

Talks resume

New round of negotiations on Gaza ceasefire begins in Doha
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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2025

Ukraine endorses interim truce

More efforts required to find a peaceful solution to conflict despite turning point

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong and MO JINGXI in Beijing

Ukraine's support for a US-proposed temporary ceasefire with Russia marks a significant shift by Kyiv from its stance just one week ago with regard to an eventual diplomatic solution to the three-year-long crisis.

But analysts said that, despite the turning point that emerged on Tuesday at the talks hosted by Saudi Arabia, much more needs to be done to ensure that there is a peaceful solution to the longest conflict in Europe since World War II.

Wang Chenxing, an associate professor at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' School of International Politics and Economics, said that a final solution to the crisis can only be achieved after the core interests of Russia, the United States and Europe are guaranteed.

"Since Russia now has the upper hand on the battlefield, time is on its side in terms of peace negotiations. But the US is eager to withdraw from the crisis, ignoring the feelings of Europeans to some degree," Wang said.

A joint statement after the talks in Jeddah, which were held without European participation, said that Ukraine is ready to accept the US proposal to enact an immediate, interim 30-day ceasefire, which can be extended by the mutual agreement of the parties.

Moreover, Ukraine would receive renewed US security aid and intelligence sharing, and the US would get preliminary approval for access to Ukraine's mineral resources.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Wednesday that it is hoped that all parties involved can find a sustainable and lasting solution for peace that addresses each party's concerns through dialogue and negotiation.

"China has been calling for political settlement through dialogue and negotiation since the first day of the Ukraine crisis, and has been actively working for peace and pushing for talks," Mao said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky quickly thanked US President Donald Trump for the "positive" proposal.

"Ukraine is ready to accept this proposal — we see it as a positive step and are ready to take it," Zelensky said. In Washington, Trump said he was ready to welcome Zelensky back to the White House.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday that it did not rule out con-



Top: Investigators inspect the damage to an apartment building on which a downed Ukrainian drone fell in Sapronovo village, outside Moscow, Russia, on Tuesday. Russia shot down over 300 drones in the biggest Ukrainian attack on its capital, in which three people were killed and 18 injured. AP
Above: Firefighters work to extinguish a blaze on Tuesday following a strike on the outskirts of Odesa, Ukraine. The overnight strike on the port city killed four people and damaged a cargo ship. The country's air force said that Russia had launched 126 drones and one ballistic missile. OLEKSANDR GIMANOV / AFP

tacts with US representatives.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview published on Wednesday that Moscow will avoid compromises that would jeopardize people's lives, reiterating Russia's stance that under no conditions will it accept the presence of NATO troops in Ukraine, should there be a permanent peace settlement.

Nagapushpa Devendra, a West Asia analyst and research scholar at the University of Erfurt in Germany, said that despite the positive diplomatic effort, it may still be unlikely to achieve an immediate ceasefire given the complexities.

Without security assurances, Kyiv

may hesitate to agree to any political settlement, Devendra said, adding that another crucial aspect is that Russia has agreed to engage with the US but its core demands, like Ukraine's neutrality and territorial concessions, remain unchanged.

In a joint statement by Saudi Arabia and Ukraine released on Tuesday, the Saudi side expressed its hope that the "efforts to achieve comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine" will succeed in ending the conflict in line with international law and the United Nations Charter.

Jasim Husain, a Gulf analyst and former member of the Bahraini

parliament, highlighted the importance of the Middle East as a mediator in resolving the Ukraine crisis.

However, the US-Ukraine statement did not include any mention of the explicit security guarantees that Kyiv had been seeking, as Ukraine and the US said they agreed to conclude a deal "as soon as possible" securing US access to Ukraine's mineral wealth, which Trump demanded as compensation for the billions of dollars in US military aid given to Ukraine by his predecessor Joe Biden.

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Trade, not tariffs, causes peace, prosperity

Scottish economist Adam Smith was one of the first to observe that trade brings about peace. In his 1776 magnum opus *The Wealth of Nations*, he wrote: "... commerce and manufactures gradually introduced order and good government, and with them the liberty and security of individuals, who had before lived almost in a continual state of war with their neighbors, and of servile dependency upon their superiors. This, though it has been the least observed, is by far the most important of all their effects."

Some 19th-century philosophers thought similarly. In France, for example, economist Frederic Bastiat famously argued that "where goods do not cross borders, soldiers will". On the other side of the Atlantic, Ralph Waldo Emerson declared: "... trade was the principle of liberty; that trade planted

WORLD WATCH By John Lawrence Graham

America and destroyed feudalism; that it makes peace and keeps peace; and it will abolish slavery."

In the 20th century, Lee Kuan Yew, the first leader of an independent Singapore, Robert B. Zoellick, former president of the World Bank, and even psychologist Steven Pinker agreed that trade causes peace. Indeed, Pinker's conciseness is notable: "... you can't kill someone and trade with him too."

We appreciate that the anti-globalization folks disagree, in some cases violently. However, aside from the philosophers, the causal relationship between trade and peace has been proven empirically by

economists. The most prominent economic evidence is provided by Solomon W. Polachek. He explains in his paper about international relations: "The results show that the fundamental factor in causing bilateral cooperation is trade. Countries seek to protect wealth gained through international trade, therefore trading partners are less combative than nontrading nations."

In that paper, Polachek also reviews the literature in political science, which is also consistent with the trade-causes-peace relationship. Finally, the Institute for Economics & Peace provides the most comprehensive measures of peace within countries and its relationship to economic variables.

Trade brings about peace in three ways.

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Europe's defense push fuels autonomy talks

By SHAO XINYING
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The European Union's recent endorsement of a plan to bolster the bloc's defense capabilities is a major step toward reducing reliance on the United States, observers said. However, experts warned that achieving strategic autonomy remains a daunting task due to stark divisions among member states.

Leaders of the EU backed the ReArm Europe plan introduced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at a summit in Brussels on March 6. The plan aims to beef up military spending.

This push comes as European countries face significant pressure to increase defense spending following the inauguration of US President Donald Trump, who has warned that the continent must look after its own security.

"This plan can be seen as a reaction to the change in the White House," Marian Duris, an international affairs analyst and adviser to a member of the European Parliament, told China Daily.

"I see this plan as a hasty, emotional response from officials who are more interested in confrontation than in cooperation and prosperity," he added.

The plan aims to mobilize some 800 billion euros (\$872 billion) "for a safe and resilient Europe", including 150 billion euros of a loan program to invest in "pan-European capability domains".

"If member states would increase their defense spending by 15 percent of GDP on average, this could create fiscal space of close to 650 billion euros over a period of four

years," Von der Leyen said last week. "But turning funds into defense unity is another matter as there are clear internal divisions, including on whether to buy weapons from the US or Europe and attitude toward Ukraine," Jian Junbo, director of the Center for China-Europe Relations at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, told China Daily.

"Even though meetings are held under the EU framework, the actual use of funds is carried out at the level of individual member states," he added.

Meanwhile, though EU leaders endorsed the plan at the summit, worries remain.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni voiced her concerns over the loans becoming a potential burden, and that the EU plan might overburden the country with debt, reported Decode39, a news website. According to Eunews, Meloni claimed to have fought to rule out the possibility of such resources being forcibly diverted to defense spending.

In another development, a narrow majority in the Dutch parliament on Tuesday urged the government not to join the rearmament plan. "The Netherlands is fundamentally opposed to joint European loans, and defense expenditure must remain a national resource," the parliamentarians said.

Duris, the international affairs analyst, said that there are 27 countries with different economic performances, interests, government "mindsets" and public opinions in terms of security, attitude toward the European Commission, the NATO and the new US administration. Thus, one could not expect the plan to be implemented as it is proposed.

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KALE RISES FROM BITTER HARVEST TO POPULAR, HEALTHY 'SUPERFOOD'

Growers reap profits from improved crops, exports, strong domestic demand

By ZHAO RUIXUE
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Editor's note: In a series of reports titled "Claims to Fame", China Daily looks at how some regions have earned wealth and recognition through specific products to advance economic development.

Twenty years ago, Wang Cuifen took her first bite of kale. The memory of that experience remains vivid to this day.

"It was awful, not just bad, but almost inedible. Bitter, astringent and even a bit salty," she said. "What could foreigners possibly want with such a terrible vegetable?"

Today, the kale she grows tastes different.

"It's sweet, crisp, juicy and has a pleasant aroma," Wang said in early March, while standing in her greenhouse in Gaomi county of Weifang, Shandong province.

The greenhouse was filled with kale, and she casually plucked a few leaves and ate them. "I eat a few leaves every day," she said. At 56, Wang is full of energy. She starts her day at 5 am and works tirelessly in her fields until evening.

See *Kale*, page 2

Train hijack



Medical workers treat an injured passenger on Tuesday at Mach railway station, after insurgents attacked a train with over 450 people on board in Mach, Pakistan. At least 190 hostages have been rescued so far. BANARAS KHAN / AFP See *story*, page 9

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PAGE TWO

Kale: Farmers' know-how paves way to wealth



Kale is used as an ingredient to create a wide range of products, including kale noodles, dumplings, pastries, yogurt and vegetable juices. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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"It's all thanks to eating kale," she said with a hearty laugh when someone complimented her on her vitality. Wang attributes the transformation in the taste of her kale to the use of bio-organic fertilizers. She proudly refers to her kale as "pregnancy and infant-grade food", safe for even the most vulnerable consumers.

Journey of growth

"I'm a farmer, and I've been working the land since I was a child. Growing crops and vegetables is second nature to me," Wang said. In the 1990s, many young people in her village left their farms to seek work in cities. Seeing vast stretches of abandoned land, Wang grew concerned. "If everyone leaves to work in the cities, what will we eat?" she thought. In 1995, she leased over seven hectares of land from 13 households in her village and began growing wheat and corn.

In addition to growing these crops, in 2000 Wang started cultivating spinach for export. "The soil and water in Shandong are perfect for growing vegetables, so I started with spinach and secured steady export orders," she said. This success led to a new opportunity in 2005, when a client in the United States requested that Wang grow kale.

At first, Wang saw this as a lucrative business opportunity. She imported kale seeds from the Netherlands and began cultivating the crop.

"Back then, we had never tasted kale, but growing vegetables is something we Shandong farmers know how to do. I figured it out through trial and error," she said.

What she didn't anticipate was that this trial-and-error process would take seven years. "We experienced heat waves, floods, droughts and almost every possible disease," she said. Finally, in 2012, she achieved success.

Over those years, she learned the crop's "temperament".

"It thrives in cool climates, and can withstand temperatures as low as minus 10 degrees Celsius, and isn't particularly picky about soil, making it suitable for large-scale cultivation," she said. "We had no manuals or experts to guide us. It was all based on our own experience and wisdom as farmers," she said.

Despite her success, Wang initially found the taste of kale unappealing. "When I first grew it, I tasted it and thought it was terrible — bitter and astringent," she said. For years, she didn't even mention that she was growing kale, fearing that the demand for such an unpalatable vegetable would eventually dry up. But to her surprise, orders kept increasing year after year. By 2016, her farm exported 1,000 metric tons of kale annually.

It wasn't until she did some research that Wang discovered kale's reputation as a "superfood". Rich in dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals like calcium, iron and phosphorus, kale also contains antioxidants and anti-cancer compounds such as sulforaphane, she said.

What truly convinced Wang of kale's potential was a personal discovery. One day, she accidentally left a bag of kale in a corner and forgot about it. Six months later, she found the leaves hadn't rotted. "They had simply dried out and turned yellow," she said. "This was completely different from other vegetables. I realized it must be due to its antioxidant properties."

"That's when I became convinced that kale, as a healthy and nutritious vegetable, had a bright future," she said.

Domestic markets

The global vegetable juice market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.8 percent from 2024 to



Left: A juice containing kale sold by the tea chain Naixue. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY



Right: A worker uses kale to make cakes at a workshop in Gaomi, Shandong province. ZHAO RUIXUE / CHINA DAILY

2034, according to Precedence Research.

Consumers are increasingly seeking out natural and nutrient-rich foods, and juice producers have turned their attention to niche ingredients. From avocados to chia seeds, from black mulberries to goji berries, "superfoods" have taken their turn in the spotlight.

Kale, once dismissed as "unpalatable", unexpectedly became one of the hottest beverage ingredients over the last year.

In July 2024, the tea chain Heytea launched a drink featuring kale as the main ingredient, combined with apples, lemons, chia seeds and green tea. The product, which tied in with the health boom, quickly became a sensation, selling 1.6 million units in just a few days.

In September, the retail chain Hema introduced its not-from-concentrate kale mixed vegetable juice. The product blends kale with pineapple and green apples to reduce bitterness while retaining a high fiber content.

Priced at 13.9 yuan (\$1.9) a bottle, the product achieved an online repurchase rate of over 40 percent.

A 2023 consumer trends report highlighted that 81 percent of consumers are willing to pay for healthy food and beverages. Factors such as "high fiber" have become key drivers of consumer choices.

Kale fits health-conscious consumers' demands perfectly.

"Kale contains very few calories, but has a high 3.6 grams of dietary fiber per 100 grams," said Wang Fengde, deputy director of the Institute of Vegetables at Shandong Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

As kale-based beverages have gained in popularity, demand for the leafy green vegetable has surged.

Before 2024, all of Wang's kale was exported. But in the second half of last year, domestic buyers, including Heytea, began purchasing the vegetable from her farm. During the second half of 2024, Wang sold 1,000 tons of kale in the domestic market.

"We used to operate on export orders, where foreign clients would place orders first, and we would grow accordingly. But with domestic buyers, it's the opposite — they want as much as we can grow," Wang said.

At a kale-growing base in Zhangdian district in neighboring Zibo, the leafy green vegetable is also highly sought after. "Supply falls short of demand, and buyers have to wait for the kale to grow," said Hu Yanxia, the farm owner.

To meet the growing demand, Wang has temporarily converted 60 greenhouses, covering over 13 hectares, to grow more kale. From planting to harvesting, the process takes about 60 days.

Wang plans to expand her kale cultivation by 66 hectares this year. She is confident that demand for the vegetable will continue to thrive, driven by the growing emphasis on healthy eating.

"Some people have warned me that new tea drinks usually only stay popular for three to four months, and that's just the nature of the industry. Products come and go," Wang said.

