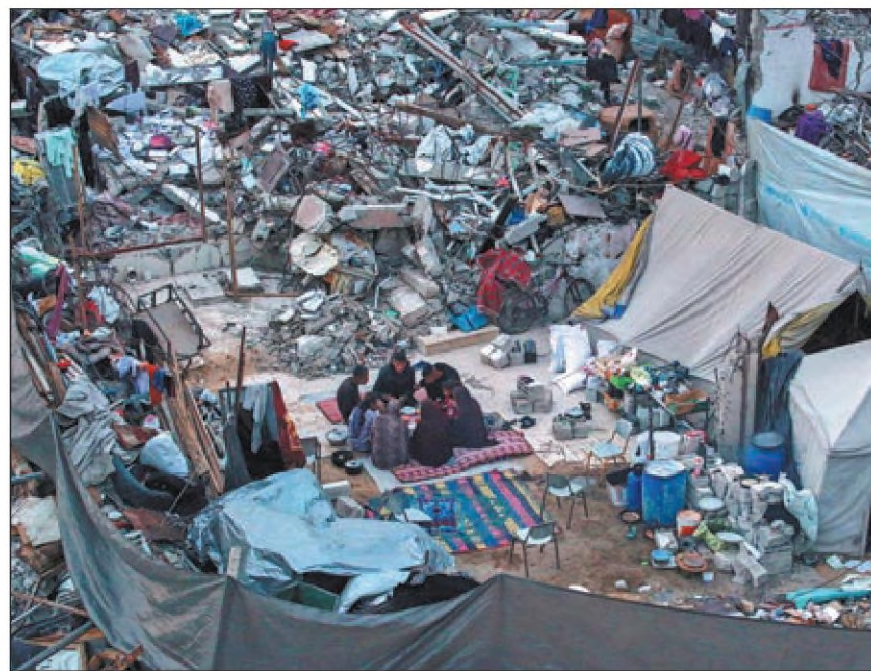
Iaria Mazzocco, deputy director and senior fellow with the CSIS trustee chair in Chinese business and economics, talked mainly about China's climate and technology goals. "The 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) is going to start next year, and that's the time frame in which China has indicated that carbon emissions would start to decline," Mazzocco said, stressing the plan's role in shaping coal consumption trends.

On technology, Mazzocco pointed to China's confidence in artificial intelligence, bolstered by the success of DeepSeek. "The Chinese leadership is going to go into these meetings with pretty strong confidence in its AI position thanks to DeepSeek's success," she said. She anticipated a continued push for AI and high-end technology to boost productivity, alongside trade-in programs to stimulate sectors like automotive.

The experts also discussed China's posture toward the US, especially with new tariffs. Kennedy said China has made technological strides.

The experts said China actively promotes international cooperation, particularly within multilateral trade and global governance institutions. Kennedy said that China is committed to addressing global challenges through platforms such as the World Trade Organization, the United Nations, and the World Health Organization.

"China believes that the world should use the WTO, the UN system, the WHO, Paris, et cetera, to address and manage global challenges," Kennedy said.



A Palestinian doctor has his fast-breaking meal with his family outside their tent in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip during Ramadan on Tuesday. BASHAR TALEB / AFP

Arab leaders endorse alternative Gaza plan

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE,
and JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong

The Arab leaders' endorsement of an alternative to a widely condemned "irrational" proposal by United States President Donald Trump should be "the concrete way forward" for Gaza and Washington and Tel Aviv should toe the line, according to experts.

Hosted by Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, representatives of Arab nations unanimously approved on Tuesday an Egyptian reconstruction plan for Gaza with a price tag of about \$53 billion. It aims to avoid unnecessarily and illegally depopulating Gaza at the closing of an emergency summit held in Cairo.

The reconstruction plan for Gaza is a 112-page document focusing on emergency relief, infrastructure restoration and long-term economic development. It projects that rebuilding the enclave would take five years and the first two-year phase would cost \$20 billion.

Also under Egypt's plan, Hamas would cede power to an interim administration of political independents until a reformed Palestinian Authority can assume control.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas welcomed the idea, saying his administration could assume "its duties in the Gaza Strip through its governmental institutions". He urged Trump to support it. But in a statement posted on X, the Israel Foreign Ministry said

the Arab summit "fails to address the realities of the situation following Oct 7, 2023, remaining rooted in outdated perspectives".

Haydar Oruc, a former researcher at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Turkey, said that Egypt's "essentially, comprehensive plan" also addresses not only Gaza but other Palestinian territories.

He said the Egyptian plan also envisages some arrangements in the context of the two-state solution and urged the Trump administration to support this plan "in order to end the conflicts in the region and to establish an environment of peace and tranquility".

"In fact, considering the policies that Trump is trying to implement in his (second time as president), (The Arab endorsement) seems to be the most rational choice to support such a plan that does not impose a cost on the US and will ensure the stabilization of the region," Oruc told China Daily.

UN backing

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stressed the UN's readiness to back the plan, saying Gaza "must remain an integral part of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state, with no forced transfer of its population". Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit said violence will not be stopped by displacing Palestinians, and reconstruction is viable while keeping Gazans on their land.

Saul Takahashi, former deputy

head of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in occupied Palestine, told China Daily that the Arab plan "is significant" as it showed unity among Arab countries.

But he also said it was doubtful the Arab plan would go anywhere without serious pressure on Israel.

Israel, in its post, slammed the Egyptian proposal for the absence of condemnation of Hamas' "brutal terrorist attack".

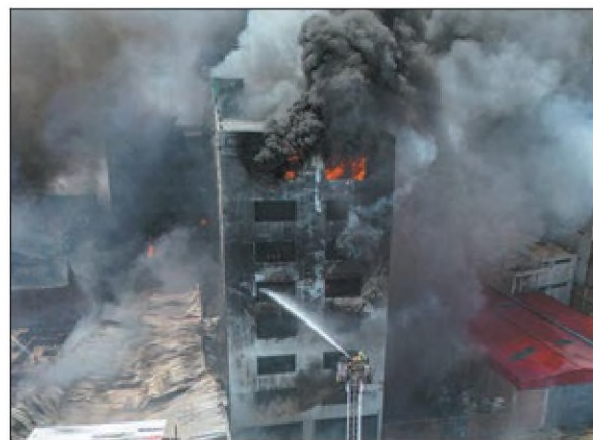
Israel argued that Trump's idea provided the opportunity for Gazans to "have a free choice based on their free will", further blaming the Arab states for "rejecting this opportunity without giving it a fair chance and continuing to level baseless accusations against Israel".

The White House said it welcomed "input" from the Arab nations on Trump's proposal but emphasized Hamas cannot remain in power.

"The fact that Egypt has prepared such a plan and that the Arab League, together with all its stakeholders, stands behind it and calls for the adoption of the most feasible and cost-effective plan for the United States instead of Trump's irrational Gaza plan is an important development," said Oruc.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

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Flames of fury

Peruvian firefighters battle a major fire at a toy store in downtown Lima, Peru, on Tuesday. The incident did not result in any fatalities. Nearby residents were evacuated from their homes due to the risk of the blaze spreading to surrounding buildings, as reported by local media.

CONNIE FRANCE / AFP

Driving down autonomous tech costs

Chinese automakers are democratizing the technology with higher volumes, innovation

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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Chinese automakers are making significant strides in democratizing advanced autonomous driving features, offering them in increasingly affordable vehicles thanks to growing manufacturing volumes and rapid technological progress.

While the cost-reduction trend is expected to shake up the global automotive market, experts warn that US tariffs and restrictions on Chinese electric vehicles may be preventing domestic automakers from learning valuable lessons from Chinese innovations.

Chinese EV giant BYD has dramatically reduced the entry price for smart EVs to below \$10,000 as it started offering advanced autonomous driving features on most of its models this month.

The company's Seagull model, priced at just 69,800 yuan (about \$9,550) in China, comes equipped with autonomous driving capabilities — a feature previously only available in models priced from \$30,000. Li Auto has announced it would adopt LiDAR (light detection and ranging), a sensing technology using lasers to detect distances, across its entire new model line this year to enhance intelligent driving capabilities.

Other Chinese EV manufacturers also have increasingly incorporated autonomous driving features into their affordable EV models, marking a shift toward "electric intelligent vehicles".

At CES 2025 in January in Las Vegas, Geely, in partnership with Chinese robotics technology company RoboSense, showcased its Galaxy ES. The model features RoboSense's latest EM4 ultra-long-range automotive-grade digital LiDAR, enabling advanced intelligent driving capabilities including high-speed navigation on autopilot (NOA) and home parking assist (HPA).

LiDAR technology is increasingly deployed in less expensive cars, like the Galaxy ES, due to a dramatic decrease in costs, said RoboSense CEO Qiu Chunchao. "We have brought LiDAR into a fully digital era — it's similar to how cameras transitioned from the film era to the digital era. Now LiDAR is also entering its digital age, so our entire series of new products are being developed around this digital LiDAR platform," he told China Daily.

Li Chuanhai, vice-president of Geely Auto Group, said that he expects that 2025 will be the year when autonomous driving technology sees the fastest commercialization, combining both deeper market penetration and technological advancement.

The autonomous driving technology was previously only equipped on high-end vehicles, starting from 400,000 yuan (about \$55,000) and now it's accessible in cars around 100,000 yuan (about \$13,800), said Li, without disclosing the price for Galaxy ES with autonomous driving features.

A LiDAR unit, for instance, used to cost 30,000 yuan (about \$4,100), but now it costs only around 1,000 yuan (about \$138) — a dramatic decrease, said Li.

"It's about both volume and technology itself. The automotive industry relies on scale to reduce costs. When application volume increases, costs come down," he told China Daily in an interview. "Current autonomous driving technology, especially from Chinese brands, is progressing rapidly. Particularly, AI large models represent a revolutionary advancement for autonomous driving capabilities."

This technological revolution is unfolding in two phases — electrification in the first half and intelligence in the second half, according to Su Ning, CEO of BOE Varitronix, a sole sales platform of BOE Group for automotive businesses.

"Electrification has significantly lowered the barriers to entry for vehicle manufacturing and made overall intelligent driving possible," said Su. "Since last year, intelligent features have developed rapidly, especially in China, where Level 3 autonomous driving has now gained general acceptance."

The economies of scale are the primary driver of the trend, particularly as LiDAR systems see wider deployment in smart EVs, robotaxis and other robotics applications, according to Lei Xing, a Massachusetts-based analyst who covers the Chinese auto industry and was former chief editor of China Automotive Review.

The trend is accelerating the adoption of advanced autonomous driving features, especially in urban scenarios, with increased implementation of city NOA and parking-to-parking autonomous capabilities — "Level 2+" systems where vehicles can drive themselves while still requiring driver attention, he said.

"This trend is expected to accelerate significantly this year, reaching more affordable vehicle models," he added.

Xing said he expects Chinese LiDAR manufacturers to expand their global footprint, starting with joint venture brands like Toyota, GM and Volkswagen, in the Chinese market. "There are ongoing discussions about incorporating Chinese LiDAR systems into vehicles sold globally by international brands," he said.

However, Chinese EVs and technology face stringent restrictions in the US market, due to concerns over "national security" and fears that Chinese auto exports could undermine the nation's EV industry.

The US imposed 100 percent tariffs on vehicle imports from China last year, and other proposed rules would ban Chinese software and components for connected vehicles starting in 2027.

Jonas Nahm, an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, pointed out that the US "has failed to engage with the reality of China's auto sector" and that "protectionist policies could raise prices for American consumers and impede the transition to cleaner vehicles".

"Tariffs and bans also reduce pressure on US automakers to innovate, including by learning from China's EV makers who excel at software innovation, rapid product development, and a relentless focus on reducing costs," Nahm wrote in a new report published by his institution.

S. Africa taking steps to get more tourists from China

By NDUMISO MLILO
in Johannesburg
For China Daily

Major tourism destination countries in Africa are making efforts to get a bigger share of Chinese tourists by ensuring they are ready.

"The Chinese market is important for us and we see value in them. We have maintained our office in Beijing since 2011. China is a growth market for us and we have put in place a trusted tour operator scheme to increase visitors from China and India," said Nombulelo Guliwe, CEO of South African Tourism.

Since February, South Africa has implemented the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme, or TTOS, wherein the

tourism authority of the country vetted and selected 65 tour operators from South Africa, China and India to handle group visa applications and expedite visa approval. Under the scheme, South Africa reduced some requirements for tourists from China and India and cut the visa waiting period to less than two days.

Last year, South Africa received more than 41,000 tourists from China — which is an 11 percent increase from the previous year. Guliwe pointed out that South Africa is pulling all the strings to attract more tourists from China.

She said, "We are 'China ready' in terms of cuisine served in our hotels and restaurants, signage and we have trained some of our tour

guides to speak Mandarin."

Leon Schreiber, South Africa's minister of home affairs, said that they will continue to remove impediments to inbound travel for Chinese visitors and those from other countries. He said the TTOS is a "game changer" that will result in an increase in the volume of tourists from China and India, thereby creating jobs and boosting the economy.

He said, "It has been difficult to get visas for group travel to South Africa approved. Under the TTOS, tour operators apply one online and we digitally adjudicate those outcomes with speed. This is just the beginning, and we will very soon deliver electronic travel authorization for visas across the board."

Patricia De Lille, the South African minister of tourism, said that many tourists from China have expressed interest in visiting South Africa. She said South Africa intends to increase the number of tour operators in the TTOS to 150-200 by December to facilitate more travelers.

James Mwaura, CEO of the Kenya International Convention Centre in Kenya, said his country has put in place some measures to increase tourist arrivals from China.

Kenya aims to get 5 million tourists by 2027. A total of 80,000 tourists visited Kenya from China last year, a substantial increase from 51,000 in 2023.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Reform, opening-up and people-centered development will continue to drive progress

In his report on government work, which opened this year's annual session of the National People's Congress, Premier Li Qiang introduced the hard-won achievements of 2024 and set a practical government agenda for 2025.

Despite the external pressures and internal difficulties, the economy made steady progress last year, and the major goals of socioeconomic development were "smoothly accomplished", he said. With the emphasis on stability, innovation and balanced growth, Li outlined a road map for China's high-quality development for 2025 that seeks to tap the potential of market economy while taking full advantage of the "visible hand" of the government. Underscoring the nation's resolve to maintain stability while pursuing progress, the report sets a target of "around 5 percent" GDP growth and the creation of over 12 million jobs.

At the heart of the report is a strong focus on boosting domestic demand, which is identified as the top priority for 2025. By stimulating consumer spending and encouraging private sector investment, the government aims to counter slowing economic growth and create a robust internal market.

Measures to increase personal incomes, reduce financial burdens and improve the consumption environment are aimed at unlocking the potential for diversified and upgraded spending. Efforts will also be made to boost private investment and green consumption to further drive demand and consolidate domestic consumption's role as the main engine of growth.

Innovation remains a cornerstone of China's development strategy. The report highlights fully leveraging the country's ability to mobilize resources nationwide to intensify the push for breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields, R&D advancements in frontier and disruptive technologies, and to accelerate forward-looking planning for major science and technology projects.

The advancement of strategic emerging sectors such as biomanufacturing, quantum technology, and 6G is to be fostered and service-oriented manufacturing promoted. To further unleash the potential of the digital economy, the integration of artificial intelligence will be promoted across industries. And by leveraging the strengths of high-tech enterprises and facilitating collaboration among industries, universities and research institutes, China aims to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies and enhance its global competitiveness.

To promote more balanced development, the central government will regulate local investment policies and promote coordinated industrial planning. By addressing local debt concerns and regulating irrational market competition, the government aims to boost regional development vitality while preventing overcapacity.

Fiscal and monetary policies are to be fine-tuned to support less-developed areas, and advance new urbanization and all-around rural vitalization.

Reforms in key areas will seek to remove institutional barriers, foster a fairer market environment, and stimulate the vitality of market entities, with the reform of State-owned enterprises to be deepened and policies and measures implemented that are designed to spur the growth of the private sector.

Li also indicated the government's willingness to provide more policy support for the property sector. With local debt considered to be less of a risk, the property market, a critical pillar of the economy, is to receive targeted support with monetary policy instruments refined and new ones developed to provide stronger support for its healthy and sustainable development.

China's journey toward high-quality development is not just a national endeavor but a contribution to global stability and growth. By staying true to its new "innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared" development philosophy, China is poised to achieve the goals of its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and set an example for sustainable and inclusive development in the 21st century.

China's commitment to high-standard opening-up remains unwavering. By advancing opening-up in sectors such as telecommunications, healthcare and education, the government aims to attract foreign investment and strengthen international cooperation. Li indicated that pilot free trade zones are to be granted greater reform powers to improve the business environment in order to ensure that China remains a favored destination for global investors. High-quality Belt and Road cooperation is also being prioritized, with a focus on both large-scale projects and smaller, impactful initiatives that enhance public well-being.

Balancing immediate economic stability with longer-term strategic goals, the Government Work Report reflects the national leadership's clear vision for realizing high-quality development as the nation navigates the global headwinds and domestic challenges.

Tariffs causing US pain not 'little disturbance'

US President Donald Trump dedicated the majority of his address to Congress on Tuesday to boast about what he has done since his return to the White House 43 days ago.

Among the many economic topics he touched upon in the one-and-a-half-hour address, tariffs were given the most time after inflation.

"We have been ripped off for decades by nearly every country on Earth and we will not let that happen any longer," Trump said, repeating his election campaign claim to justify the tariff wars he is dragging the world into.