"But my belief in kale is as strong as my belief in the importance of growing food. No matter the cultural or dietary differences, the need for healthy vegetables is universal," she said, adding the increasing export orders for kale are proof that it has stood the test of time.

"Twenty years ago, I wondered why foreigners wanted kale. Now, domestic beverage companies are using it to make vegetable juices and tea drinks. That's progress," Wang said.

During a visit to a tea shop in Gaomi, Wang observed that out of every 10 drinks sold, four were kale-based, reinforcing her confidence in the vegetable's future.

Innovation, expansion

Wang has taken her commitment to kale a step further by developing a range of kale-based products. Her family farm has partnered with several large processing companies to create over 40 kale products, including noodles, dumplings, pastries, yogurt and vegetable juices.

"These products have been well-received by consumers. I want more Chinese people to enjoy this healthy vegetable," Wang said.

She refers to her kale as "pregnancy and infant-grade food", meaning it is safe for pregnant women and babies.

Her farming practices adhere to strict standards, and she does not use herbicides, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Instead, the farm relies on physical pest control methods, such as insect traps, and uses bio-organic fertilizers made from soybeans and peanuts.

"Kale contains an insect-resistant element, so it's not easy for the vegetable to attract insects, making it safe from the need to use pesticides," said Wang Fengde from the Institute of Vegetables.

"There was a time we cultivated cabbage and kale in the lab, and after some time, we noticed that the cabbage was infested with aphids, while the kale remained unaffected," he added.

The bio-organic fertilizers that farmer Wang uses for her kale are easy to produce. On the 400 hectares of farmland run by her, she grows wheat, corn and soybeans, which supply enough materials for making fertilizers.

"We have the materials and skills, so we make bio-organic fertilizers on our own," she said.

The farm is currently collaborating with the institute on establishing a kale research base this year. The research team includes eight PhD and master's holders.

"The institute will focus on developing new kale varieties and improving growing techniques," said Wang Fengde.

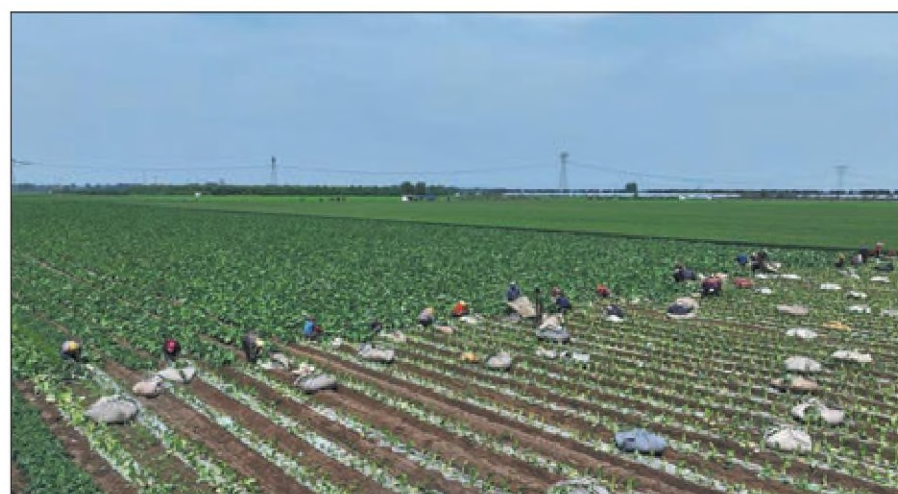
"We are working on growing kale that is also rich in selenium," he added. Selenium is believed to further boost the health benefits of kale.

Wang Cuiwen's farm is also working with the Weifang Academy of Agricultural Sciences to draft industry standards for the entire production chain of pregnancy-safe and infant-grade kale.

"This is the first in the kale sector. I hope to promote these standards so that more people can access healthy vegetables," she said.

Inspired by Chen Zhenlong, a merchant said to have introduced sweet potatoes to China in the 16th century that helped alleviate a food crisis, Wang aspires to make a similar impact.

"I want to improve the dietary habits of the Chinese people," she said. "Just as Chen Zhenlong changed the way we eat, I hope kale can become a staple in our diets."



Left: Farmers pick kale in Gaomi in May. ZHANG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: Farmers harvest kale in a greenhouse in Gaomi in March. ZHAO RUIXUE / CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Fishermen hit the road to protest

Tires burn as demonstrators throw bottles and roll a bin toward riot police on Tuesday, during a protest by fishermen against a proposed fishing bill in Valparaiso, Chile. Protesters claimed the bill would give a small group of industrial actors control of the market.

RODRIGO GARRIDO / REUTERS



Joint actions to boost growth of commercial space sector

By ZHAO LEI
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The central government, trade unions and enterprises should work together to make a comprehensive development road map to facilitate the sustainable growth of China's commercial space sector, said an industry insider.

Wang Runfu, a senior researcher at the China Academy of Space Technology, said that the commercial space sector is on the rise in China because it fits in well with the nation's overall development strategy, providing an example of high-quality development, new quality productive forces, advanced science and technology, and high-end manufacturing capability.

"In 2024, the commercial space sector was listed in the Government Work Report as one of the 'new engines of economic growth', marking the first time that the industry appeared in such an important government document. It was mentioned twice in this year's Government Work Report, as the government vows to promote the secure and sound development of several 'emerging sectors' such as commercial space and low-altitude aviation," he said.

Wang, who is also a national political adviser, made the remarks in an exclusive interview with China Daily on the sidelines of the third session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which concluded in Beijing on Monday.

"Considering its strategic significance, relevant central departments should cooperate with trade unions and enterprises in the space community to make a comprehensive development road map to better regulate this sector, determine its directions, coordinate and integrate efforts from all aspects, foster cross-industry collaboration and specify support policies and measures from governments," Wang said.

The making of such a road map is

necessary because most of the existing policies and rules were made before the commercial space sector was born and developed, and they are more suitable for State-owned companies and government-funded programs, the researcher said.

"For instance, there are multiple companies in China striving to build their massive space-based internet networks, and each of their networks, according to their plans, will have hundreds or even thousands of satellites," he said. "On the one hand, this will create a tremendously big market with enormous business potential. On the other hand, realizing their ambitious plans requires government guidance, huge investment in infrastructure, business profitability and a solid foundation of satellite design and manufacturing capacity."

The researcher said there are some shortcomings in the industry chain that will require persistent, joint efforts by the government and the space community to resolve, and he suggested that the central government establish a set of national-level mechanisms to help commercial space enterprises develop new technologies and techniques.

Yang Yiqiang, a senior rocket scientist and founder of CAS Space, a Beijing-based rocket company owned by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the commercial space sector represents a natural progression in China's space industry development.

"To strengthen the nation's space capabilities, it is imperative to create an integrated development framework that deeply combines advantages of State-funded contractors and commercial sector forces," he said, adding that to develop a commercial space industry with Chinese characteristics, three fundamental principles must be observed.

"First, commercial space businesses should be done in accordance with China's actual conditions. I mean that though the nation has possessed a certain level of scientific

and technological capabilities, there remains a significant gap compared with the United States in terms of spacefaring power. Chinese commercial space enterprises should adhere to objective, reasonable development strategies and avoid unrealistic, overambitious projects.

"Second, domestic enterprises face greater financing challenges than their American counterparts such as SpaceX, with many investors demonstrating impatience and unwillingness to grant domestic commercial space enterprises room for trial and error. It is important that more 'patient capital' comes to this sphere and plays a major role. At the same time, the government must ensure greater stability and continuity in policies pertaining to the space industry to let investors rest assured that its support for the commercial space sector is long-lasting and stable," Yang said.

Third, the industry must maintain close alignment with national strategies and precisely target market demands, he said.

"The current priority for commercial players should be providing low-cost and reliable launch solutions to support the in-orbit construction of China's multiple mega internet networks," Yang said.

Meanwhile, relevant government authorities should methodically advance the commercialization of China's space industry by fully opening low-orbit launch services to fair competition between State-owned contractors and private enterprises. This market-oriented approach could later expand to include high-orbit launch operations and encourage government-backed programs to incorporate qualified private players.

"Such phased measures would align with national priorities while leveraging market forces to strengthen China's comprehensive space capabilities," he added.

Xu Ming, chairman and CEO of GalaxySpace, a leading private satellite

maker in Beijing, underscored the sector's push to align with national goals, saying the commercial space sector has gained prominence in China's innovation-driven economic road map.

He said that the mention of the commercial space sector in the 2025 Government Work Report has "greatly galvanized the resolve of commercial space enterprises to accelerate sci-tech innovation at the global forefront."

"With growing confidence in the prospects of this sector, we are more determined than ever to contribute to building China into a space power," he added.

Future growth will rely on stronger policy coordination, improved industrial regulations and legal safeguards, such as a national space law, to ensure private entities' participation in space-based infrastructure projects, he said.

Xu called for fair competition and more opportunities for private players, adding that more tolerance should be given to trial and error by enterprises to encourage innovation and new businesses.

Zhang Changwu, founder and CEO of LandSpace, a private rocket maker in Beijing, said that China's commercial space industry has achieved remarkable progress in recent years, but there remains much room for improvement.

"Currently, China still needs to accelerate efforts to catch up with the US when it comes to technological capability and the 30 industry's maturity and share in the global market," Zhang said.

"To match world-class standards, China must expedite breakthroughs in reusable rocket technology, reduce launch costs and carry out more launches," he added. "Relevant authorities must optimize their launch approval procedures and relax requirements on companies wishing to enter the satellite internet field, to allow qualified participants to engage in network construction, thereby boosting industrial growth."

Beijing to host talks on Iranian nuclear issue

Trilateral meeting shows China's diplomatic efforts to uphold multilateralism, stability

By MO JINGXI
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As China, Russia and Iran prepare to hold talks on the Iranian nuclear issue in Beijing on Friday, observers said the meeting will once again highlight China's unique role in advocating the political settlement of regional and international hot spot issues.

China's Vice-Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu will chair the meeting, which will be attended by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov Sergey Alexeevich and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Wednesday.

"The three parties will exchange views on the Iranian nuclear issue and other issues of mutual interest," Mao told reporters at a regular news briefing in Beijing.

In 2015, Iran reached the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany, which lifted sanctions on Tehran in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

In May 2018, the US unilaterally quit the plan and reimposed sanctions on Iran under its policy of "maximum pressure". Consequently, in 2019, Iran began to gradually scale back its obligations under the JCPOA, but its violations are largely reversible.

Last week, the US urged fresh talks on Iran's nuclear program and warned of possible military action if it refuses. Iran said it will not be "bullied" into talks with the US on the nuclear issue.

Experts noted that the meeting in Beijing is a significant diplomatic effort made by China to uphold multilateralism and regional stability.

As the host country of the tripartite talks, China has long been committed to promoting the peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue and has maintained communication with relevant countries through various channels in order to reach a broad consensus, they said.

Wu Bingbing, director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Peking University, said that choosing Beijing as the venue for the talks shows Iran's endorsement of China as a crucial party to the Iranian nuclear issue.

Wu said he expects China to reiterate its support for the full implementation of the JCPOA and call on relevant parties to make joint efforts to achieve the goal. "China could also stress the importance of safeguarding the international nuclear nonproliferation regime and stability in the Middle East," he said.

In the face of rising uncertainties, including Washington's reimposition of the "maximum pressure" policy on Iran last month, the upcoming meeting will help reinforce the three parties' consensus on opposing pressure and supporting dialogues, Wu added.

Esmail Baqaei, spokesman for the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said on Wednesday that the tripartite talks will mainly address the issues related to nuclear energy and the lifting of sanctions.

Discussions will also cover other topics of interest to the three countries including regional and international developments and cooperation within the frameworks of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Baqaei said.

As this year marks the 10th anniversary of the JCPOA, Sun Degang, director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, said the Iranian nuclear issue has reached a crossroads and a window of opportunity for preventing nuclear proliferation in the Middle East has opened.

"It is the consensus among China, Russia and Iran that the lifting of sanctions serves as a crucial step in maintaining stability in the Middle East and avoiding further escalation caused by misjudgment," Sun said.

Observers said the meeting is also an important test for current international relations and global governance, as the international community expects talks to achieve new breakthroughs in the Iranian nuclear issue.

Wu, from Peking University, said the international community should not abandon the approach of resolving major regional hot spot issues through peaceful negotiations. "If confrontation and coercion tactics are chosen over peaceful negotiations to solve the Iranian nuclear issue, it will bring new instability to the region," he added.

Defense: Strategic autonomy requires additional focus

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Despite the ambitious ambit of the ReArm Europe plan, "there are doubts whether it would not be just another spending spree with dubious effect", Duris said. "I do not exclude some European companies that could benefit from this. But I would certainly rule out independence from the US or its companies."

The US accounted for 64 percent of arms imports by European NATO states in the 2020-24 period, compared to 52 percent in 2015-19, findings by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute published on Monday showed.

Discussions on strengthening EU security have spanned decades. At the Cologne European Council in 1999, EU member states reaffirmed the bloc's willingness to develop capabilities for autonomous action, backed by credible military forces.

The term "strategic autonomy" was introduced in the bloc in 2013 during European Council discussions on the Common Security and Defense Policy.

Since then, the issue has remained high on the agenda, and is tied to reducing dependence on the US for security — a reliance enabled by post-World War II arrangements such as the Marshall Plan and the NATO, both led by the US.

"In the short term, or at least in the foreseeable future, it may not be possible to break away from reliance on Washington," said Jian from Fudan University.

"Challenges are expected, including the financial capacity of member states, the allocation and use of funds, and even the coordination with NATO," he added.

"Strategic autonomy extends beyond defense; it also includes technological autonomy, economic self-sufficiency and ideological independence, an aspect that has not received enough attention."

Duris agreed. "The ideological independence would be needed most of all. By sophisticatedly distributing geopolitical ties and relationships, a country can maintain a relatively high degree of strategic autonomy."

Such phased measures would align with national priorities while leveraging market forces to strengthen China's comprehensive space capabilities," he added.

Xu Ming, chairman and CEO of GalaxySpace, a leading private satellite

maker in Beijing, underscored the sector's push to align with national goals, saying the commercial space sector has gained prominence in China's innovation-driven economic road map.

He said that the mention of the commercial space sector in the 2025 Government Work Report has "greatly galvanized the resolve of commercial space enterprises to accelerate sci-tech innovation at the global forefront."

"With growing confidence in the prospects of this sector, we are more determined than ever to contribute to building China into a space power," he added.

Future growth will rely on stronger policy coordination, improved industrial regulations and legal safeguards, such as a national space law, to ensure private entities' participation in space-based infrastructure projects, he said.

Xu called for fair competition and more opportunities for private players, adding that more tolerance should be given to trial and error by enterprises to encourage innovation and new businesses.

Zhang Changwu, founder and CEO of LandSpace, a private rocket maker in Beijing, said that China's commercial space industry has achieved remarkable progress in recent years, but there remains much room for improvement.

"Currently, China still needs to accelerate efforts to catch up with the US when it comes to technological capability and the 30 industry's maturity and share in the global market," Zhang said.

"To match world-class standards, China must expedite breakthroughs in reusable rocket technology, reduce launch costs and carry out more launches," he added. "Relevant authorities must optimize their launch approval procedures and relax requirements on companies wishing to enter the satellite internet field, to allow qualified participants to engage in network construction, thereby boosting industrial growth."

Experts noted that the meeting in Beijing is a significant diplomatic effort made by China to uphold multilateralism and regional stability.

As the host country of the tripartite talks, China has long been committed to promoting the peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue and has maintained communication with relevant countries through various channels in order to reach a broad consensus, they said.

Wu Bingbing, director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Peking University, said that choosing Beijing as the venue for the talks shows Iran's endorsement of China as a crucial party to the Iranian nuclear issue.

Wu said he expects China to reiterate its support for the full implementation of the JCPOA and call on relevant parties to make joint efforts to achieve the goal. "China could also stress the importance of safeguarding the international nuclear nonproliferation regime and stability in the Middle East," he said.

In the face of rising uncertainties, including Washington's reimposition of the "maximum pressure" policy on Iran last month, the upcoming meeting will help reinforce the three parties' consensus on opposing pressure and supporting dialogues, Wu added.

Fleeing to safety



Alawite Syrians wade across the Nahr El Kabir River on Tuesday in Akkar, Lebanon, while fleeing the violence in western Syria, which has left hundreds of Alawites dead. HUSSEIN MALLA / AP PHOTO

Trade: Sanctions cause unintended negative consequences

From page 1

First, it builds economic interdependence; second, international interpersonal interactions breed long-term and mutual understanding; and, third, international diversity stimulates the creative products and solutions that have always driven human progress. Less trade causes less of all these things. As a prominent example, consider the cellphone in your pocket — the technology therein comes from around the world.

Another important example of the

creativity resulting from international collaboration and trade comes from our most recent analyses of patent data from the United States. The number of patents granted to research teams that included both US and Chinese citizens has continued to rise from one in 1985 to 23 in 1995, to 156 in 2005, to 1,681 in 2015, and to 3,130 last year. The only declines in the data stream we can see were in 2018 and 2020, both years of the first Donald Trump presidency.

Trade does not work as a stick, only as a carrot. The best studies we

can find on the topic estimate that economic sanctions have achieved their stated political purposes around 25 percent of the time during the last hundred years. But the analyses have always ignored the often catastrophic collateral costs of sanctions. Many researchers have enumerated other such unintended negative consequences of sanctions: US firms' losses (often in sectors beyond those targeted), third-country competitive gains, and in the target countries' GDP and employment shrinkage, extreme poverty, civilian

suffering, and even increased human rights violations. Among the worst consequences are retaliatory terrorism and attacks on the sanctioning countries themselves.

It was in 1807 that Thomas Jefferson came up with trade sanctions as an innovation in diplomacy. The donkeys he endeavored to persuade then were quite big and quite stubborn — England and France. The goal was to get these warring nations to leave US ships alone on the high seas. Lacking a competitive navy, the third president of the United States

dreamed up the trade embargo — rather than using trade as a carrot he planned to withhold trade and use it as a stick. However, instead of changing French or English policies and behaviors, Jefferson's policy actually endangered New England traders. They complained: "Our ships all in motion, once whiten'd the ocean; They sail'd and return'd with a Cargo; Now doom'd to decay, they are fallen a prey, To Jefferson, worms, and EMBARGO."

Jefferson's embargo fell apart in just 15 months. Only the War of 1812 settled the problems with English aggression at sea. Some two centuries later, we have Donald Trump's tariffs. When will we ever learn?

Finally, I will end this essay with 1776. In the Declaration of Independence, a prominent complaint of the colonists against the tyranny of King George was about free trade: "For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world."

The author is professor emeritus of international business at the Paul Merage School of Business and a founding director of the Long US-China Institute at the University of California, Irvine, the United States. He is also author of the book China Now: Doing Business in the World's Most Dynamic Marketplace. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Harbin surprise



People forge ahead despite being caught off guard by a short but intense sudden snowfall outside the Harbin International Convention and Exhibition Center in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Wednesday. Harbin was hit with snowfall that day following a drop in temperature caused by a cold front. LIU YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

DPP actions lack public support

Official condemns island authorities for blocking cross-Strait exchanges

By LI SHANGYI
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Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party is obstructing cross-Strait exchanges despite public support for peace and cooperation, a mainland official said on Wednesday.

Chen Binhua, spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, accused the DPP of restricting academic exchanges by banning cooperation with Jinan University and two other mainland institutions. Recently, Taiwan expanded the blacklist to include seven more universities, including Beihang University and the Beijing Institute of Technology.

"The DPP authorities are the main obstacle to cross-Strait cooperation and a destroyer of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait," Chen said.

Chen also criticized the DPP for refusing to lift its ban on group tours to the mainland and delaying the comprehensive resumption of direct passenger flights. He said Taiwan authorities have obstructed travel for residents from Shanghai and Fujian province seeking to visit the island.

In January, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced plans to allow group tours to Taiwan for residents from Shanghai and Fujian, with preparations underway. Chen accused the DPP of intimi-

dating Taiwan residents seeking mainland identity documents and requiring public officials to sign declarations stating they do not hold them.

He also criticized Taiwan for banning the use of DeepSeek, restricting mainland telecom products in public schools and blacklisting over 100 mainland institutions, including the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Confucius Institute.

"The desire of people on both sides to grow closer cannot be suppressed, and the trend of cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation cannot be stopped. Reckless actions will lead to self-inflicted consequences," he added.

China's 2025 Government Work Report proposed refining mechanisms to strengthen cross-Strait eco-

nomical and cultural ties, which Chen said underscores Beijing's commitment to deeper engagement.

"Chinese modernization is a shared endeavor for people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan people have every reason to take part in this process," he said.

Fujian province has introduced 17 policy measures to support Taiwan residents and businesses, including allowing such residents to establish radio and television production companies in the province and expanding cooperation with marine aquaculture and biomedical industries.

In Yunnan province, Taiwan residents applying for a mainland travel permit for the first time as of this month are eligible for one year of free entry to 320 tourist attractions, including Lijiang Ancient Town and Jade Dragon Snow Mountain.

Foshan to hasten traditional sectors' efforts to go digital

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
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Foshan, a manufacturing hub in Guangdong province, plans to accelerate the digital transformation of its traditional industries to boost innovation and efficiency, a senior government official said.

Bai Tao, mayor of Foshan and a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said digital upgrades are crucial for the city's established sectors, which include seven of its 10 100-billion-yuan (\$13.8 billion) industry clusters.

"By enhancing production efficiency through intelligence reform and digital transformation, we are driving the smart evolution in traditional advantageous industries," Bai said.

The city has implemented a wave of technological reforms, including launching Guangdong's first city-level artificial intelligence application platform, to drive digital transformation.

According to local government statistics, over 7,400 industrial enterprises above designated size — companies with annual operation revenue exceeding 20 million yuan — in Foshan have undergone digital transformation, more than 72 percent of the total. "Enterprises that have completed their digital transformations have seen a 16 percent increase in production efficiency on average, and a 17 percent reduction in costs," Bai said.

Foshan Haitian Flavoring and Food Co, a soy sauce producer, exemplifies this trend. Known as a "lighthouse factory," the company has improved efficiency through fully digitized management, reducing product order delivery cycles by over 38 percent and increasing profit margins.

"We will make greater efforts in digital transformation for more companies in the traditional manufacturing industries, aiming to achieve an 80 percent digital transformation rate among industrial enterprises above designated size this year," Bai said.

The city also plans to integrate artificial intelligence into manufacturing, leveraging its data resources and diverse application scenarios.

“We will make greater efforts in digital transformation for more companies in the traditional manufacturing industries.”

Bai Tao, mayor of Foshan

"By embedding AI into research and design, production and operation management, we will expand AI application scenarios in industries such as household appliances, furniture, ceramics and textiles, accelerating the shift from traditional toward intelligent manufacturing," the mayor said.

Foshan will also focus on developing emerging industries, promoting the integration of innovation, industry, funding and talent.

Leveraging its equipment manufacturing industry cluster, Foshan has built a robotics industrial chain, with about 3,000 related companies and the country's largest industrial robot production base. Midea Group, a local company, is among the world's top industrial robot manufacturers.

The city is also developing its pharmaceutical and health industries, including traditional Chinese medicine manufacturing and medical devices.

According to local government statistics, the city's pharmaceutical and health industry revenue exceeded 100 billion yuan in 2024, maintaining double-digit growth for three consecutive years.

"In the future, we will accelerate the construction of key industrial platforms, focusing on breakthroughs in emerging industries such as new energy storage, new power systems, equipment industrial robots and new energy vehicles," Bai said.

Green assets growing with afforestation projects

By XU NUO
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With over 25 percent of its land surface covered by forests, China is the fastest and largest contributor to land greening efforts in the world, according to an official from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

On Wednesday, which marked the 47th National Tree Planting Day, the National Afforestation Commission released a communique on China's land greening status in 2024, highlighting progress made over the past year.

According to the document, China completed afforestation of 4.446 million hectares, improved 3.224 million hectares of land by planting grass, and reclaimed 2.783 million hectares of desertified and sandy land in 2024. The forest coverage rate surpassed 25 percent, while the forest stock volume exceeded 20 billion cubic meters, it said.

Zhang Liming, director of the eco-

logical protection and restoration department at the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, said, "Continuous efforts have been made by the country to expand forest areas, enhance forest quality and benefits, and manage forest resources, thereby increasing the nation's green assets."

Afforestation of a cumulative total of 77.3 million hectares has been completed nationwide since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, making China the fastest and largest contributor to global greening efforts, he added.

According to the communique released by the National Afforestation Commission, significant achievements were made last year in the Three-North Shelterbelt Forest Program, which began in 1978 as a strategic project to establish large protective forests in key areas affected by sandstorms and soil erosion in Northwest, North and Northeast China.

With 32 billion yuan (\$4.4 billion) of funding from the central government, more than 3.8 million hectares of land in these regions were restored last year, it said.

Notably, the Taklimakan Desert in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, which is the largest desert in China, has been encircled by a sand-blocking green belt stretching 3,046 kilometers.

The document also praised the progress made in the systemic treatment of mountains, rivers, forests, fields, lakes, grasslands and deserts. A total of 176 projects on ecological protection and restoration in key regions and on ecological restoration support systems, as well as 27 projects for the integrated protection and restoration of the environment, have been carried out, with a cumulative treated area exceeding 5 million hectares, it said.

Moreover, ecological industries have brought increased benefits to the people, according to the document. The total output value of the

forestry and grassland industry reached 10.17 trillion yuan, up 9.6 percent year-on-year. The production of forest food exceeded 200 million metric tons, making it the third-most important agricultural produce after grains and vegetables. Forest food refers to edible items produced in forests or woodlands, including fruits, flowers, leaves and branches.

The document highlighted that economic forests cover 46.667 million hectares in China, with an annual output value exceeding 2 trillion yuan, while 40 million hectares of forest land have been used for the under-forest economy, with an annual output value of about 1 trillion yuan.

The under-forest economy involves eco-friendly activities conducted under forest canopies, such as planting, breeding, wild produce gathering and ecotourism. Among these activities, ecotourism alone attracted 2.76 billion visitors last year, a 9.1 percent increase compared with 2023, the document said.

Competent drones



Agricultural drones equipped with high-precision GPS positioning systems and intelligent spray devices soar above wheat fields, spraying pesticides to combat crop diseases and pests in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday. NI YANQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hainan seeks global nod for cultural, natural heritages

By YANG RAN and CHEN BOWEN

Hainan province is ramping up efforts to qualify its Hainan Tropical Rainforest and Traditional Settlements of the Li Ethnic Group for inclusion in the World Heritage List, with an emphasis on both protection and economic development.

Lyu Yan, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress and deputy head of Baoting Li and Miao autonomous county in Hainan, said the province must safeguard its natural environment while revitalizing its cultural heritage. "We need to protect our lush mountains while revitalizing our intangible cultural

heritage," Lyu said. "Beyond protection, we must foster development by using our cultural heritage."

Located in the central and southern parts of the island province, the tropical rainforest centered around Wuzhishan is a sanctuary for endangered species and island-specific flora and fauna. It is also home to the Li people, who have cultivated a distinctive island tribal culture for thousands of years.

In 2022, the Hainan Tropical Rainforest and Traditional Settlements of the Li Ethnic Group were included in the tentative list of UNESCO's World Heritage sites. Authorities are now seeking the prestigious "cultural and

natural dual heritage" status.

As of August last year, China has 59 World Heritage sites, including 15 natural heritage sites and four mixed cultural and natural heritage sites.

"The Hainan rainforest is the only habitat of the Hainan gibbon and one of the world's 34 biodiversity hot spots," Lyu said. "It's the most intact continental island-type tropical rainforest in China, with immense ecological value. The Li people have lived here for over 3,000 years. Their boat-shaped houses, Li brocade and the March 3 Festival are like cultural time capsules. These treasures are like family heirlooms — precious to us and wor-

thy of global recognition."

A legal framework for protecting the Li traditional settlements took effect in Hainan in December, giving ancient villages a legal safeguard.

"We must not only protect but also develop and revitalize intangible cultural heritage," Lyu said. "The Binglanggu Li and Miao Cultural Heritage Park in Hainan is a prime example, turning Ganza village from a struggling community into a thriving one with annual collective income in the millions."

Baoting Li and Miao autonomous county is an integral part of the heritage bid.

"Baoting will leverage its rich Li

and Miao cultural traditions to create a hub for cultural preservation and experience," Lyu said.