But many of his tariff-related claims do not stand up to the simplest fact-check, which many US media outlets did the moment he ended his address.

For instance, though Trump claimed the US trade deficit with Canada is "hundreds of billions", the trade deficit is actually about \$60 billion, without including Canadian energy exports, which would give the United States a trade surplus with Canada.

Trump's claim that "China's average tariff on our products is twice what we charge them" is also false. He defended tariffs as a way to raise revenue for the government; a way to encourage more domestic manufacturing; and a bargaining chip to induce other countries to lower their own trade barriers.

But he did so by presenting a false picture and prevaricating on such key issues as whether his tariffs backfire. "Tariffs are about making America rich again and making America great again. And it's happening, and it will happen rather quickly," Trump said. "There'll be a little disturbance, but we're okay with that. It won't be much."

Yet US stock markets fell significantly on Tuesday following the start of the tariff wars between the US and its three leading trading partners. The S&P 500 index ended the day at its lowest level since November.

Even many Republicans have deep reservations about the tariffs, and lawmakers from states that could be hard-hit spent Tuesday on the phone with Trump's aides voicing their concerns. They had been hoping to hear from Trump a more fulsome explanation of his tariff plan, and an explanation of how average Americans might benefit, according to US media reports.

The administration is aware of the harms its tariffs are doing to the US. After Canada, Mexico and China made public their respective retaliatory tariffs and measures over the past two days, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick suggested that the Trump administration is exploring possible relief from the tariffs and could make an announcement soon in a bid to cushion the boomerang effects of the US' tariff attacks.

The Yale Budget Lab estimates that the tariffs could cost the average household up to \$2,000 annually. Most economists predict that prices and, therefore, inflation will go up, with consumers seeing higher prices for food, gasoline, clothes, shoes, toys and other household items.

In other words, it is the working families and the US economy at large that will bear the brunt of the administration's tariffs, though ironically Trump said in the address one of his "very highest priorities" was to rescue the economy and offer relief to working families.

But as predicted, Trump was vague in the specifics in the Congress address, and he repeated his encouragement to farmers to "have a lot of fun" selling their products inside the US, a sentiment he voiced on social media this week, even as he acknowledged the tariffs could cause economic pain.

Seeking a quick-fix to address long-term institutional and structural issues, leaving the unspecified and unpredictable impacts to the future, is the hallmark wisdom of Trump's art of policymaking. It is the parties he claims he will protect that will prove to be the victims in the US' tariff wars against the world.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Country should explore strengths to consolidate base for recovery

The long-term upward trajectory of China's economy remains unchanged, despite the challenges in recent years.

This year, the economy is poised to benefit from the synergistic effects of innovation-driven growth, domestic demand expansion, private enterprise empowerment and the reevaluation of Chinese assets by international capital.

The potential of innovation is being unleashed. DeepSeek, a Chinese private artificial intelligence startup, exemplifies the breakthrough advancements in China's AI sector, even under constrained computing power. A Stanford University report highlights that 61 percent of the world's authorized AI patents originate from China and the country also leads globally in robot installations. Today, technological and industrial breakthroughs driven by innovation are evident nationwide, prompting local governments to further enhance the business environment, embrace innovation and continuously strengthen the innova-

tive capabilities of cities and regions.

The central government has meanwhile vowed to boost consumption, improve investment efficiency and expand domestic demand this year. To this end, the government is implementing a more proactive fiscal policy and a moderately loose monetary policy, increasing the fiscal deficit rate and launching special initiatives to stimulate consumption.

China is steadfast in its support for the private economy. The government recently held a symposium focused on private enterprises, underscoring its commitment to their development. A draft law on promoting the private economy is expected to be enacted soon. This legislation will ensure that enterprises of all forms of ownership can utilize production factors equally, participate in market competition fairly and receive equal legal protection.

The reevaluation of Chinese assets is attracting international capital inflows. Historically, international capital underestimated the strength of China's

technological capabilities and the value of its assets. However, DeepSeek's breakthroughs despite the computing power constraints, coupled with its cost efficiency and advanced technology, have showcased the country's innovation potential and development prospects. This has led to a broader recognition of China's global leadership in sectors such as electric vehicles, energy and power generation, high-speed rail, and shipbuilding, as well as its advanced capabilities in aerospace, biotechnology, new materials, robotics, semiconductors and communications. As a result, international capital has shown renewed confidence in the Chinese economy, leading to increased investment in Chinese companies.

The economy is on a path of sustained growth, driven by innovation, domestic demand, private sector vitality and international confidence. These factors collectively ensure that the country's economic development remains resilient and forward-looking.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

Ukraine: US involvement key to success of Starmer's 'coalition of the willing' plan

From page 1

At the moment, there are very few concrete outcomes we can see from the London summit, although Starmer is talking about a coalition of the willing. I will make three points about that.

The first is that the members of this coalition of the willing have not actually been named. The only countries named are the United Kingdom and France.

There are said to be other countries, but they are as yet unnamed. Most of those nations will probably make very insignificant contributions, if any. The fact that no other names can be put forward at the moment for this coalition of the willing tends to indicate that it doesn't amount to very much in real terms. Indeed, it already seems to be fraying, with, for example, President Emmanuel Macron of France proposing some sort of limited and temporary ceasefire only for this to be promptly rejected by Starmer.

The second point I would make about the coalition of the willing is that it is actually a very unfortunate phrase that was coined by former US president George W. Bush to describe those participating in the invasion of Iraq, which is more or less universally regarded now as a disaster. That coalition of the willing had to be created because the US and the UK couldn't get support in the United Nations Security Council for their illegal war. Starmer may think that the coalition of the willing sounds clever, but actually, its antecedents are not very auspicious or encouraging.

The third issue is that everything Starmer is proposing relies on the US' involvement in the coalition.

In the long term, this could happen as Trump is a very mercurial character. But at the moment, the US is more in the coalition of the unwilling.

The announcement that the US intends to freeze military support to Ukraine underlines this in a dramatic fashion. Without US involvement, the whole thing is bound to fall apart.

Starmer wants to place British and other peacekeepers in Ukraine, but they would have to have what he calls a backstop in terms of US air power. If the US doesn't agree to this, again, everything falls apart.

When Starmer went to the White House about a day after Macron and about a day before Zelensky, his visit was presented in the British press as some kind of a great achievement.

In reality, Trump was quite scathing toward Starmer. When Starmer made some comment about the US and the UK always standing together, Trump more or less laughed at him and said, "Do you think you can take on the Russians on your own?"

Russia launched its military operations in Ukraine precisely to prevent NATO from expanding into Ukraine and posing a threat to Russia.

Therefore, it seems really inconceivable that Russia would tolerate the presence of so-called peacekeepers from NATO countries in Ukraine as part of any agreement it would sign up to. Peacekeepers, after all, are supposed to be neutral.

If the US continues to dial down its support for Ukraine, as is presently the case, the Europeans can contribute a bit more, but they're really not in a position to match the amount of aid that the US has been giving.

So everything that was discussed at the London summit hinges on getting the US on board with whatever

was decided on. However, the Europeans' ability to get the US on board is questionable, to say the least.

If you look at some of the participants, you had people such as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who is on his way out. Trudeau is yesterday's person. He's going to cease being his country's prime minister very soon, and Canada is going to have a new political reality. You had Olaf Scholz from Germany — his Social Democratic Party is almost certain to be a junior coalition partner in the next government, but he is the person who just led his party to its worst electoral defeat since the 19th century and will doubtlessly pay a personal price for this.

Therefore, clearly some of the people involved in taking decisions will soon be in no position to carry them through. So, the London summit should be seen as being more an act of showmanship than anything that makes a serious difference.

And that places Starmer in a very difficult position. As the saying goes, he's trying to "square a circle".

It's not really possible to do. If you are determined to continue the conflict in Ukraine, and the US is determined to bring it to an end, then just flattering Trump is only going to take you so far.

Starmer and some of the other European leaders are in an almost impossible dilemma, one that they probably never expected to face. And beneath the brave front, they really don't know what to do.

The author is a London-based senior analyst on international relations and co-editor of the Friends of Socialist China platform. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

GERT GROBLER

Strengthened solidarity

The Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus is a commendable initiative to promote closer Africa and Global South cooperation with China

Shortly after assuming office for the second time, United States President Donald Trump announced a sudden 90-day suspension of the US Agency for International Development as part of his "America First" agenda, suspending billions of dollars in global funding.



With such actions, "America First" is in danger of becoming "America alone". In fact, world trade routes and its circle of friends are gravitating toward China rather than the US. It suggests that any country unwilling to engage in trade with China may find itself at a disadvantage, a message that the Trump administration does not seem to grasp.

The bilateral relations between South Africa and the US are complex, and the Trump administration froze all US aid to South Africa. This aid block is the culmination of a number of bilateral sticking points between the US and South Africa that were building up even during the administration of former president Joe Biden, and which are now escalating under the Trump administration.

The government of South Africa has noted this and expressed its concern. President Cyril Ramaphosa responded that "we are witnessing the rise of nationalism and protectionism, the pursuit of narrow interests and the decline of common cause", and added that "but we are not daunted. We will not be deterred. We are a resilient people. We will not be bullied".

The US is also busy reducing its participation in this year's G20 meeting, hosted by South African President Ramaphosa in Johannesburg in November. In fact, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, as well as Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, did not attend the G20 foreign and



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

finance ministers' meetings held in South Africa.

In the face of changes in the international landscape and the challenges South Africa is encountering,

the South African government and its people have warmly welcomed China's firm support and solidarity. Chinese Ambassador to South Africa Wu Peng expressed

China's readiness to support South Africa's G20 presidency.

As it prepares to host the historic G20 Summit, the first to be held on the African continent, South Africa

should be confident that its solid collaboration with China will contribute to fostering inclusive and sustainable development, particularly for the Global South.

The growing cooperation and solidarity between Africa and China was clearly demonstrated by the joint release of a significant document titled the Consensus Among African and Chinese Think Tanks on Deepening Global Development Cooperation, also referred to as the Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus, under the auspices of the important China-Africa Think Tanks Forum, in Dar es Salaam in March 2024. This commendable document represents a significant and admirable strategic initiative by African and Chinese scholars to deepen exchanges and mutual learning. The document provides significant guidance for deepening global development cooperation. It not only reflects the breadth and depth of cooperation between Africa and China, but also injects new impetus into the common development of Global South countries.

In a subsequent joint letter to President Xi Jinping, 63 scholars from 50 African countries stressed they were deeply encouraged by his dynamic leadership and strategic contribution which is strongly reflected in an unwavering commitment to China's high-quality modernization through reform and opening-up.

In his valued and constructive letter of reply, President Xi encouraged African scholars to continue to provide intellectual support for building a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future and safeguarding the common interests of the Global South.

China has not only firmly supported South Africa but also actively promoted cooperation among Global South countries. And the consensus document, in essence, represents the collective call of the Global South for the international community to deepen development cooperation based on the principles of mutual respect, solidarity, win-win cooperation, openness and common prosperity.

Africa and China therefore look forward, as stated in the consensus document, to working with the international community to deepen the solidarity, cooperation and the alignment between international initiatives. In this regard, it is vital to promote the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the African Union's Agenda 2063, enhance high-quality Belt and Road Initiative cooperation, implement the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, in order to open a new chapter in global development and modernization. It is against the background of today's global situation, characterized by multiple and complex challenges, that Africa and China are striving to strengthen unity and cooperation with other Global South countries to jointly push for a more equal, just and rational international order.

The creation of Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus is a step toward this goal and it should be commended and celebrated.

The author is a senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University and a former senior diplomat in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

SILENCE CHARUMBIRA

Breaking the tech barrier

How the Global South can mitigate the negative impact of Western-driven 'technology decoupling'

Global political dynamics in the past few years call for more integration between China and Africa to fend off a new onslaught from the West, particularly from the new US administration. President Donald Trump seems bent on alienating the developing world, with a raft of orders that include cutting aid and pulling out of the World Health Organization, thus reversing the immense gains from globalization that had helped underdeveloped countries kick off efforts to narrow the gap with the developed world.



The Global South, particularly regions such as Africa, faces significant challenges due to Western "technological decoupling", which refers to the separation of technological ecosystems between the West and other regions, particularly China. This decoupling can lead to reduced access to technology, investment and markets, hindering development. However, there are several strategies that the Global South can adopt to mitigate these negative impacts.

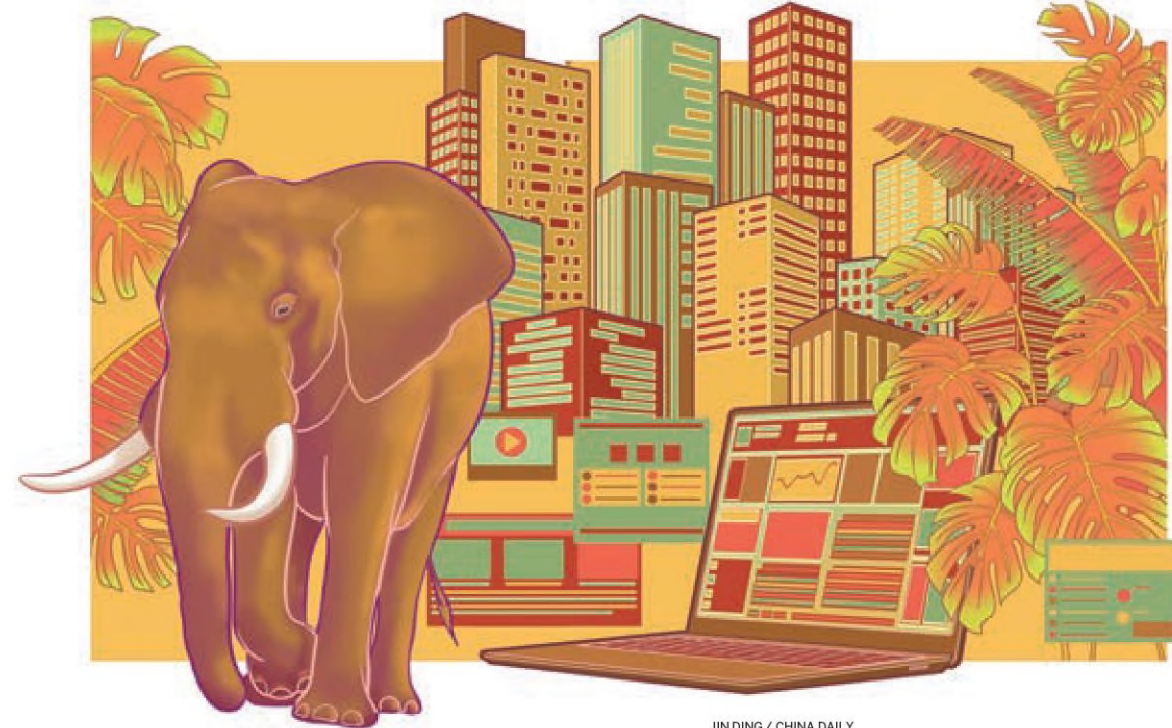
Among these is diversification of partnerships. Global South countries must diversify their technological partnerships beyond the West, using the same principles that China has used to become a global leader in modernization and technology. They must also engage other emerging economies and reduce dependency on any single source of technology and investment.

Global South countries must start increasing investment in local

innovation, which encourages domestic startups and tech companies to build a self-sustaining ecosystem. Governments can provide funding, training and resources to nurture homegrown talent and innovation. This can also be aided by enabling environments that stimulate growth in the desired sectors.

There is need for firm regional cooperation to create regional technology hubs that share resources and develop joint initiatives that enhance their collective technological capabilities. It is equally important to establish clear and supportive policy frameworks that encourage foreign investment while protecting local interests. This will help attract diverse technological partners and foster a conducive environment for innovation.

China has already been investing in digital infrastructure in Africa in areas that include telecommunications, with companies such as Huawei and ZTE playing a crucial role in expanding telecommunications networks in Africa. Countries must therefore improve connectivity and facilitate access to information, e-commerce, and digital services, fostering innovation. Projects such as the smart city initiative in Kenya, which aims to integrate technology into urban planning, and improving efficiency and quality of life must be emulated and replicated elsewhere. Such initiatives can create new economic opportunities in sectors such as construction, technology and services. China has also invested in training programs for African youth in digital skills, which can enhance the local workforce's capabilities and drive innovation



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

in various sectors.

In this light, China-Africa partnerships can play a pivotal role in bridging the digital divide and accelerating industrial development. Investments in broadband and mobile networks can enhance access to digital services, enabling more people to participate in the digital economy.

Financing technology is expensive but establishing joint ventures between Chinese and African companies can lead to the development of new products and services tailored to the African market, creating jobs and stimulating economic growth. These collaborations can also facilitate technology transfer, allowing African countries to adopt and adapt technologies that suit their local contexts, thus fostering industrial growth.

However, success models outside the Western narrative and technology standards come at a cost. We have witnessed this happening recently with the demonization of DeepSeek, a Chinese success story. The artificial intelli-

gence-driven startup focusing on data analysis has garnered global attention for its innovative solutions but has faced scrutiny and skepticism in the US, where such success stories are tagged as threats to US jobs and security, reflecting a broader trend of viewing foreign technological advancements with suspicion.

The US government has consistently targeted Huawei, a Chinese tech giant, portraying it as a security threat despite its significant contributions to global telecommunications, including in Africa. This has created a narrative that demonizes successful foreign companies, impacting their operations and partnerships.

Similarly, the Belt and Road Initiative has been criticized in the US as a means for China to exert influence over developing countries. However, many African nations have benefited from the infrastructure investments made under this initiative.