"By showcasing the intangible heritage, hosting cultural festivals and developing creative products, we aim to convert ethnic culture into a tourism draw, establishing a model for ecological value transformation and green economic growth," she added.

Lyu outlined plans to advance the heritage bid, including refining application materials, enhancing rainforest ecosystem monitoring and restoration, and promoting Li brocade at Paris Fashion Week and cultural exhibitions overseas. The province also plans to accelerate tourism infrastructure development and train more intangible cultural heritage bearers.

During the two sessions, Lyu

called for stronger policy support for the integrated development of ecological and cultural tourism in ethnic regions.

"Despite strides in cultural tourism, ethnic group areas face challenges in meeting high-quality development standards," she said. "Greater efforts are needed to strengthen policy and financial support in this aspect."

She also emphasized the importance of balancing conservation and economic growth.

"Achieving the transformation of lucid waters and lush mountains into valuable assets requires coordinated development of natural and cultural resources," Lyu said.

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CHINA



Dong Yunrong (third from right) performs with members of the band Fenghe on a TV show in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Sonic seniors form band and rock out to youthful rhythm

Pensioner Dong finds solace in music after husband's death

By CHEN YE in Hangzhou
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A band of seniors have been rocking the world with their lively sound. The band, from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, whose members have an average age of over 70, captivated the audience with their vitality and passion at the 2025 Online Spring Festival Gala in January.

One of the founders and the leader of the band, Dong Yunrong, 81, left a deep impression on many as she performed in a black leather jacket and red pants.

Her story with music began in 2007 when she was encouraged by her son to apply for a guitar class at a university for seniors.

During a period of mourning after her husband's passing, Dong found herself immersed in grief and unable to break free. It was the guitar class that led her to gradually emerge from the shadow of her husband's departure.

She fell in love with music and started to enjoy the beauty of a more musical world.

In 2009, Dong and four of her college mates formed a band, named "Fenghe", because they often rehearsed by the Qu Yuan Fenghe — one of the top 10 scenic sites around the West Lake in Hangzhou.

Learning the guitar was not easy. To help her remember the songs, Dong started recording herself play-



Members of the band rehearse at Qu Yuan Fenghe Park in Hangzhou. XINHUA

ing and singing, and uploaded the video clips on video sharing platform Youku.

She also wrote the musical scores and lyrics on paper, which she carried with her so she could practice wherever.

She once accompanied her granddaughter to an electronic organ class and practiced outside.

After uploading a cover of a song by Jay Chou on Youku, Dong gained more attention, attracting 270,000 views. Many people were amazed by her performance, especially the rap part of the song.

In March 2011, one of her videos, in which she sang the song *Because of Love*, garnered over 1 million views within a week.

To her surprise, the video was even reposted by one of the original singers, Faye Wong, on social media. Dong later performed the

song again during *China's Got Talent* show, and dedicated it to her husband.

In 2018, Dong's band received an invitation from the TV program *Avenue of Stars*, a popular singing competition on China Central Television. Inspired by the show's director, the team members decided to inject more "craziness" into their performance, incorporating rock elements with drums and bass.

Finally, the band performed the Chinese rock song *Life in Full Bloom*, showcasing not only their meticulously prepared performance but also their own lives in full bloom.

Over the years, the silver-haired band has gradually gained recognition, traveling across the country from the West Lake to bigger stages, stunning audiences on many TV shows.

"Rock is not just for the young!" the band members sometimes shout at the end of their performances. Through each "rocking" experience, they feel the charm of music and the power of life.

In their regular rehearsals, they have also updated their repertoire to include more dynamic songs, building upon the soothing old songs of the past.

"Singing these rock songs makes me feel young and energetic. When we sing and dance, we forget our aches and all the troublesome things and feel joyful," Dong said.

The band also performs for the elderly in nursing homes and children in orphanages.

"We can bring happiness and joy to others. Maybe it is the reason why we are liked by many people," Dong added.

Today, the band has grown to over 20 members from all walks of life including retired teachers, translators and restaurant owners. While some members have dropped out due to health or family reasons, new members have joined. However, Dong is always there, as the soul of the group.

Dong believes that seniors need a sense of belonging to find something they love and to learn new things.

In turn, they often discover joy in these new experiences, living each day with the exuberance of an 18-year-old.

Dong is working on grooming the next generation of the band, hoping to pass on the "forever young" rock spirit embodied by Fenghe.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Korean tourists opting for short breaks in China

By LIU MINGTAI in Yanji, Jilin and ZHOU HUIYING

Short breaks in China are becoming increasingly popular among South Korean travelers, with many enjoying experiencing cultural attractions.

For Seo Seo-ro, a 35-year-old tourist from South Korea, he was glad he chose China, especially the Changbai Mountain Scenic Area in Jilin province, as the first overseas destination to travel to with his parents.

"I've always wished to take my parents on a trip abroad," said the traveler from Busan.

"Recently, the travel agency suggested to me that we could spend the weekend in China, which is currently very popular among Korean tourists."

It took them about two hours to fly to Yanji, capital of the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture in Jilin. Located in the eastern part of Jilin, the prefecture is rich in elements of the Korean ethnic group and receives the most foreign tourists in the province.

Tourists can easily identify distinct ethnic elements in architecture, clothing and performances.

Since China implemented a transit visa-free policy for the Republic of Korea in November, Yanbian has quickly become a popular choice for Korean tourists to spend their weekends.

Data from the local government shows that during this year's Spring Festival holiday, the number of inbound and outbound foreign tourists at Yanji Chaoyangchuan Airport reached 13,000, a year-on-year increase of 14.7 percent.

Among the inbound foreign tourists, Korean tourists accounted for 88.1 percent.

During Seo's four-day trip, they first visited Tumen and enjoyed the hot springs in the city.

"At the Changbai Mountain Scenic Area, we took a snowmobile to get to the top of the main peak," he said. "We were so lucky to see the mysterious Tianchi Lake, which was surrounded by snow, providing us a white and pure wonderland."

Changbai Mountain remains frozen for most of the year, and has long been a major tourist destination in all seasons.

The lake is located at the top of the volcanic cone of the main peak of Changbai Mountain with a surface elevation of 2,189 meters. They also tasted various local cul-

tures including mutton kebab and visited scenic spots popular on social media platforms to take photos.

According to Zheng Xuefeng, a tour guide with 15 years of experience leading groups of South Korean tourists, in the past they had to apply for a visa at least 10 days in advance to visit China, but now with the transit visa-free policy, the procedure has been shortened to only one day.

"Recently, South Korean tourists usually come to China on Friday and return to South Korea on Sunday," he said. "Therefore, weekends have become the busiest time for us."

As a result of the boom of tourism in Yanbian, he said, the variety of tourism products has increased, catering to various needs.

"Because most local residents in Yanbian can speak Korean, there are no language barriers, making communication very convenient," he said.

Last year, the total revenue for travel agencies in the prefecture reached 280 million yuan (\$40 million), a year-on-year increase of 64 percent. The growth has prompted local travel agencies, including Yanbian Chuntian International Travel Agency, the largest travel agency in the prefecture, to expand.

"We have a total of 74 tour guides, including 54 Korean-speaking guides specialized in serving Korean tourists," said Cui Guolu, the agency's deputy general manager.

During this winter season, he said, the agency received a total of 2,500 tourists from South Korea, which is a 50-percent increase compared to the previous winter.

"Due to the current popularity of Korean business, we have decided to expand by recruiting another 30 tour guides this year," he said. "We also have a plan to launch customized tour products based on customers' demand."

According to local government, the prefecture will actively develop the inbound tourism markets of the Republic of Korea and Russia. They will increase investment in cultural and tourism sectors, create new cultural and tourism landmarks such as Yanbian Tower and Bohai Ancient Town, and develop new activities such as gourmet tours, leisure sports events, camping and picnicking.

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A foreign tourist learns a traditional dance of the Korean ethnic group at a tourist site in the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture, Jilin province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wuyuan's natural beauty mesmerizes

NANCHANG — Since mid-March, Wuyuan county in Jiangxi province has entered its most enchanting season.

Across the undulating hills, a stunning expanse of 6,700 hectares of rapeseed flowers has burst into

bloom, painting the landscape in vibrant hues of gold.

As the flowers reach their peak, waves of visitors from across the country witness this natural spectacle, turning Wuyuan into a bustling haven of beauty.

Scattered with historical sites and ancient buildings of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, Wuyuan boasts 30 traditional villages. In 2012, the county government adopted measures to protect and develop the ancient buildings.

"There are trees, bridges, flowing water and beautiful Huizhou-style houses. It is how I imagined traditional Chinese culture would look like," Gawne said.

With China's ever-expanding high-speed rail network making the once-remote countryside easily accessible, Wuyuan has even attracted the interest of overseas travelers.

"Our B&B has served as a bridge for cultural exchanges between China and the West. About 90 percent of our guests are foreigners, and they can enjoy the beauty of Chinese traditional villages and learn about the culture and folk customs of Wuyuan and Jiangxi," Gawne said.

The story of Wuyuan is a shining example of how China's poverty alleviation and rural revitalization efforts have transformed the lives of countryside residents.

Once economically stagnant, the county of more than 300,000 people has undergone a remarkable transformation through land reform, poverty alleviation and infrastructure upgrades.

The idyllic lifestyle has not only encouraged locals to return but also attracted many outsiders to settle down. Among them is Edward Gawne, the first British national to open a homestay in Wuyuan.

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Since the 2000s, Wuyuan has adopted an agriculture-tourism integration development model, combining traditional farming with tourism to develop distinctive industries such as rapeseed flower and chrysanthemum cultivation.

The initiative has spurred the growth of rural homestays, lifting the annual average per-capita income to more than 26,000 yuan (\$3,600) in 2023 from less than 3,000 yuan in 2002.

In 2023, Wuyuan welcomed over 28 million visitors, cementing its status as a top-tier tourist destination in rural China.

As China's rural revitalization gains momentum, Wuyuan is further transforming its local resources into a thriving, diverse tourism industry. A nature education hub operated by young graduates has become an in-demand destination with eager participants booking spots three months in advance.

From wetland explorations and building bird nests to observing bacteria under microscopes, the education hub's hands-on activities captivate children and parents alike.

"We're using Wuyuan's natural beauty and our expertise to make science fun and accessible," said Liu Zhilong, who runs the nature educa-

tion hub, adding that over 60,000 children and 10,000 parents have joined their nature lessons.

These achievements stem from Wuyuan's groundbreaking "mini nature reserve" system, launched in the early 1990s. Today, the county boasts 193 such reserves, spanning 43,600 hectares and safeguarding rare species such as the critically endangered blue-crowned laughingthrush.

This dedication to conservation has fueled economic growth, with bird-watching tourism alone generating over 100 million yuan in 2023.

Party chief Xu Shubin stated that Wuyuan has successfully turned its ecological strengths into economic benefits.

Villagers, now reaping the rewards of this green development, have become even more dedicated to protecting their beautiful homeland.

"This commitment has fostered a win-win cycle. Protecting the environment drives the green economy, and the resulting success inspires villagers to care even more for their natural surroundings, promoting true harmony between people and nature," Xu said.

XINHUA



Tourists visit an ancient village at a scenic area in Wuyuan county, Jiangxi province, in November. CHEN YEHUA / XINHUA

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

By YAN DONGJIE

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In the grasslands of the Xizang autonomous region, Kyizom's work can be solitary.

With a motorcycle, binoculars, a bag of dry rations and a notebook in hand, she ventures alone into the grasslands, embarking on a new day's patrol.

"The black-necked crane is considered a sacred bird in Tibetan culture. People believe they are loyal in relationships, and I admire their dedication to guarding their loved ones," said Kyizom, a wildlife ranger at the Siling Lake National Nature Reserve.

The reserve in Shanza county, Nagchu city, Xizang, is an important breeding ground for black-necked cranes. As the only species among the 15 crane species globally that breeds and winters in highland areas, the black-necked crane is revered locally as the "highland fairy" and the symbol of happiness, auspiciousness and love.

Kyizom, a 29-year-old Tibetan, has been protecting black-necked cranes here for 10 years.

Late every March, black-necked cranes that winter in the Yarlung Tsangpo River Valley fly to Shanza to nest, lay eggs and hatch their young. Around November, as the grasslands enter winter on the plateau, the cranes fly to warmer southern regions.

From March to November is Kyizom's busiest time. She is responsible for recording the number of the wild animals, especially the migration patterns of black-necked cranes, and preventing human activities that may harm their habitats.

"During the breeding season, they are more vulnerable and in need of my protection," she said. "Seeing the hatching of black-necked crane chicks makes me both happy and fearful because I worry wild dogs and foxes may eat them. Therefore, I increase the frequency of my patrols.

"The survival status and migration patterns of black-necked cranes reflect changes in the highland wetland ecology, serving as a pointer for the health of highland wetlands," she said.

In recent years, Xizang has increased efforts to protect their habitats, and the scattered wetlands in Shanza have attracted a large number of black-necked cranes for breeding and raising their young.

According to the second terrestrial wildlife survey in Xizang and the joint survey on wintering crane resources organized by the China Wildlife Conservation Association Crane Conservation Committee in 2020, the population of black-necked cranes in Xizang exceeded 10,000.

In the 1970s, it was estimated that there were fewer than 1,000 in the area.



Black-necked cranes winter at a reservoir in Lhundrub county, Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, on Saturday. When it gets warmer, they will fly to areas including the Siling Lake National Nature Reserve to breed. TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA

Tibetan keeps close watch on 'sacred' black-necked cranes

Conservationist guards birds' nesting grounds on plateau lake



Left: Kyizom shares her stories on wildlife conservation with a team of photographers and documentary makers.



Right: Black-necked cranes winter on Siling Co (Lake) in the Xizang autonomous region. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In November, Kyizom visited Beijing to share her experiences in nature conservation at the 10th China International Oral History Week organized by the Cui Yongyuan Center for Oral History of the Communication University of China. She shared her story with participants from 11 countries and regions, receiving much appreciation.

In recent years, a growing number of young people born in the 1990s and 2000s have joined wildlife protection teams on the plateau. In the internet age, they continue to fulfill their duties in sparsely populated areas with no network signal and harsh environments, contributing a unique strength to protecting the highland ecology, said Kyizom.

"I have loved wildlife since I was a child. My father taught me how to interact with animals, and my passion for them is the main reason I love this job," she said.

However, her path has not been completely smooth. In the early days she struggled with riding her bike in rough terrain and suffered many scrapes and bruises. The remote and sparsely populated areas also fostered a fear of attack from nature's predators such as bears.

Over the years, Kyizom has mastered her skills and overcome her fears, and started to pass on her experience to her own children.

A mother of three, she guides her children just as her father taught her. When they are on vacation, she takes them to observe wildlife, teaching them how to identify animal species.

The children learn to look up, carefully counting the cranes flying across the sky, just like their mother.

Through her years of interaction with black-necked cranes, Kyizom has gained an in-depth knowledge of their behaviors.

"In wetland environments with good weather, safety and abundant food, black-necked cranes will gently flap their wings and make giggling calls to express their joy. Now, this sound also brings me happiness," she said.

"I hope to participate in more training on scientific wildlife rescue. Through my efforts, I want to ensure that wildlife can live safer and happier lives," she said.

With people's increasing enthusiasm for exploring nature, bird-watching activities are becoming more popular, making Kyizom's grassland more lively than before.

"When tourists visit, we remind them not to disturb the lives of black-necked cranes," Kyizom said. "They are our auspicious birds, and I hope more people will love and help them, making Xizang a beautiful home for black-necked cranes."

Shi Yudie, Zhang Lina and Yang Meiduo contributed to this story.



Tourists walk a raised path by the Siling Co (Lake) in the Xizang autonomous region in June. The lake and its surrounding natural reserve serve as an important habitat for black-necked cranes. TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA

By YAN DONGJIE and LI YINGQING

in Chuxiong, Yunnan

Deep in the Dinosaur River Natural Reserve in Southwest China's Yunnan province, Wang Xiaoyan and her husband Zeng Guofu wait patiently, silently in their hide for a glimpse of the elusive green peafowl.

"Let's be quiet... Listen, this is the sound of the green peafowl," Wang whispers.

A few moments later, Zeng gestures to a clearing in the shrubbery where a male green peafowl emerges displaying its crown feathers and splendid plumage as it pecks at the ground.

The green peafowl, an inspiration for the phoenix in traditional Chinese culture, has been recorded in history for thousands of years as a symbol of auspiciousness, cherished and respected by people.

However, due to increased human activities and changes in the ecosystem, by the end of the last century, the number of green peafowls in China was estimated to be only a few hundred, distributed in Yunnan province.

Thanks to conservation efforts over the past decades, the population of green peafowls has now recovered to over 800.

Wang and her husband work as guardians of the green peafowls in the reserve in Shuangbai county of Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture, and are known locally as the "green peafowl couple".

Every day, they shuttle back and forth on mountain roads for tens of kilometers between the reserve office in Shuangbai and the green peafowl activity areas deep in the mountain, tracking the movements of the birds.

Patrollers protect precious green peafowls

"They are very shy. We have to arrive at the mountain before sunrise, hide ourselves in the shed, and wait quietly until they come out for food after spending the night in the forest," Wang said.

The couple provide food to the birds during the winter months, as the food supply can be short. Preventing poaching and assisting in habitat restoration are also part of their work. Wang has been protecting what he calls these "mountain spirits" for more than seven years.

"The green peafowl is our auspicious bird, the elders say it brings us good luck," Wang said.

"When I was young, around two or three years old, I could only hear their calls. As I grew older, I occasionally caught some glimpses in the fields. I remember how they walked with their long tail feathers shimmering, and they captured my heart instantly," she said. "Later, it seemed like the number of peafowls decreased significantly, and they were not seen as often."

Researcher Yang Xiaojun from the Kunming Institute of Zoology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences said that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, economic activities such as hunting, mining and agriculture led to the destruction of green peafowl habitats. At that time, people lacked awareness of the importance of protecting the species, resulting in a sharp decline in the green peafowl population.

In 2018, the nature reserve began to recruit patrollers, and Wang volunteered.



Wang Xiaoyan and her husband Zeng Guofu patrol the Dinosaur River Natural Reserve in Yunnan province.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Over the years, she has promoted ecological conservation among locals and encouraged them to participate in the protection of green peafowls and other wildlife.

"Patrolling isn't easy. There are pythons, wild boars and other big animals in the mountain, and even macaques throwing stones sometimes. It's still dark when we enter the mountains in the early morning," she said.

"At first, my family and villagers thought I wouldn't last long in the job, but here I am,

seven to eight years later. Initially, I was afraid of walking the dark mountain roads, but hearing the bird calls and knowing that the green peafowls were there with other creatures settled my heart. Over time, I got used to it," Wang said.

Her husband Zeng, a former miner, joined the team in 2021 as infrared cameras were being installed to expand the monitoring of green peafowls.

Shuangbai county used to have many silver and mineral mines, but most have since shut down.

"We record what we see on our patrols, and also the data collected from the infrared cameras, which both help researchers and experts better understand this precious creature. It's important to understand the survival status of green peafowls and to protect their habitats," Zeng said.

"In recent years, during our regular patrols and monitoring, the sightings of green peafowls have increased. Last year, I saw 18 green peafowls in a single outing," he said.

Over the years, Wang and her husband have become experts on green peafowls. She said that green peafowls typically inhabit areas at elevations of 800 to 1,200 meters. They usually mate in February, lay eggs in mid-March, and by late April, the baby peafowls hatch.

"The chicks resemble adult peafowls in six to seven months, and by two to three years old, they are fully grown, displaying beautiful tail feathers," Zeng said.

According to statistics from the reserve, there are currently 30 green peafowl patrol officers and over 400 infrared monitors. They have built dozens of wildlife drinking spots and feeding stations in areas where the green peafowls are frequently seen, and even do sand baths.

"Green peafowls have long feathers, so they don't bathe in water but in sand. That's why sand baths are important for their feather health," Wang said.

"They enjoy eating sorghum, wheat, corn and peas, and the food we provide undergoes strict safety checks. We have also planted sorghum and similar foods around specifically for them, without pesticides or fertilizers, ensuring their food safety," she added.

The reserve has allocated a piece of farmland specifically for green peafowls. Farmers take care of the fields but don't harvest them, welcoming the peafowls to feast.

"We hope they never go hungry and can grow strong," said Wang.

The reserve's director, Wang Sineng, said that the variety of wildlife seen in the reserve is becoming increasingly diverse, with infrared cameras frequently capturing images of green peafowls with rare companions in the same frame.

"Our monitoring results show that as of last year, we had approximately 430 green peafowls here in Shuangbai, compared to only 56 in 2015," said Wang Sineng.

Shi Yudie contributed to this story.

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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.

Over the past decade, nearly half of the country's wild elephant population has been wiped out.

These gentle giants, which once roamed freely across Bangladesh's lush forests, have been falling victim to human-elephant conflict, driven by relentless deforestation and habitat loss.

In the last 10 years, at least 124 wild elephants were killed across Cox's Bazar, Chattogram, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and Mymensingh regions. Many fell prey to retaliatory killings, electrocution, poaching, and train accidents.

Conversely, 83 people have been killed in elephant encounters during this period. Yet, the government's response has been limited, with few visible actions to prevent further losses.

According to a 2016 survey by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN, there were only 457 elephants in the country, including 268 wild elephants, 93 migratory elephants, and 96 in captivity.

The study found that from 2003 to 2015, 63 wild elephants were killed, clearly indicating the rate of elephant killings has doubled in the last decade.

However, it was not determined how many of the recorded deaths involved migratory elephants.

Meanwhile, a circus elephant died in Lalmonirhat in 2019 due to extreme stress, while a captive elephant calf was killed after being hit by a train in Uttara, Dhaka, in 2023.

With Bangladesh's forests disappearing at an alarming rate, conservationists fear these magnificent creatures may soon vanish from the country altogether.

According to data from the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division under the forest department, at least 102 wild elephants were killed in the Chattogram region alone in the past decade, from 2016 to January this year.

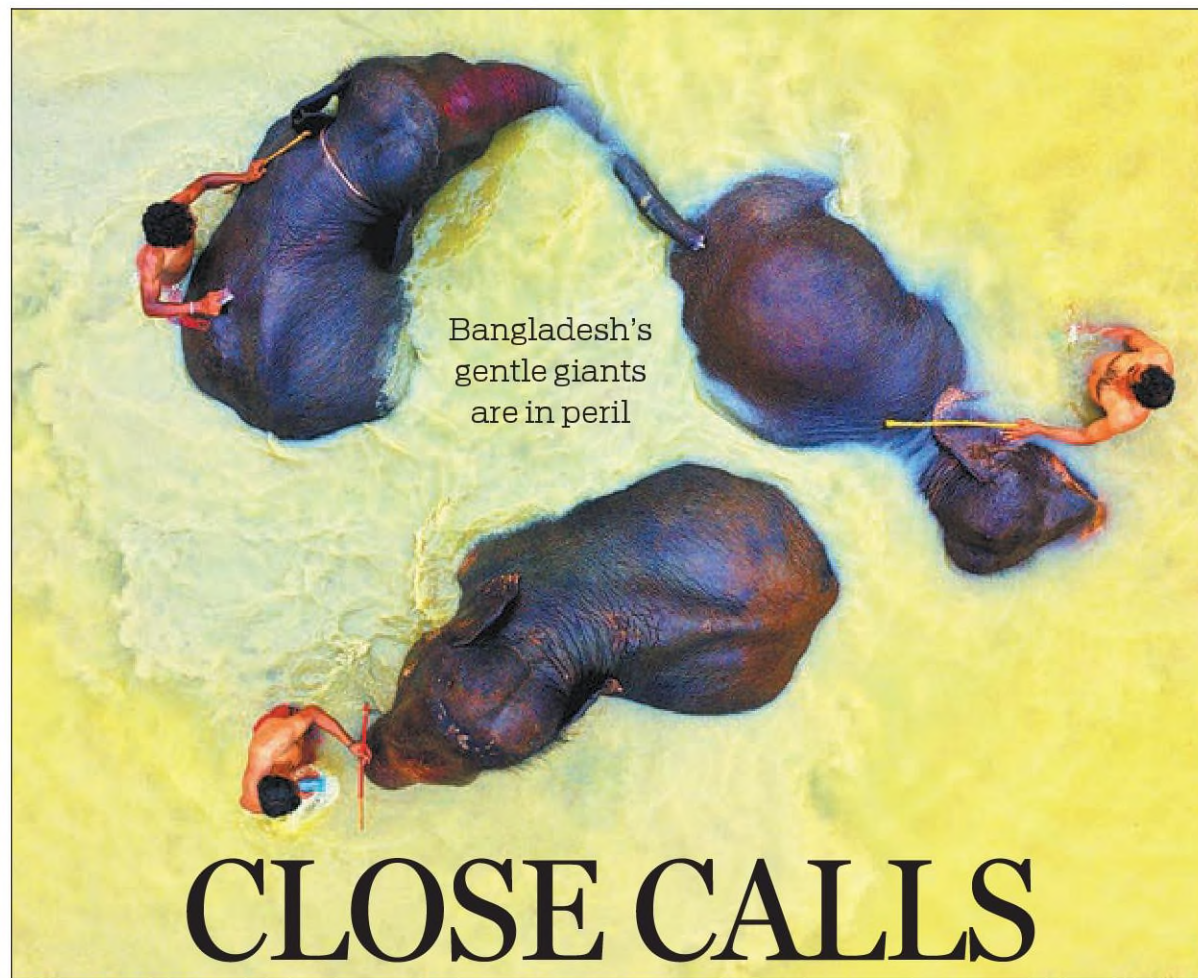
Data obtained by The Daily Star showed that 16 died from electrocution, while five were shot dead. The Wildlife Division reported that 53 elephants died from age-related complications or "natural causes" such as heart failure. At least 17 died from accidents, while the causes of the remaining deaths could not be determined.

During this period, 44 people died in human-elephant conflicts in the region.

Human intervention

Conservationists, however, argue that all the elephant deaths resulted from human intervention.

Despite the scale of the crisis, only 18 cases have been filed over the killing of elephants.



Bangladesh's gentle giants are in peril

CLOSE CALLS

Elephants rest in Karatoya River in Bangladesh, where their owners take them several times a week for a bath. AHSANUL HAQUE NAYEM / SOLENT NEWS

“Deforestation, hill-cutting, and industrial expansion are driving elephants out of their habitats and into human settlements.”

Abu Naser Md Yasin Newaz, divisional forest officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division in Chattogram, Bangladesh



A young elephant hides under a bodhi tree in Bogura, Bangladesh. ABDUL MOMIN / SOLENT NEWS

One such incident involved Ali Akbar, a 36-year-old welder from Chattogram's Karnaphuli upazila. An upazila is an administrative region in Bangladesh, and it is made up of a few villages.

One night, upon stepping out of his home, he encountered an elephant nearby. Fearing it might trample his home and family, he attempted to chase it away, triggering the animal's "fight or flight" instinct.

Within moments, Akbar was crushed to death.

"He was the sole breadwinner of the family... His death has left us in turmoil," said Akbar's wife, Minu Akter.

Over the past six years, from 2019 to 2024, such incidents in Chattogram have claimed 44 lives, left at least 33 injured, and destroyed the properties of 382 families.

The wildlife authorities attribute these encounters to habitat destruction and food shortages, which force wild elephants into human settlements.

"Deforestation, hill-cutting, and industrial expansion are driving elephants out of their habitats and into human settlements," said Abu Naser Md Yasin Newaz, divisional forest officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division in Chattogram.

Meanwhile, 22 elephants and 39 people have died in human-elephant conflicts in the Mymensingh region since 2016, said ANM Abdul Wadud, divisional forest officer in Mymensingh.

Three cases were filed with Nalitari and Jhenaigati police stations in 2023 and 2024 over the deaths of three elephants.

Additionally, a total of seven general diaries were filed with different police stations over elephant deaths, Wadud said.

According to the forest department sources, elephant deaths were recorded as follows: four each in 2016 and 2017, three in 2018, one in 2019, two in 2020, two in 2021, three in 2022, two in 2023, and one in 2024.

MA Aziz, a professor of zoology at Jahangirnagar University who has dedicated his career to studying elephants, warned that wild elephants are currently the most vulnerable species in Bangladesh.

"An elephant needs around 200 to 250 kilograms of vegetation and 150 liters of water daily. But their habitats can no longer provide these... So, they wander into human settlements, desperately looking for food. And that's where tragedy strikes."