In the context of "America First" policies and, lately, Trumpism, suc-

cessful initiatives, particularly those involving foreign partnerships, have often been demonized. While the Global South faces challenges from Western technological decoupling, strategic partnerships, particularly with China, and South-South collaboration are imperative for innovation and economic growth. It allows countries to develop modernization strategies that are culturally relevant and aligned with their unique social, economic and political contexts. By collaborating, they can share best practices, lessons learned, and innovative solutions that have been effective in similar contexts, rather than relying on Western solutions that may not be applicable.

In uniting, South-South countries should set their goals on reducing their dependency on Western nations and institutions. This translates into either greater economic autonomy or the ability to negotiate better terms in trade and investment, fostering a more equitable global economic system. All this cannot be done without strength-

ening political ties and solidarity, enabling them to present a united front in international forums. In the course of achieving the sustainable development goals for example, these countries can pool resources, share knowledge, and implement strategies that are tailored to their specific challenges, thus enhancing their chances of success.

By collaboration of such kind, South-South countries can build resilience against global economic shocks, climate change and other external pressures. Focusing on modernization on their own terms empowers South-South countries to take control of their development narratives. This agency is crucial for fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility toward their development paths.

The author is managing editor of Africa News 24. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

BUSINESS

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Localities given more powers to stabilize realty

By WANG KEJU
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China's policymakers have vowed to adopt a city-specific approach for fine-tuning or slashing restrictive measures in home purchases, and stem the downturn as well as restore stability in the real estate market.

Officials and experts said this will better anchor market confidence and facilitate a broader economic recovery.

Since housing is an important source of asset-based income for Chinese residents, a recovery of the property market can translate into greater consumer confidence and capacity to spend, providing a much-needed boost to invigorate domestic demand, they added.

The Government Work Report, released during the annual meeting of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, made it clear that localities are allowed to make context-based policy adjustments aimed at reducing restrictive measures in the property sector, so as to tap into potential demand for first homes and better housing.

"A mortgage rate cut could be a critical component of the government's broader strategy to arrest the ongoing downturn in the real estate market and guide it toward a sustainable recovery," said Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International.

"Given the current high level of real mortgage interest rates after accounting for inflation factors, there is still ample scope for a significant downward adjustment in mortgage rates, whether for new loans or existing ones, over the course of this year," Wang said.

It was also stressed in the report that the government will direct efforts to leverage existing land resources, facilitate the purchase of commodity housing stock and expand the scope of the relending facility for government-subsidized housing.

The current substantial land inventory and the long time taken to clear the housing backlog are hindering the real estate market's ability to stabilize and rebound, said Yan Yuejin, deputy head of the Shanghai-based E-House China R&D Institute.

The government has announced plans to earmark 4.4 trillion yuan (\$606.38 billion) in local government special-purpose bonds this

year, a 500 billion yuan increase from 2024. It will channel these financial resources toward the acquisition of land parcels, the purchase of existing commercial housing inventory and infrastructure projects, among others.

"By directly addressing the inventory overhang through acquisitions, the authorities are removing a key source of downward pressure on home prices, which in turn will help to stabilize market expectations and pave the way for a broader recovery in the real estate sector," Yan said.

Moreover, policymakers will leverage the real estate financing coordination mechanisms to ensure timely delivery of housing projects and effectively prevent debt defaults by real estate companies, according to the report.

The government has deployed over 6 trillion yuan in loans under these mechanisms to support the delivery of more than 15 million units of housing that are either already completed or currently under construction, said Li Yunze, head of the National Financial Regulatory Administration, on Wednesday.

This year, the administration will further expand the pool of qualified projects that can secure loans under the mechanisms, helping to alleviate the liquidity challenges faced by developers and ensure timely delivery of pre-sold homes to buyers, Li added.

"The real estate sector is the most significant component of residents' asset portfolios in China. Stabilizing the housing market would allow for the release of the wealth effect, which in turn could provide a much-needed boost to consumer spending," Chen Changsheng, deputy director of the Research Office of the State Council, said at a news conference on Wednesday.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a key factor behind sluggish consumer spending has been the slowdown in income growth. Among the main sources of household income, property-related income has seen the sharpest decline, said Shen Janguang, chief economist at Chinese e-commerce platform JD.

These efforts are not only about shoring up the property sector itself, but also have broader implications for household wealth and consumer spending, which are crucial to the country's economic recovery, Shen added.



Employees work on the production line of a foreign-funded electronics company in Rongcheng, Shandong province. LI XINJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Foreign firms sanguine on Chinese market

Economic vitality, growing optimized biz climate driving upbeat sentiment

By ZHONG NAN
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Foreign companies remain steadfast in expanding their presence in the Chinese market, driven by the country's economic vitality and an increasingly optimized business environment that bolsters their confidence, business executives said on Wednesday.

Despite rising geopolitical tensions and the surge of protectionism, they noted that China's efficient industrial and supply chains, coupled with its evolving innovation ecosystem, will provide a solid foundation for multinational corporations to invest and grow in the years ahead.

China will better open internet-related, cultural and other sectors in a well-regulated way and expand trials to open sectors such as telecommunications, medical services and education, according to a government work report submitted on Wednesday to the national legislature for deliberation.

Premier Li Qiang, who delivered the report at the opening meeting of the third session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing, pledged that the country will encourage foreign investors to increase their reinvestment in China and support them in collaborating with upstream and downstream enterprises in industrial chains.

China will ensure national treat-

ment for foreign-funded enterprises in fields such as access to production factors, license applications, standards setting and government procurement, said Li.

Jens Eskelund, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, said the chamber's members believe that full implementation of recent measures aimed at optimizing the business environment is still the best way to boost confidence in the Chinese market.

The two sessions this year therefore represent an opportunity for China's leadership to communicate clear expectations to local authorities in the form of implementation timelines for the 2025 Action Plan for Stabilizing Foreign Investment, said Eskelund.

China issued the action plan in February, aiming to stabilize foreign investment this year. As part of the plan, the country will support pilot regions in implementing opening-up policies related to areas such as telecommunications, biotechnology and foreign-owned hospitals.

Sanguine on the Chinese market, Gong Anming, executive vice-president of Elekta, a Swedish medical equipment producer, said China's transforming business environment has reinforced foreign companies' confidence in making long-term investments in China.

With research and manufacturing facilities in several Chinese cities,

including Beijing and Shanghai, Gong — who is also Elekta's president for China unit — said his company will strengthen support for localized production, innovation and the training of radiotherapy professionals to build a robust radiotherapy ecosystem.

"While creating tailored solutions for Chinese patients and hospitals, we are also proactively sharing innovations originating from China globally," he added.

Striving to gain a bigger foothold in China, German industrial and consumer goods group Henkel announced on Tuesday that it has completed its acquisition of Suzhou Boke Biotechnology Co Ltd, a manufacturer of personal care products based in Suzhou, Jiangsu province.

Frank Labahn, head of production operations and supply chain at Henkel Consumer Brands Asia, said the acquisition is a strategic move to reinforce the company's commitment to China and further strengthen its supply chain capabilities.

"China is a stronghold in our manufacturing footprint, and this investment enables us to enhance local production," said Labahn.

This move will drive the continued growth of Henkel's consumer goods business in China, positioning the group to respond to shifting market demand with greater agility and efficiency, he added.

China attracted 97.59 billion yuan (\$13.44 billion) in foreign direct investment in January, marking a 275 percent increase from the previous month, said the Ministry of Commerce.

China confident of hitting growth rate

By ZHU WENQIAN
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China's economic growth target of around 5 percent this year is in line with the country's situation and the laws of economic development, and China is fully confident of achieving this target, said the group that drafted this year's Government Work Report on Wednesday.

While achieving this goal will not be an easy task and requires very hard work, the growth target is achievable, said Shen Danyang, head of the group that drafted the report and director of the Research Office of the State Council, who elaborated on the key points of the document after its release.

"The economic growth target of around 5 percent this year has been set through repeated research and demonstration. The setting of goals takes into account both domestic and international situations and various other factors," Shen said at a news conference in Beijing.

This goal may be higher than the predictions of some foreign institutions, though it should be noted that any economic forecast is a deduction under assumed conditions, and

the forecast results often change with environmental conditions, macroeconomic policies and the measures of reform, Shen added.

From China's development progress and the experiences of other countries, whether an economic growth target can be achieved depends on the development trend, capabilities and supporting policies. Taking into account these factors, China is confident of achieving this year's growth target, Shen said.

Quan Heng, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress and Party secretary of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, said the growth target is expected to enhance social confidence and promote long-term economic growth in China, and it meets the intrinsic requirements of high-quality development of the country.

The trend of sustained economic recovery and growth in China is still being consolidated. Despite facing some international uncertainties, since the introduction of a package of incremental policies in September, the economy has been boosted effectively.