Grim reminder

Bangladesh has never launched a long-term conservation initiative for elephants, he said. "If the government does not take immediate action, Bangladesh may no longer be one of the 13 Asian countries with wild elephants within the next decade."

Simanta Dipu, program manager at the IUCN, said, "In 2016, the IUCN recorded only 457 elephants in Bangladesh. A century ago, these creatures roamed freely across the country's forests."

Human settlements, agricultural

lands, roads, highways, brickfields, and village markets have developed within or near elephant movement routes and corridors, exacerbating human-elephant conflicts, he said.

Md Amir Hossain Chowdhury, chief conservator of forests, admitted that most elephant deaths occur due to human-elephant conflicts. Of the 12 elephant corridors that once existed, one in Ramu and two in Teknaf have already been completely closed.

An elephant corridor is a narrow strip of land that allows elephants to move between habitats without human interference.

"We need to involve local communities to save these elephants," Amir said, adding, "We've submitted a project proposal to the Planning Commission for elephant conservation."

The proposed "Elephant Conservation Project", if approved, will be Bangladesh's first government-funded elephant conservation initiative since independence. Under it, the forest department will conduct an elephant census in 2026 to estimate the remaining elephant population.

With a budget of 410 million Bangladeshi taka (\$1.17 million), the three-year pilot project aims to support elephant response teams with funding and logistics, raise public awareness, and install solar fencing to prevent elephants from straying into human settlements.

Solar fencing, which delivers a harmless shock, is expected to deter elephants while protecting villages from destruction. Currently, farmers have set up illegal electric fences to keep elephants away from their farmlands, leading to fatal consequences for the animals.

To address this problem, the conservation project also plans to ensure affected farmers receive compensation for crop damage, aiming to reduce hostility toward elephants.

Syed Rizwana Hasan, environment adviser of Bangladesh, said, "The situation has reached alarming levels as we've destroyed almost all the elephant corridors. Elephants have the habit of using the same routes they're familiar with."

"With the involvement of experts and different organizations, we've already resolved the human-elephant conflict issue in the Korean Export Processing Zone area (in Chattogram's Anowara)."

Regarding the elephant conservation project, she said it is expected to be approved by the end of March.

"Under the project, a certain area of the Gazipur Safari Park will be assigned to rehabilitate captive elephants. We'll also protect the remaining elephant corridors and form elephant response teams in different areas."

THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Concerns voiced over erosion of Bali's architectural identity

Balinese architects have expressed concerns over the growing number of buildings that violate local architectural guidelines and promote illegal architectural practices, prompting the island to lose its cultural identity.

I Wayan Agus Novi Dharmawan, chairman of Indonesian Institute of Architects (IAI) Bali, said that violations had been increasing with little to no strict measures coming from authorities to uphold local stipulations on architectural requirements on the island.

Among those regulations are the limit to building heights of no taller than 15 meters, as well as the use of traditional materials and designs.

Numerous newer buildings, however, fail to reflect Balinese architecture, such as those in Western styles, he said.

"We are losing our identity, we are in an identity crisis," Wayan said.

Construction was the island's fourth-largest economic growth driver last year, contributing around 9 percent of local GDP, according to Statistics Indonesia.

I Nyoman Gede Maha Putra, architecture lecturer and researcher at the Warmadewa University, said that the growing property sector in Bali had contributed to the new architecture designs that cater to the increasing market demands in the resort island.

These include architectural designs that contravene local rules across the island, reaching into the mountains, rice fields and beaches, he said.

He said that enforcement may have been lacking as the local government finds itself in a difficult situation, particularly in balancing the economic benefits and their impact on the local culture.

"If (the illegal practices) are prohibited, then investment might dry up. If they are allowed, then just like now, Bali's architectural landscape will be destroyed," he said.

A growing property sector in Bali would benefit local construction businesses and the economy, he said, but such development should still consider specific aspects, particularly Bali's climate, topography, nature and culture, as well as local livelihoods.

Gathi Subekti, design director at architecture and design firm Arkana Architects, said the investment boost in Bali had often led authorities to compromise on land zoning and other regulatory aspects to accommodate investments, leading to overdevelopment on an island that is famous for its natural landscape.

In some areas, construction was done with "as many buildings as possible", while not allocating enough space for watershed, which violated spatial planning regulations, she said, adding others installed modern glass buildings and flat roofs that were unsuitable for Bali's tropical climate.

She acknowledged that the investments in Bali had contributed significantly to local businesses, but she warned architects to avoid being

"part of the problem", suggesting that projects be filtered to ensure alignment with Bali's architectural context and environment.

Stricter laws required

Wayan from IAI Bali has called for the government to be stricter in upholding the prevailing regulations and to take firm action against illegal architects working on the island.

He has expressed frustration over many cases of architects without licenses and yet still being able to market and promote themselves as "the best architects in Bali", which is also a violation of ethics and conduct for local architects.

The association has conducted multiple discussions with the local government, such as with the manpower agencies and the immigration authorities in Bali, but no progress has been made following their meetings.

Bambang Eryudhawan, chairman of the Indonesian Architect Council, or DAI, said the council was ready to provide support and had been speaking to the government for the past two years on the issue.

He said the government had responded positively to its report. However, progress has been slow amid fast-paced expansion of Bali's architecture sector.

"We want assertiveness (from the local government) and we will be glad to accept legal foreign workers to partner with Indonesians," he said, adding he called for the author-



Besakih Temple in eastern Bali, Indonesia. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ities to improve oversight regarding these practices and violations.

Ida Bagus Setiawan, head of a manpower agency in Bali, said the department had taken action on the association's report by conducting checks to identify illegal practices, while adding that "the findings of illegal practices could be further reported to immigration for visa use violations".

He said the challenge in identifying illegal practices was that the process of overseeing companies or recruiters of foreign workers also involved departments at the regen-

cy level where these businesses operate.

"There needs to be synergy between the IAI and the DAI, manpower agencies at the regency and provincial levels, as well as with Bali's immigration office to tackle the issue of illegal architects in Bali," Setiawan concluded.

Bali's public works and spatial planning agency did not immediately respond to a request for comments.

Meanwhile, the island's tourism agency head Tjok Bagus Pemaayun said he hoped the government could pay attention to this matter, noting

that "Bali's uniqueness is in its culture... including its buildings".

In the tourism sector, he said many buildings, such as hotels and restaurants, are built in modern style, but most of them still incorporate Balinese architectural ornamentation.

However, he expressed concern that "Bali's character is no longer reflected in its architecture", citing the diminishing Balinese architectural forms in buildings, especially those in urban areas.

THE JAKARTA POST, INDONESIA

WORLD

Signs of protest

People hold signs and shout as they rally against House Bill 0793 following its passing in the House K-12 Education Subcommittee, at Cordell Hull State Office Building in Nashville, Tennessee, on Tuesday. The bill, if passed into Tennessee state law, would allow local education agencies or public charter schools to refuse admissions to undocumented students in the United States.

SETH HERALD / REUTERS



Early election looms as Portugal's government loses confidence vote

LISBON — Portugal's center-right minority government collapsed on Tuesday after losing a vote of confidence, with the country now likely to head into its third early general election in as many years.

Lawmakers voted 142-88, with zero abstentions, against the motion of confidence that was presented last Thursday by Prime Minister Luis Montenegro, who has been in the job for 11 months. He called the vote after the opposition questioned his integrity over the dealings of a consultancy firm he founded and is now run by his sons.

Montenegro, 52, said at the start of a parliamentary debate on the vote of confidence that "I have committed no crime."

He denied wrongdoing or any ethical shortcomings by the firm, which has contracts with private companies.

"The insinuation that I mixed my business and political activity is completely abusive, and even insulting," Montenegro told parliament before the vote.

Montenegro's administration now assumes a caretaker role. It is now up to President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa to call a parliamentary election — after he consults the main political parties on Wednesday and his advisory Council of State on Thursday. He has said a new ballot could be held in mid-May.

The next general election in Portugal was scheduled for January 2028. "We tried everything to avoid a snap election," Montenegro told reporters after the vote. His administration had tried to convince the main opposition Socialists to abstain from the vote, or to agree on terms for the government to withdraw the motion.

Montenegro said he had proposed that he face a parliamentary committee inquiry into his family's company that would last up to two months, something he had previously ruled out. The Socialists refused to negotiate setting a time limit.

Any lengthier investigation would have worn out the govern-

ment, Montenegro said.

Socialist leader Pedro Nuno Santos labeled the attempts to negotiate just minutes before the vote "desperate and shameful", saying that Montenegro was the only one to blame for the crisis and was "unfit to govern".

An early ballot is all but inevitable, but analysts see no strong mandate for any political force emerging from it.

Voter fatigue

Voters are already showing election fatigue and disillusionment with politicians.

"This seems like a joke, no one understands why there's a new election so soon. Politicians blame each other, but all of them are being irresponsible," said Joao Brito, a 70-year-old retired civil servant in downtown Lisbon.

Political scientist Adelino Maltez of Lisbon University said opinion polls showed very little change in voter preferences from the March 2024 election, which Montenegro's Democratic Alliance, or AD, won by a slender margin — securing 80 seats in the 230-seat house.

The AD and the Socialists, who now have 78 seats, are neck-and-neck in most surveys.

Montenegro's Social Democrats are hoping that economic growth estimated at 1.9 percent last year, compared with the EU's 0.8 percent average, and a jobless rate of 6.4 percent, roughly the EU average, will keep their support firm.

"The problem is that the new election will not be conclusive. ... The AD and the Socialists are tied. It is a situation that will be difficult for them to navigate," Maltez said. A centrist pact between the Social Democrats and the Socialists was the only solution, despite the differences in their policy proposals, he said.

The two main rivals had such an accord in parliament only once, in 1983-85.

"If they don't do it, it will be more of the same instability," Maltez said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Sino-Slovak relations stressed

Ambassador expresses optimism for closer economic, cultural cooperation

By YANG RAN

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Peter Lizak, Slovak ambassador to China, emphasized the strategic partnership between the two nations, highlighting a high level of bilateral relations and expressing optimism for future collaborations in economic and cultural spheres to further enhance bilateral ties.

Having served as Slovakia's ambassador to China for more than two years, Lizak has traveled extensively across various regions of China. Unlike many of his diplomatic colleagues, Lizak's understanding of China extends beyond official duties and meetings with government officials.

A passionate ping-pong player for over 50 years, Lizak has found an additional avenue to connect with the nation. Also a well-known sport in Slovakia, ping-pong has allowed him to bond with local citizens in Beijing's parks, gaining insights into the everyday lives and transformations of ordinary Chinese citizens.

"I went jogging to the park and I saw the corner with the ping-pong equipment and the people playing there. And I was shocked twice. First was the quality of the equipment because you would expect, in the park, the tables would not be so well arranged or not kept well. But they are actually top-quality equipment," the ambassador said. "And the second shock was the quality of the people who are playing. They are playing really good."

"It's a really nice possibility to have direct contact with local peo-

"I greatly appreciate what China has achieved in the last 40 years. It's a miracle in my eyes — an economic miracle. The difference in how people lived 40 years ago compared to today is immense."

Peter Lizak, Slovak ambassador to China

ple," he said. "Not all of them speak English, but some can. So I can somehow see the way they live their daily life."

"I greatly appreciate what China has achieved in the last 40 years. It's a miracle in my eyes — an economic miracle. The difference in how people lived 40 years ago compared to today is immense. I think the people are living a good life and are satisfied with it."

"I believe that China's future development will shift from focusing on quantity to quality. It mirrored the Chinese leader's call for rejuvenation," the ambassador added.

The connection between Slovakia and China transcends their shared passion for ping-pong. With diplomatic ties dating back to 1949, China is Slovakia's largest trading partner outside the European Union. Slovakia was also one of the first European countries to



Peter Lizak

sign a memorandum of understanding on Belt and Road Initiative cooperation in 2015.

"The BRI initiative is a key effort by China to engage with other countries and is evidently yielding results. We highly appreciate what has been achieved with many Chinese partners," the ambassador stated.

Last year marked a significant milestone in bilateral relations with the joint statement on establishing a strategic partnership during the visit of Robert Fico, prime minister of the Slovak Republic, to China in November.

Solid foundation

"The strategic partnership stands to confirm the high level of our relations, especially as we celebrated 75 years of diplomatic ties last year. We are one of the earliest countries to recognize China in 1949, providing a solid foundation for cooperation in all fields," Lizak noted. "On that basis, we have signed 14 memorandums in various areas last year."

Economic and cultural collaborations hold particular promise for the future. Last year, Chinese company Gotion High-Tech signed an investment agreement with Slovakia's Ministry of Economy to invest 1.23 billion euros (\$1.27 billion) to construct a battery production plant for electric vehicles in Slovakia's Lower Nitra region, marking the second-largest investment project in the nation's history.

For Chinese companies, the trend of investing in Slovakia as a gateway to European and global

markets will persist, as those who have tapped into its potential are pleased with their achievements, the ambassador explained.

"For Slovakia, Chinese investment means more local jobs, advanced technology, and new opportunities for research and development. Investments in the battery and automotive industries are also expected to attract further investors, given these sectors' need for local suppliers."

Vibrant cultural exchanges also play a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations. "Last year, Slovakia had its first separate stand at the Beijing Book Fair, which was a huge success. We showcased books translated into Chinese, including children's stories, providing a positive impulse for our relations," Lizak said.

"In Slovakia, we also have projects for Chinese language education, including a secondary school where Chinese is taught as the main foreign language and even some subjects are taught in Chinese. Additionally, Confucius Institutes have been also established in the frame of partner universities in Slovakia."

This year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the European Union and China. "It's a good opportunity to evaluate our progress, achievements, and future direction," the ambassador remarked.

"China and the European Union have experienced positive parallel development. ... We should build on this foundation for the coming decades," he said.



Online See more by scanning the code.



Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro (center) attends a debate preceding a confidence vote at the Portuguese parliament in Lisbon on Tuesday. ARMANDO FRANCA / AP

EU plans to deport more rejected asylum-seekers

By JONATHAN POWELL in London
jonathan@mail.chinadailyuk.com

The European Union unveiled a new migration proposal on Tuesday aimed at increasing deportations of rejected asylum-seekers.

With data from the European Commission showing that less than 20 percent of people ordered to leave the EU actually depart, the "European System for Returns" plan presented includes establishing controversial "return hubs" in third countries as a solution.