In 2024, China's GDP surpassed 130 trillion yuan (\$17.9 trillion) for

the first time, growing 5 percent year-on-year. The growth rate in the second, third and fourth quarters of last year was 4.7 percent, 4.6 percent and 5.4 percent, respectively, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed.

In the past few years, emerging industries and new driving forces of the economy have developed rapidly, and a number of industries, such as new energy vehicles, photovoltaic sector, and shipbuilding, have reached a leading level globally. Besides, the explosive growth of the sectors related to artificial intelligence is driving China's economic growth with a strong new engine, Shen said.

Some previous economic downturn factors such as the real estate sector are also showing positive changes, and this year's report mentioned stabilizing the real estate and stock markets for the first time, Shen said.

He noted that the package of incremental policies is continuing to play a positive role. Combined with more proactive macroeconomic policies planned this year, it is bound to provide strong policy support for economic growth.

Whetting buying sentiment prioritized

By LIU YUKUN
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A raft of policies to boost consumption is in the pipeline, aiming to propel domestic demand to the forefront of economic expansion, particularly benefiting sectors like household appliances, electronics as well as intelligent and low-carbon equipment, said experts on Wednesday.

The remarks were made following the delivery of the Government Work Report during the ongoing two sessions, which underscored the imperative to invigorate consumption, optimize investment efficacy and comprehensively broaden domestic demand.

The report said that ultra-long term special treasury bonds totaling 300 billion yuan (\$41.3 billion) will be issued to support consumer goods trade-in programs, which involve replacing outdated consumer goods with newer, greener alternatives.

Concurrently, there will be a push to incentivize increased private capital engagement in significant infrastructure ventures, social welfare enhancements and other domains to foster a more conducive environment for private capital growth.

Shen Danyang, head of the group that drafted the report and director of the Research Office of the State Council, elaborated on the key points of the document after its release.

"The prevailing contradiction in the current economic landscape stems from insufficient overall demand, while external environment shifts may introduce novel challenges to external demand. Redirecting our focus toward bolstering domestic demand to elevate consumption is paramount," Shen said.

He said plans are underway to implement a specialized action agenda to stimulate consumption, with relevant departments currently formulating the blueprint. Additionally, there will be intensified service sector investments, government-led initiatives to propel private investment and active encouragement of investment from the private sector.

"I visited 218 companies last year and the biggest challenge facing entrepreneurs was where to find markets," said Tang Dongsheng, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

"Last year's policy greatly boosted demand in sectors such as home appliances. This year, the policy will further expand its scope, covering more electronic products, consumption of smart devices, and intelligent and low-carbon equipment. It will also to some extent drive the development of the circular economy, such as the growth of used-goods trading platforms like Xianyu," he said.

Over the past year, the volume of used good trading orders on the Xianyu platform increased by nearly 50 percent year-on-year, as some consumers purchased new products at subsidized prices, and then resold used ones on Xianyu at prices higher than used items' buyback price.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, in 2024, more than 36 million consumers purchased over 56 million household appliances under the trade-in policy, driving sales of 240 billion yuan.

Zhang Tianren, chairman of battery maker Tianneng Group, and also a deputy to the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, highlighted the report's propositions for enhancing policies related to taxation for renewed resources, targeting industry pain points to further invigorate the circular economy's market vitality.



Potential homebuyers look at a property model in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Briefly

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 25 pips to 7.1714 against the US dollar on Wednesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

Chinese mainland shares close higher

Chinese mainland stocks closed higher on Wednesday, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index up 0.53 percent to 3341.96 points. The Shenzhen Component Index closed 0.28 percent higher at 10709.46 points. The combined turnover of these two indexes stood at about 1.49 trillion yuan (\$207.77 billion), up from 1.48 trillion yuan the previous trading day. The ChiNext Index, tracking China's Nasdaq-style board of growth enterprises, gained 0.01 percent to close at 2190.36 points.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

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.

Global firms foresee fairer biz environment



Ma Jun
Senior vice-president of Volvo Group, and president of Volvo (China) Investment Co Ltd



Yu Yongjian
TotalEnergies China country chair



Ian Shih
President of Rockwell Automation China



Hideki Ozawa
Executive vice-president of Canon, and president & CEO of Canon China

Q1 What are your expectations for the ongoing two sessions? Do you expect any specific policy measures for further deepening reforms and expanding high-standard opening-up? What more should China do to create a more enabling business environment for foreign investors?

MA: The recently released 2025 Action Plan for Stabilizing Foreign Investment is a strong signal of China's firm commitment to high-standard opening-up. We're eager to see the detailed supporting measures and timelines that will facilitate the full implementation of the plan. The action plan requires the full abolition of foreign investment access restrictions in the manufacturing sector. In terms of personnel exchanges, we also seek more relaxed policies for foreign talent in China, such as longer and more convenient work visas and residence permits, and a streamlined talent introduction process to help MNCs attract top global talent. Sweden was the first Western country to establish diplomatic ties with China. We propose that China grants a unilateral visa-free policy for Sweden, a move that would significantly boost business confidence and catalyze deeper economic cooperation between the two nations. We expect a fair and competitive business environment secured by institutional guarantees. It would further boost MNCs' confidence in, and commitment to, China.

YU: TotalEnergies' ambition and strategy align perfectly with China's needs, creating a solid foundation for mutual success. Over the years, we have contributed significantly to China's energy transition by supplying LNG, replacing coal, investing in renewable energy, developing CCUS technologies and fostering extensive international partnerships with Chinese companies. Looking ahead, we would like to see more open policies and a better environment for foreign investment to better support our multienergy strategy in China and international energy cooperation. We welcome clear policy signals to deepen cooperation in clean energy sectors such as renewable energy and biomass energy. We firmly believe that China has all the necessary political, economic and industrial resources to drive the energy sector forward and lead the world in a successful energy transition.

SHIH: Rockwell Automation anticipates that the two sessions will bring forward significant measures to strengthen reforms and broaden high-standard opening-up. Specifically, we would appreciate updates that will further encourage foreign companies in the fields of smart manufacturing, sustainability and industrial upgrading. China's initiatives to foster a more enabling business environment would support Rockwell's long-term growth in the market. We also see growing opportunities to collaborate with local partners across various fields to address the industrial and urban challenges together.

OZAWA: We look forward to the two sessions emphasizing policies that optimize the business environment, simplify market entry for foreign-invested enterprises, strengthen intellectual property protection and promote cooperation in the digital economy. These measures are crucial for creating a dynamic and inclusive business environment with Chinese characteristics. Canon expresses confidence in China's continuous pursuit of high-standard opening-up and economic reforms. The recently released 2025 Action Plan for Stabilizing Foreign Investment is encouraging. Canon looks forward to the implementation of this plan, which will provide foreign-invested enterprises with more diversified business development opportunities. We welcome China's efforts to promote equal treatment of foreign-invested and domestic enterprises. This will boost investor confidence and create more opportunities for cooperation.

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?

MA: At Volvo Group, we aim to drive prosperity through sustainable transport and infrastructure solutions. The business transformation we are experiencing in both transportation and infrastructure sectors is perfectly aligned with China's top agenda for new quality productive forces, as both emphasize innovation-driven and green development. We are committed to leading the industrial transition toward electrification, and we are doing this with an international setup, with China being an important part of our strategy. Through our R&D center in Jinan and production base in Shanghai, Volvo CE has launched a range of electrified equipment, which helped expand our new energy product lineup in both Chinese and international markets. Volvo Group is also actively contributing to China's circular economy goals. In 2023, soon after Premier Li Qiang's visit to our remanufacturing center in Shanghai, we successfully completed China's first import order for remanufactured engines. This year, we will take a step further and initiate a pilot program for bonded remanufacturing operations in China. This initiative seeks to enhance our role in the circular economy, underscoring our commitment to innovative and environmentally responsible business practices.

YU: To support the development of new quality productive forces, TotalEnergies is investing in renewable energies in China, including wind and solar power, as well as contributing to the development of energy storage and high-quality rubber products. Additionally, TotalEnergies is focused on providing low-carbon products to support China's high-quality development, particularly in the aviation sector. For example, in partnership with Sinopec, we are developing a sustainable aviation fuel production unit in China.

SHIH: Thanks to China's dedication to developing "new quality productive forces", Rockwell has the opportunity to engage in many key areas, including technology innovation and smart manufacturing. To further support China's development in these fields, Rockwell leverages our global network and over a century of expertise in smart manufacturing to actively promote the industrial-scale application of technological innovations. Rockwell is dedicated to helping the cultivation of China's "new quality productive forces" through energy transition, life sciences, high-end equipment, digital and AI innovations, and explorations in other fields. Foreign enterprises have become a vital part of China's technological innovation. Rockwell firmly believes that the open environment and policy support in the Chinese market will continue to enable us to unlock the full potential of technology and smart manufacturing, working closer with our local partners.