Under the proposal, the European Commission seeks to strengthen the bloc's return system, including expanded powers to detain irregular migrants, reported news agencies.

"We are creating the scope for member states to explore new solutions for return," Magnus Brunner, the EU commissioner for migration, told a news briefing in Strasbourg on Tuesday.

"The European system needs to be clear that when someone is issued a return decision, they are being told to leave not just the country but the entire European Union,"

said Brunner, who described the 20 percent figure as unacceptable.

"Any figure would be an improvement, but we don't want to pin down any specific figures," he added.

The proposal also seeks to establish uniform standards across all 27 EU member states and enables authorities from one country to execute deportation orders issued by another — thereby addressing a gap in last year's migration and asylum pact.

The so-called "return hubs" are in fact deportation facilities located in non-EU countries. These centers would serve as temporary holding locations where rejected asylum-seekers would stay before being sent back to their home countries.

Humanitarian organizations have criticized the proposal as undermining the right to asylum.

"We can likely expect more people being locked up in immigration detention centers across Europe, families separated and people sent to countries they don't even know," warned Silvia Carta from the Platform for International Coopera-

tion on Undocumented Migrants.

While the EU won't directly manage or construct the return hubs, it plans to negotiate agreements with countries willing to accept rejected asylum-seekers.

"Keeping people deliberately out of sight and out of mind is not a sustainable solution to Europe's migration challenges," said Marta Welander from the International Rescue Committee, cautioning that such arrangements could lead to increased rights violations.

Rising anti-migration sentiment and hard-right electoral gains across EU countries have pressured governments to adopt stricter policies.

A group of EU nations, including Sweden, Italy, Denmark and the Netherlands, pushed for urgent legislation in October to accelerate deportations and explore "innovative" approaches to combat irregular migration.

"If we are not going to do the return hubs, what will we do instead is my question. We have tried other systems for many years, it doesn't work," Johan Forssell, Sweden's migration minister, told Agence France-Presse.

Return hubs are likely to face legal hurdles, similar to the UK's abandoned Rwanda deportation initiative and Italy's stalled migrant processing facilities in Albania.

China's innovation seen as key to AI boom

By XING YI in London
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China's capability in innovation, especially in key areas such as artificial intelligence, is going to shock those who try to block it, and benefit those who work with it, says Jack Perry, chairman of the 48 Group, a London-based organization dedicated to promoting Sino-British economic cooperation.

Commenting on the detailed discussions on AI during the just concluded two sessions, the annual meetings of China's National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Perry said he wasn't surprised by the rapid breakthroughs made by companies in China, including the Hangzhou-based tech startup DeepSeek, whose AI model launched in January rivals the capabilities of models developed by leading US company OpenAI.

"DeepSeek shocked everybody. It did not shock me. If you try to limit China, they will go over you in those areas," Perry said, pointing to the United States government's export control of semiconductor manufacturing equipment and chips to China. "That's naivety and ignorance," he



Jack Perry

said. "It wants to slow China's efforts in AI, but actually it forced China to accelerate."

"China's capability of innovation, and cultivating tomorrow's leaders in key areas is beyond anyone else," said Perry, citing the rapid increase in computer science degree students in China over the past decade.

According to a report by China Internet Network Information Center last year, there were more than 4,500 AI-related companies registered in the country by 2024, constituting a relatively comprehensive AI industry ecosystem.

"I think in the next two years, people will see more DeepSeek situations where people will be shocked in the West if they're not working with China," he said.

Perry noted the AI Plus initiative being mentioned in this year's Government Work Report, which said the government will encourage combining digital technologies with China's manufacturing and market strengths more effectively.

Echoing the initiative, Perry said

he thinks though AI is now seen as a sector in itself, it is going to be a platform where every sector will be built on AI. "It is going to be a foundation of every sector of today and tomorrow," he said.

Perry said in the past four years the 48 Group has been looking into the best expertise in AI, and will hold an expo in Beijing themed on AI Plus in October — focusing on healthcare and renewable energy.

"We will bring experts and large business delegations to explore and showcase what AI can do to those sectors," he said, adding that the United Kingdom has a significant presence in AI technology.

The UK is home to the British-US AI research laboratory Google DeepMind, which made headlines in 2016 after its AlphaGo program beat a human Go world champion.

"The problems we have in the United Kingdom are scalability, capital, and energy resources. ... Working with China can help our capital, and also can help our scalability," said Perry.

"China's statements in the two sessions are about helping foreign companies be more suitable and access China's infrastructure and market. So that is a good thing for the foreign companies," he added.

WORLD

Forces rescue 190 hostages in Pakistan

Terror attack condemned amid efforts to get other train passengers released

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
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Pakistan's security sources said on Wednesday the military had freed 190 train passengers taken hostage by gunmen on the second day of the siege in the mountainous southwest.

More than 450 passengers were on board when terrorists captured the train in a remote frontier district in Balochistan Province, with an unknown number of hostages still being held.

"So far, 190 passengers have been rescued, and 30 terrorists have been killed," security sources told AFP. "Due to the presence of women and children with suicide bombers, extreme caution is being exercised."

The assault was immediately claimed by the Balochistan Liberation Army, which released a video of an explosion on the track followed by dozens of militants emerging from mountainous hiding places and storming onto the carriages.

Hundreds of troops and teams in helicopters have been thrown into the effort to rescue the hostages from the area where the train was stopped.

However, militants with bombs strapped to their bodies were sitting next to other passengers, a security source told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"The militants have made some suicide bombers sit right next to some hostage passengers", complicating rescue efforts, he added.

Local media quoted government sources as saying the militants killed at least 10 people, including nine security personnel.

The train was heading from Balochistan's capital Quetta to Peshawar in the northwest when the militants launched the attack in Kacchi district, said Muhammad Kashif, a senior official of Pakistan Railways.

"The attack occurred in a mountainous region where communication is severely restricted due to the lack of mobile service," Kashif said.

The train driver was killed after suffering serious injuries, police and railway officials said.

Following the incident, security forces and rescue teams rushed to the site. A full-scale security operation is underway to rescue the passengers and ensure their complete safety,

according to Balochistan police and officials.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the terror attack. "Those who have attacked the passengers are standing against Balochistan and its values," Zardari said.

"The Baloch people denounce those who have attacked the passengers, elders and children. No religion or society teaches to commit such a heinous act."

He praised the security forces' commendable efforts in rescuing the passengers.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also condemned the attack and vowed to "bring the cowardly terrorists to justice".

Morale high

"The morale of the security forces is high despite the challenges," Sharif said, and the nation will continue the fight "till the end of the menace of terrorism".

"The entire nation is standing with the security forces against the war of terrorism," he said.

Earlier, railway officials confirmed that 57 rescued passengers were transported to Quetta in the early hours of Wednesday, while 23 others remained in Mach, a town in Balochistan.

The Balochistan government has declared an emergency and mobilized all relevant institutions to manage the situation, provincial spokesperson Shahid Rind said.

China strongly condemns the terrorist attack in Balochistan and expresses firm opposition to terrorism in any form, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Wednesday.

"We will continue to firmly support Pakistan in combating terrorism, maintaining solidarity and social stability, and protecting the safety of the people," she said. "China stands ready to strengthen counterterrorism and security cooperation with Pakistan and jointly keep the region peaceful, secure and stable."

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei also condemned the attack and the hostage-taking. He extended his sympathies to the government and people of Pakistan.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.



Palestinians wait in line for water next to a distribution truck at a displacement camp west of Jabalia city in the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. BASHAR TALEB / AFP

Gaza cease-fire talks begin in Doha

CAIRO — A senior Hamas official said a fresh round of Gaza cease-fire talks began on Tuesday in the Qatari capital Doha, with the group approaching the negotiations "positively and responsibly".

"A new round of cease-fire negotiations began today," Abdul Rahman Shadiid said in a statement.

"Our movement is dealing with these negotiations positively and responsibly."

Israel has also sent a team of negotiators for talks aimed at extending the fragile truce in Gaza, but has so far not commented on the talks.

"We hope that the current round of negotiations leads to tangible progress toward beginning the second phase," Shadiid said.

He also expressed hope that United States Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff would help "initiate negotiations for the second phase of the cease-fire agreement".

"The US administration bears responsibility due to its unwavering support for the occupying (Israeli) government."

The first 42-day phase of the cease-fire deal expired earlier this month without agreement on subsequent stages meant to secure a lasting end to the conflict.

There are differing views on how to proceed, with Hamas seeking immediate negotiations for the next phase, while Israel wants to extend the first phase.

Hamas has accused Israel of reneging on the deal, saying in a statement on Monday that Israel "refuses to commence the second phase, exposing its intentions of evasion and stalling".

Ahead of the current round of talks, Israel halted the supply of electricity to Gaza's only desalination plant, a move Hamas condemned as "cheap and unacceptable blackmail".

Israel has already stopped aid deliveries to Gaza amid the deadlock over the cease-fire.

Fresh airstrikes

While the fate of the cease-fire remains uncertain, both sides have largely refrained from all-out hostilities.

However, in recent days, Israel has conducted daily strikes in Gaza, targeting what it claims are militants.

On Tuesday, an Israeli airstrike killed four men in Gaza City, according to the territory's civil defense agency.

The Israeli military said its air force had struck "several terrorists engaged in suspicious activity posing a threat to IDF (Israeli) troops".

In Yemen, the Houthis said on Tuesday that they would resume attacks on Israeli ships passing through the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden — ending a period of relative calm starting January with the Gaza cease-fire.

The Houthis had launched more than 100 attacks targeting ships from November 2023, saying they were in solidarity with Palestinians over Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

The group said the ban on Israeli shipping would "take effect from the time this statement is issued" and that "any Israeli ship attempting to violate this ban shall be targeted in the declared zone of operations".

The leader of Yemen's Houthis had warned on Friday that the group would resume its naval operations against Israel if it did not lift a blockade of aid into Gaza within four days.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Ballots in motion

Electoral workers count ballots in Nuuk, Greenland, during parliamentary elections on Tuesday. Official results showed on Wednesday that the center-right opposition Demokraatit (Democrats) party won the election securing 29.9 percent of the votes.

EVGENIY MALOLETKA / AP

Highway horror



Emergency responders clear the site of a bus accident in South Africa's Gauteng Province on Tuesday. At least 16 people were killed after the bus overturned on a highway in Ekurhuleni, near Johannesburg's OR Tambo International Airport. SHIRAZ MOHAMED / XINHUA

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Stopgap bill to avert govt shutdown passed

The Republican-controlled US House of Representatives passed a stopgap bill on Tuesday to keep federal agencies funded past Friday, averting a partial shutdown beginning this weekend even as President Donald Trump dramatically shrinks the government. The bill passed in a nearly party-line 217-213 vote, with one Republican voting no and one Democrat yes. The continuing resolution, which largely keeps the government funded at its current level through Sept 30, would need to be passed by the Republican-majority Senate and signed by Trump into law by Friday to avoid a shutdown.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Education Department to halve staff members

The US Department of Education said on Tuesday it would lay off nearly half its staff members, a possible precursor to closing altogether. The terminations are part of the department's "final mission", it said in a news release, alluding to President Donald Trump's vow to eliminate the department. Asked on Fox News whether the firings would lead to the department's dismantling, Education Secretary Linda McMahon said "yes", adding that doing so "was the president's mandate". The layoffs would leave the department with 2,183 workers, down from 4,133 when Trump took office in January.

SOUTH KOREA

Ministry bans drones ahead of Yoon ruling

South Korea's air traffic authorities will ban drones from flying around the Constitutional Court in Seoul from Thursday ahead of the ruling on the impeachment of President Yoon Suk-yeol. The measure will take effect from Thursday to Wednesday, according to a notice to airmen issued on the Transport Ministry's aeronautical information system. Police said earlier it had asked the ministry to impose a temporary ban on drones around the court and adjacent areas spanning 1.85 kilometers until the end of this month.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Zimbabwe farmers upbeat about new tobacco season

HARARE — As a new marketing season dawned, Tendai Chimhondoro waited patiently for her golden leaf crop to go under the hammer in Zimbabwe's capital Harare.

The small-scale farmer from Shamva, Mashonaland Central Province, has been selling tobacco on the auction floors since she started growing the cash crop three years ago.

"I am expecting the leaf to fetch a higher price at the auction because the quality of my leaf this year is high compared to last year's," said Chimhondoro, 45.

The tobacco auction season opened on March 5 and is expected to run until the third quarter of the year. Chimhondoro said that while tobacco is not a food crop, it generates

more income to put food on the table than staple crops.

"Since I started bringing my tobacco to the auction floor, my life has changed. I am now at another level, and my earnings have greatly improved," she said.

Although most tobacco sales occur through contracts, auction floors provide a ready market for many small-

scale farmers to sell their produce.

In Zimbabwe, tobacco is known as the "golden leaf" because of its distinctive color and significant contribution to the economy — providing livelihood for many households.

Primarily exported to China, the United Arab Emirates and South Africa, among other destinations, it has become one of the leading foreign

currency earners for Zimbabwe.

According to the country's Tobacco Industry and Marketing Board, tobacco farmers have expanded planting area to 125,000 hectares this season, up from 113,000 hectares last year. Driven by favorable rainfall, the output is projected to rise from 240 million kilograms last year to 280 million kg this year.

Lloyd Titi, a farmer from Shamva, said he preferred tobacco to food crops for its drought tolerance, especially as climate change has made

rainfall patterns increasingly erratic.

"Maize has water thirst, but tobacco is short seasoned, so it's more dependable," he said.

George Seremwe, president of the Zimbabwe Tobacco Growers Association, expressed optimism about a rebound in the tobacco sector this year. "As we went into January and up to date, the rains are good and reaping is ongoing," he said. "The marketing season is promising to be good."

XINHUA

WORLDUS

Panel: US tariffs will alter global trade

'Modern era of globalization' could be near end, says speaker at NYC talk

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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Participants in a discussion on US tariff policy said that it could have a long-lasting impact on the American economy, trade with key partners, and international relations.

The discussion on Tuesday was held at the China Institute in America, a 100-year-old organization based in New York City that strives for better relations between China and the United States.

Panelists included Craig Allen, former president of the US-China Business Council; Brad W. Setser, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and former senior adviser to the US trade representative; and Susan Yuqing Feng, journalist and director of programs at the China Institute in America, who moderated the discussion.