OZAWA: Canon contributes to the cultivation of "new quality productive forces" in China by developing and providing innovative products, solutions and services that meet the needs of the Chinese market. Particularly in areas where Canon excels, such as imaging, printing, healthcare and semiconductor-related industrial equipment, we integrate advanced technologies like AI, big data and cloud computing to help drive the digital transformation and upgrading of related industries in China. At the same time, by expanding localized R&D and production capabilities, extending partnerships with upstream and downstream companies and strengthening green and low-carbon development, we aim to better adapt to the rapidly changing demands of the Chinese market. We are committed to continuously contributing to China's high-quality development through these efforts.

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?

MA: AI's transformative power aligns perfectly with Volvo Group's mission — to drive prosperity through transport and infrastructure solutions and create a better world for us and future generations. At Volvo Group, we see great potential in AI and fully embrace new technologies. We have now deployed AI across our operations, using it to optimize costs, enhance efficiency and expand markets, driving innovation that adds real business value. At the same time, we prioritize responsible AI governance to ensure its secure, scalable and ethical deployment. We see great potential in China's AI growth. With its vast market and diverse application scenarios, China provides a unique space for AI innovation. I look forward to seeing more creative AI solutions in the transport and infrastructure sectors, to help further reduce logistics costs and support sustainable development in China and globally.

YU: TotalEnergies has for several years leveraged AI in our exploration and production activities to predict oilfield output and optimize production processes. As the company diversifies its business, we are also applying AI to explore new areas. Additionally, we utilize digital simulation tools to determine the best layout for wind turbines, minimizing production losses and equipment wear. In 2020, we established a digital factory bringing together 300 AI and digital technology experts to develop digital solutions and offer new energy management services to our customers. China has made remarkable advancements in AI with applications like DeepSeek gaining global attention. We look forward to deepening our collaboration with Chinese partners in the field of digital technologies.

SHIH: AI is one of the key drivers of productivity. According to Rockwell's 9th annual State of Smart Manufacturing report, by 2024, 83 percent of manufacturers planned to use generative AI in their operations. In the manufacturing sector, AI can detect defects and ensure product quality in a more efficient, accurate and proactive way. China's commitment to innovation-driven growth and a supportive business environment has further enabled Rockwell to integrate AI into our overall value chain from design, technology and patent, supply chain, and manufacturing to operation, AI and data mining, marketing and services. For example, through initiatives like the co-innovation center we established with Shanghai Caohejing Hi-Tech Park, Rockwell is using AI and other emerging technologies to drive innovation and industrial upgrading in China.

OZAWA: AI technology has brought significant business opportunities to Canon, from cameras and printers to medical equipment. In recent years our new products have effectively integrated AI technology, significantly improving efficiency and enhancing user experience. Looking ahead, we see AI as a key driver for product line innovation. AI will continue to play a crucial role in making products smarter, more efficient and better at improving the user experience. Meanwhile, we are deeply exploring how AI can be applied to our own internal digital transformation, streamlining workflows, and boosting productivity. With strong emphasis on R&D and supportive government policies, China is expected to maintain its leading position in cutting-edge technologies in the coming years. This not only drives domestic innovation, but also contributes to the global technological landscape, making it more dynamic and competitive.

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?

MA: We believe logistics development will propel China's consumption-driven economy into high gear. Volvo Group's energy-efficient heavy-duty truck portfolio and digital logistics solutions remain key enablers of this industrial revolution. Last year, government policies accelerated local bond issuance and optimized funding allocation, which in turn boosted infrastructure investment significantly and fueled economic growth. Volvo Group will continue to drive industry transformation through electrification, automation and connectivity, delivering competitive products and integrated solutions to advance high-quality infrastructure development in the country.

YU: China is the world's second-largest consumer market, with immense domestic demand and consumption potential. TotalEnergies aims to leverage this opportunity to supply China with more and cleaner energy products, contributing to the country's green consumption upgrade. In the solar sector, we will develop distributed photovoltaic projects to provide industrial and commercial customers with self-sufficient clean energy at their sites. In the EV sector, we are making substantial investments in building fast-charging infrastructure to further promote the adoption of electric vehicles. Additionally, we are providing cleaner fuels for aviation and maritime sectors in China to reduce carbon emissions and support the green transformation of transportation and logistics. As a global leading LNG supplier, we aim to continue supplying LNG to China through our global resource pool, ensuring energy security and enhancing energy efficiency.

SHIH: Rockwell has noticed significant potential in China's shift toward a consumption-led economic growth model. The Chinese government's focus on boosting domestic consumption through policies such as enhancing the supply side will create new market opportunities. Rockwell aims to drive supply by generating new demand, and we are eager to create new demand through innovations and cross-border collaboration with our partners across the entire industry chain. Rockwell is committed to leveraging our capabilities to address both industrial and social challenges. For example, Rockwell is grafting on the technology that provides at least 50 percent more parking space than traditional vertical parking solutions, which could help drive parking construction and potentially boost vehicle consumption. Our innovative solutions can play a crucial role in helping Chinese manufacturers upgrade their capabilities, better meet market demand and generate a consumption-driven momentum for the economy.

OZAWA: We are confident in China's initiatives to boost domestic consumption, and Canon is eager to participate actively. Government subsidies for consumer electronics and support for the camera market have created new opportunities for the imaging industry, driving Canon's imaging product sales to new heights. We are confident that, with the support of national consumption promotion policies, we can return to the golden era of the camera market. The expansion of the national purchase subsidy program to digital products is welcome news. We look forward to seeing categories such as digital cameras and printers receive subsidy support nationwide. China's focus on consumption-led growth serves as a powerful driver of economic stability and business expansion. We believe these efforts will help improve Canon's profitability this year and contribute to overall economic recovery.

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? Will you increase investment in China in the coming years? How will you further expand your footprint in China?

MA: Volvo Group has been at the forefront of transforming transportation and infrastructure to be more sustainable, safe and efficient, not only in Europe but also around the world. With over 30 years in the Chinese mainland, we've built a unique innovation ecosystem, for instance, for our Volvo Construction Equipment business that blends global expertise with local insights. Our Jinan R&D center is a great example, where we mix global know-how with the needs of the local market to deliver tailored solutions for our diverse clients. Moving forward, Volvo Group will continue to harness our strengths to align global resources with China's innovation and productivity advantages to offer more products and services that are safer, cleaner and more efficient, to support our client's success and the sustainable development of the industry.

YU: TotalEnergies' strategy focuses on two pillars: oil and gas and integrated power, while advancing a multienergy approach. This aligns perfectly with China's path and offers us tremendous growth opportunities across our portfolio. It's worth noting that just recently we underwent an organizational restructuring in China. One of the main objectives of this reorganization was to strengthen our partnerships with local partners and to better leverage China's globally leading supply chain. All these measures demonstrate our confidence and long-term commitment to China. In the coming years, we will redouble our efforts in partnerships, technology co-development and localized solutions to strengthen our position as China's leading energy transition partner.

SHIH: China's commitment to pursuing high-quality development and modernization offers Rockwell great anticipation for our future growth in the local market. The positive signal of further opening-up gives us more confidence in our vision to continue empowering the local market and shaping the future with our local partners. Looking ahead, Rockwell will deepen our concentration on smart industrial parks to enhance the quality and efficiency of research, development, and production of innovations, aligning closely with China's high-quality development process. We will also continue to promote our sustainable ecosystem to accelerate the green transformation of the manufacturing industry. Rockwell also believes that China's open business environment will contribute to more collaboration opportunities. We look forward to deepening our collaboration with local partners to explore opportunities worldwide and support China's high-quality development.

OZAWA: We are delighted to see the Chinese government's ongoing efforts in promoting high-quality development and modernization, which have brought extensive development opportunities for Canon. Canon is well-positioned to play a significant role in China's industrial upgrade. Going forward, Canon will continue to increase its investment in China, provided that Canon China will increase our business year by year. This includes not only expanding R&D capabilities to better meet the innovative demands of the Chinese market, but also strengthening cooperation with local enterprises to jointly promote technological advancements and industrial upgrades, achieving mutual benefits and win-win outcomes.

CULTURE

A tray lifts Jing'an Monastery, a single hand holds the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, and chopsticks delicately turn the pages of the novel *Fan Hua* (Blossoms) — these whimsical images come from the imagination of artist Jin Yucheng, who brings his hometown of Shanghai to life through a distinctive artistic vision.

Jin is better known as a celebrated writer, particularly for the novel that won him the Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2015.

While *Fan Hua* gained widespread recognition over the past decade, fueled by literary accolades and a TV adaptation by famed director Wong Kar-wai, Jin has devoted much of his time to painting.

Much like his literary works, Jin's paintings are marked by his unique style — each piece tells a story that blends realism with a touch of absurdity — a fantastical narrative brought to life with every brushstroke.

Jin's works were on display at the Rosewood Beijing, Rosewood Guangzhou, and Rosewood Sanya hotels as part of the exhibition *Infinite Blossoms*, celebrating Chinese New Year. The exhibitions ran through the end of February, with a show expected to be held at the Rosewood Hong Kong scheduled to launch in April.

"We are honored to present a kaleidoscope-like view through Jin's widely praised *Fan Hua* and vibrant paintings, combining realism and fiction to offer a panoramic view," says Joanna Gunn, chief brand officer of Rosewood Hotel Group.

"This exhibition invites visitors to delve into a world of blossoms, where they can explore the city's historical memories, contemporary realities, and future possibilities."

Starting point

Born in 1952 in Shanghai, Jin spent his childhood in his grandfather's villa on South Shaanxi Road. At 17, he moved to Heilongjiang province to work on a farm. Upon returning to Shanghai, he was employed as a machinist in a watch factory and began writing in his spare time. In 1988, he became an editor at Shanghai Literature, a position he held until his recent retirement.

Fan Hua was published in 2012.

Reflecting on why he wrote the novel, Jin recalls his frustration upon reading online gossip that targeted individuals by name. Determined to focus on the lives of ordinary, nameless people, he set out to capture their stories.

In the novel, Jin paints a rich portrait of Shanghai, drawing on his observations and experiences to depict the city's daily life — details also featured in his artwork. For Jin, painting and writing serve a similar purpose: to preserve the lives of ordinary people.

Jin's foray into painting began with *Fan Hua*. When the novel was serialized in *Harvest* magazine, he created four maps as illustrations. Later, as it was being prepared for stand-alone publication, the editor suggested he add more illustrations to clarify key elements like buildings, scenes and clothing.

"That casual suggestion struck me," Jin recalls. "I realized that the novel could be enhanced with visuals."

He adds: "Only through visuals can we capture aspects that words cannot reach. The structure of old lane houses — their upstairs and downstairs — only a drawing can make it instantly clear."

The illustrations in the novel received positive feedback from readers, boosting Jin's confidence and motivating him to continue painting. "As artist Chen Danqing said, 'When kids in the alley do somersaults and are cheered on, they



Above: Artist Jin Yucheng is also a celebrated writer, best known for the novel *Fan Hua* that won him the Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2015. Right: Rosewood Hotel's gift box with Jin's paintings on it.

Multifaceted works show writer-painter's novel ideas

With no formal training, artist captures Shanghai lives in his stories and illustrations, blending realism with a bit of absurdity, **Li Yingxue** reports.



Jin's works on display at Rosewood Sanya Hotel. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

keep going'. The power of encouragement is crucial," Jin explains.

Jin's foundation in painting comes from mechanical drafting. In the 1970s, while staying at a farm dormitory in Heilongjiang, he found a worn architectural pen-drawing tutorial, which became his key reference.

At the watch factory in Shanghai, he spent six months learning mechanical drafting, laying the groundwork for his art.

With no formal art training, Jin's works break from convention, developing a unique style that mirrors the intricate, meaningful structure of his novels.



Clockwise from left: Jin Yucheng's artwork: *Blossom Shanghai*, *An European Building*, and *Red*, featuring the horse motif he loves.

mindset," he says.

Regarding the narrative and metaphorical elements that permeate his

"I don't know how to paint. That gives me an advantage because I don't have the typical artistic

work, Jin acknowledges that his lack of formal training in lines, light and color often leads him to create

stories or add complexity to the details. He aims to incorporate elements that capture attention and shift focus away from questions of technical training or color accuracy.

"I don't try to make my paintings look realistic. I want to express my ideas or blend them. It's like playing," he adds.

Jin does not adhere to a strictly realistic approach to painting. For instance, in his maps, he frequently mixes up the directions of north and south. Unlike standard maps, which require precision and scale, his maps allow for roads that are wider or longer than reality, embracing a more fluid interpretation of space.

Drafting dreams

Jin's approach to painting is rooted in storytelling. Without a clear narrative behind the work, he loses interest in creating it.

"If I haven't figured it out, I won't paint it. There needs to be something that excites me or a fictional story to inspire the work," he says.

His painting *An European Building* tells the story of a building he passed daily during middle school. It always intrigued him, but he struggled to find a way to depict it. The breakthrough came when he imagined a hand lifting the building, sparking his creative process.

He envisioned the building as a box, with a woman's lips and chin peeking out from underneath. With this concept, the painting was complete.

"People often wonder whether the hand is lifting the building or setting it down. This ambiguity is one of the hallmarks of my style," Jin says.

The image of the horse appears frequently in Jin's artwork, a reflection of his earlier experiences in rural Heilongjiang. "Back then, I spent every day caring for these animals and observing their emotions: joy, anger and sorrow," he recalls.

"The horse has played a pivotal role in advancing history, as there's a saying that humanity entered the civilized world with the help of horses. It's an especially endearing symbol. In Chinese culture, we also have many positive expressions related to horses."

Artist Zhang Enli considers Jin a visual artist at heart. "Looking at his paintings takes me back to my school days, evoking memories of reading a good novel as a child. His work brings forth a unique visual language, something that has faded from contemporary culture but carries a distinct flavor," Zhang says.

Jin reflects on his childhood education, comparing it to the "little cat catching fish" concept, where the focus is solely on fishing, with no room for distractions like picking flowers or chasing butterflies.

He now realizes this mindset can limit his potential. "I can write and paint," he says. "I can pick flowers, chase butterflies, and try new things. Life has no fixed path. Everyone can switch careers as long as they're interested."

"When I write novels, I feel I am full of holes, but when I paint, I feel like I'm still growing, like a child just starting to learn. It's an incredibly enjoyable process for me," he adds.

"Painting presents so many unknowns. For example, the colors I encounter every day, I re-create them through trial and error. It's like meeting a new version of myself and I'm eager to embrace this challenge."

Contact the writer at liyixue@chinadaily.com.cn

By DENG ZHANGYU and FANG AIQING

Architect Liu Jiakun was awarded the 2025 Pritzker Architecture Prize on Tuesday, making him the second winner from China to earn the highest honor in the field of architecture after Wang Shu in 2012.

Living in Chengdu, the capital of southwestern China's Sichuan province, Liu's career spans four decades and over 30 projects. He established Jiakun Architects in 1999 and is devoted to creating an expansive portfolio ranging from small, beautiful museums and monuments and vast commercial buildings to master plans for cities.

"The purpose of architecture is to create a beautiful, just and dignified living environment. People's real lives, happiness and dignity are what we strive for," says Liu.



The 54th Pritzker Architecture Prize winner Liu Jiakun stays in hometown. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The prize's jury statement says that "intertwining seeming antipodes such as utopia versus everyday existence, history versus modernity, and collectivism versus individuality, Liu offers affirming architecture that cel-

brates the lives of ordinary citizens."

Wang, the 2012 Pritzker recipient, tells China Daily that Liu's winning is encouraging: "His works are very local, yet modern, directly addressing the challenges facing the transformation of contemporary Chinese cities."

Wang says both he and Liu pursue contemporary architecture rooted in tradition. Many architects around the world attempt to do the same, yet their style has never become mainstream. "I believe Liu's winning holds great significance and will resonate with those architects," he adds.

Liu's focus on ordinary people is reflected in his largest project West Village, a five-story urban complex completed in 2015 in Chengdu. The complex includes a football field, a

perimeter of paths for cyclists and pedestrians, and a market. The block has become a popular public space and a destination for the city's residents to spend leisure time.

Hearing the news that Liu won the Pritzker Prize, many netizens who have visited the West Village and the museums he designed expressed that his architecture embodies a precious sense of relaxation, much like the vibrant city of Chengdu itself, which is known for its giant pandas, hotpot and leisurely pace.

Liu was born in Chengdu in 1956 and has lived and worked in Sichuan ever since. He consistently refuses to join the crowds working in cities like Beijing and Shanghai, choosing instead to remain rooted in Chengdu.

After graduating with Bachelor of Engineering in architecture in 1982 from the then Institute of Architecture and Engineering in Chongqing (now Chongqing University), he gave up architecture and began writing novels. A decade later, he attended a friend's architectural exhibition and decided to resume his old passion and continue practicing design.

Liu's friends often joke that he is the best architect among novelists and the best novelist among architects. This poetic narrative style has also been integrated into his designs, such as the Luyeyuan Stone Sculpture Art Museum in Chengdu, which balances water and ancient stones to reflect the natural landscape.

Liu was also praised by the jury for

his integration of traditional Chinese philosophy into his works. He thinks that for thousands of years, the concept of traditional Chinese philosophy is not to conquer nature but to adapt to and coexist with it.

Alejandro Aravena, chair of the jury and 2016 Pritzker laureate from Chile, says: "In a world that tends to create endless dull peripheries, he has found a way to build places that are a building, infrastructure, landscape and public space at the same time. His work may offer impactful clues on how to confront the challenges of urbanization in an era of rapidly growing cities."

As the 54th laureate of the Pritzker prize, Liu will be honored at a celebration in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, later this spring.

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