Feng stated that US President Donald Trump has placed tariffs on more than \$440 billion of Chinese imports, and the current tariffs on Chinese goods are around 39 percent. The president has also threatened to enact tariffs of up to 60 percent on China. She asked what effect that would have on global trade relations.

"If President Trump does what he says he is going to do, yes, I do think we're going to have something that's close to the end of the modern era of globalization," Setser said.

"If you do 50, 60 percent tariffs on China, standard economic analysis would say the trade between the US and China, the direct part, will go to zero. If you put 25 percent tariffs on the entire world or 20 percent tariffs on the entire world, the US will import less. We'll also export less," he said.

Since the beginning of his second term, Trump has placed 20 percent tariffs on Chinese imports to the US. He also has threatened to place tariffs of 25 percent and more on goods from Mexico and Canada. But they have



Shipping containers are stacked at the Port of Long Beach in California on March 4. FREDERIC J. BROWN / AFP

been on again, off again. He enacted tariffs of 25 percent on all steel and aluminum imports in March, and plans reciprocal tariffs for most trading partners on April 2.

Allen said that it was important to understand what the Trump administration is trying to achieve by using tariffs, that it is mainly to bring back manufacturing and jobs to the US. But he said the levies have several other purposes.

"They're to raise revenue, tariffs can also be used for retribution. ... Tariffs can be used for reciprocity to encourage other countries to lower their tariffs for perceived harms," Allen said.

Mexico, Canada and China are the US' top three trading partners.

Feng said she wanted to understand the president's reason for increasing tariffs on China.

"I don't think the goals that this administration has set out are clear yet," Setser said. "There's obviously

tensions. There's obviously contradictions. If you follow their own rhetoric, we are just actually getting started.

"These are the appetizers, so to speak. The main course perhaps comes on April 2 with the reciprocal tariffs, so perhaps it gets delayed and pushed beyond."

Allen noted that the trade landscape between the US and China has changed over the past decade.

"In 2017, Chinese imports into the US as a percentage of our total imports peaked at a little bit above 21 percent," he said. "In 2024, they were about 13 percent, and so while our total trade deficit has gone up enormously, the share from China has gone down, and I suspect that both parties approve of that."

He said that China's exports are growing rapidly and will go from 33 percent of global manufacturing to 42 percent by 2030, according to the United Nations.

American and Chinese companies are now diversifying which countries they work with, which could mean that goods shipped to the US will avoid tariffs.

Economists are closely watching how the pending reciprocal tariffs will work out.

Feng asked if the levies would have any benefits.

Setser said that if reciprocal tariffs are imposed on many countries worldwide, then the levies on China will seem less significant.

Allen added that reciprocal tariffs could flout World Trade Organization rules.

In 2018, during his first term in office, Trump placed tariffs on \$300 billion of Chinese-made goods, sparking a trade war. President Joe Biden maintained those original tariffs and increased levies on \$18 billion of Chinese imports in September.

Setser explained that at the offset, Trump's goal was to get China to buy more goods from the US. But he said that at present, Trump is more focused on a trade war with Canada, Mexico and the European Union. He also has repeatedly suggested that Canada become the 51st US state.

Overall, Allen believes that tariffs are not an effective measure to increase employment across the economy. He said that the US had experimented with it, and it did not work out well and contributed to inflation in 2023, which he said "Americans were very resentful about."

Setser added that "we could certainly throw the US and the global economy into a downturn with this level of tariffs introduced this quickly. ... We are at least taking policy decisions that put us at risk of a self-inflicted recession."

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily

except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 - No.1535

CHINA DAILY
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Vitality of private sector high on agenda

By LIU YUKUN
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Private enterprises, buoyed by China's advancing modernization drive, voiced optimism regarding the future trajectory of the private sector economy despite challenges, during the recently concluded two sessions.

The comments aligned with the key priorities detailed in the Government Work Report, underscoring the importance of implementing policies and actions efficiently to support the expansion of the private sector while ensuring the lawful protection of the legitimate rights and interests of private businesses and entrepreneurs.

Additionally, the report promotes the idea of competent private enterprises developing a resilient contemporary corporate structure incorporating unique Chinese elements. It also stresses the necessity of addressing intense competition and improving market entry conditions in burgeoning industries, positioning this as a crux of the government's 2025 agenda.

Echoing the Government Work Report, Wang Gang, chairman of Shandong province-based photovoltaic materials company Jinjing Group, expressed his confidence in the upcoming policy directives for the photovoltaic industry, stressing the imperative of innovation and advancements in driving sustainable growth.

"Intense competition in the



A solar-panel component production line at a private company in Shizuishan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. YUAN HONGYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

domestic market and ongoing trade conflicts have posed great challenges for businesses. Against this backdrop, companies in traditional sectors like us face pressure of industrial upgrade and global supply chain restructuring, propelling us to find new growth points," Wang said.

In response to these challenges, Jinjing is actively pursuing a "second track" strategy, focusing on developing green energy materials aside from its main business — glass production, Wang said, adding the company is eyeing perovskite solar cell manufacturing for new growth points.

"More policies are expected to support provinces and autonomous regions with unique resource endowments to build diversified industrial clusters," he said.

Yu Ruifen, president of Shanghai-based snack chain Lyfen, said the government should introduce rele-

vant measures to enhance entrepreneurs' confidence and encourage them to expand their investments, strengthen legal and institutional safeguards, and build a fair business environment for the private sector.

"Various regions are promoting economic recovery through measures such as issuing consumer vouchers. It is advisable to promote the upgrading of county-level consumption and improve counties' logistics distribution systems."

Yao Jinbo, chairman and CEO of life services platform 58.com, said, "The private economy is currently at a critical juncture where opportunities and challenges coexist, and it is also a key period for industrial transformation and upgrading.

"Looking at the opportunities ahead, the private sector's influence and importance in the broader context of economic and social progress

are on the rise. In the consumer services sector where we operate, we have been consistently innovating, introducing new formats and consumption trends."

For instance, the at-home care services sector has seen exponential growth, expanding from under 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) in 2022 to nearly 3 trillion at present, with sustained momentum, creating 37.6 million jobs in 2021 and over 45 million today, Yao said.

"Meanwhile, technological advancements are fundamentally reshaping industries, notably through the widespread adoption of locally developed intelligent tools like DeepSeek. Private enterprises have excelled at seizing opportunities, swiftly adapting, and optimizing their operations. Given the current landscape, I anticipate the emergence of numerous 'giant-level' private enterprises going forward," he added.

China shares looking spry on tech boom

Nasdaq Golden Dragon China Index jumped 2.83 percent on Tuesday

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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While China is undergoing economic restructuring featured by the rapid development of new quality productive forces, the capital market will also be buoyed by emerging industries and technologies, said experts.

While the US stock market tumbled for two consecutive days this week, with the Nasdaq and S&P 500 shedding over 4 percent and 3.5 percent, respectively, the Nasdaq Golden Dragon China Index — which tracks US-listed Chinese companies — jumped 2.83 percent on Tuesday.

Morgan Stanley's data showed that the Chinese stock market received a total net capital inflow of \$3.8 billion in February, with passive funds making the greatest contribution.

KWEB, an exchange-traded fund managed by US asset manager KraneShares, has seen over \$1.7 billion of net capital inflow since February. The ETF mainly tracks Chinese internet-related lists such as Tencent and Alibaba.

The MSCI China Index has risen nearly 18 percent so far this year. While the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index slipped 0.23 percent on Wednesday, combined trading value on the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses exceeded 1.5 trillion yuan (\$210 billion).

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and humanoid robots — as well as new energy vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic products — will be translated into more "catalyzing factors" in the Chinese capital market this year, attracting more investment to nurture innovation, said Zhu Haibin, chief China economist at JPMorgan.

Zhu said the sudden emergence of DeepSeek reflects China's capabilities in innovation.

Although emerging industries have registered rapid growth over the past few years, there is still much room for them to increase their weighting in China's economy. Strong growth momentum in this aspect is also conducive to the stabilization of China's economic restructuring, he added.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission, the country's top securities watchdog, on Tuesday

said it will step up support for technological innovation and the development of new quality productive forces.

The fundamental mechanisms will be more inclusive and adaptive. Quality tech firms that are not yet profitable will also be supported for bourse listings, said the CSRC.

Progress has been made. AI companies, and the technology sector in general — including computer, software and telecommunications-related firms — have seen their weighting in total A-share market valuations rise significantly since 2020, said Meng Lei, China equity strategist at UBS Securities.

This is in line with the CSRC's strengthened support for technological innovation, said Meng.

Meanwhile, the A-share market will see 1.7 trillion yuan of long-term capital inflow this year, which will facilitate the market's structural improvement and exert a positive impact on market performance, he said.

In addition, an average 6 percent year-on-year increase in A-share companies' profitability can be expected this year. China's moderately rising inflation, stabilizing economic development and the implementation of relaxed policies will help with the recovery, Meng added.

Yu Xiangrong, chief China economist at Citigroup, wrote in a report on Tuesday that the bank has raised its forecast for China's real GDP growth in 2025 from 4.2 percent to 4.7 percent, and that for 2026 from 4.1 percent to 4.8 percent.

The rise of new growth engines, best represented by AI, and the recovery of former economic drivers such as the property market, are the major reasons for Citigroup to revise its forecasts, said Yu.

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said that they have noticed from the recent A-share market rally the results of the so-called wealth effect, under which scenario people tend to spend or invest more if their asset values rise.

The rally has also taken into account the revaluation of Chinese lists. The quick recovery in trading value has directly stimulated the country's GDP growth, Lu said.

Briefly

SME development index edges up

An index tracking the development of China's small and medium-sized enterprises edged up in February, with subindexes rallying across the board, data from an industry association showed on Wednesday. The SME development index rose by 0.8 points from the previous month to 89.8, the China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises data showed.

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 45 pips to 7.1696 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.

NEV output, sales surge in February

China's new energy vehicles performed strongly in both production and sales in February, industry data showed. NEV production surged 91.5 percent year-on-year to 888,000 units in February, according to data issued by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. NEV sales also grew rapidly by 87.1 percent year-on-year to 892,000 units last month, accounting for 41.9 percent of total new vehicle sales of the month, according to CAAM data. Complementing the rapid NEV growth trend, China launched an insurance platform for NEVs on Jan 25, which has already covered 114,000 units as of Feb 25, following guidelines to address challenges and bolster consumer trust in this rapidly expanding sector. Boosted by the implementation of pro-consumption measures, such as a consumer goods trade-in program, China's auto industry will continue to post stable development, according to the CAAM.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Cross-sea bridge project takes wing

By ZHANG XIAOMIN
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The Dalian Changhai cross-sea bridge project, with a total investment of 7.9 billion yuan (\$1.1 billion), was inaugurated recently in Dalian, Liaoning province. It is scheduled to be completed and open to traffic by 2029.

This project marks the first cross-sea bridge in Northeast China to be constructed using a new mechanism of cooperation between the government and social capital.

The bid was won by a consortium led by China State Construction Engineering Corp, which is responsible for overall investment, construction, and operation.

The bridge spans a total length of 25.5 kilometers, with a 6.5-km land segment and a 19-km sea segment.

It will incorporate modern construction techniques and new green low-carbon technologies, featuring four-lane roadways

with a designed speed of 80 km per hour.

Changhai county is the only island border county in China, renowned for its natural fishing resources and delicious seafood.

However, various natural factors such as tides, strong winds and fog limit maritime transportation in the area for over 60 days each year, hindering travel of the residents and significantly impacting activities like healthcare and emergency response on the islands.

"The construction of the bridge will put an end to this once and for all," said Yu Jingxi, deputy head of Changhai. "Upon completion, the bridge will enable 24-hour rapid travel between the land and islands, freeing residents from the constraints of wind and waves for travel, and boosting goods transportation, and industrial development," he said.

Yu believes that the bridge will serve as an important economic

artery for the high-quality development of Changhai, promoting the integration of culture, sports and tourism to enhance the quality of the Changshan Archipelago tourism resort.

Xiong Maoping, Party chief of Dalian, said that as China's largest land-island road project under construction, the Changhai cross-sea bridge is a foundational project to drive high-quality development of the marine economy and improve the production and living conditions of the islands' residents.

Xiong highlighted that Dalian has actively seized national policy opportunities in recent years, striving to secure projects and stabilize investments.

In the first quarter, the city initiated and resumed construction on 1,392 projects with a planned annual investment of 103.85 billion yuan. Among these, 242 were newly initiated projects, with over 60 percent being industrial projects.

Robotic dogs patrol Beijing E-Town

In a park in the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area in southeastern Beijing, two robotic dogs performing patrol duties have captured the attention of many passersby.

These gray and white robotic canines, equipped with multi-spectral cameras and high-precision sensors, represent the latest innovation in Beijing's ongoing efforts to build a smart city.

The Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area, also known as Beijing E-Town, announced recently that the area had officially upgraded its intelligent patrol system by integrating unmanned patrol cars and robotic dogs with AI algorithms and big data analysis, to provide 24-hour full-coverage patrols throughout the area.

According to Beijing E-Town, the newly deployed equipment includes 18 L4 unmanned vehicles, 15 manned patrol vehicles and two industrial-grade intelligent robotic dogs.

Each robotic dog weighs approximately 65 kilograms and is adaptable to extreme environments such

as heavy rain and high temperatures. It features a multi-spectral camera and searchlights on its head, while the rear design of the robotic dogs allows specialized equipment such as explosion-proof gear and gas detectors to be fitted rapidly — enabling them to handle a variety of tasks with remarkable flexibility.

The unmanned patrol vehicles are equipped with 360-degree panoramic cameras and high-precision sensors. These vehicles can connect with the smart city video system, thereby creating a comprehensive, three-dimensional monitoring network that integrates aerial and ground surveillance.

The robotic dogs are tasked with meticulous ground inspections, while unmanned vehicles handle supply deliveries and data transmission, working together to estab-

lish a highly efficient operational model, Beijing E-Town said.

Moreover, this new generation intelligent patrol system leverages advanced AI algorithms and big data analysis to detect abnormal situations, fire hazards and other potential risks in real time. Through a 5G network, the system can instantly alert the command center, ensuring a swift response to every emergency.

"The upgraded system has tripled patrol efficiency compared to traditional methods and significantly reduces blind spots in surveillance," said a spokesperson from Beijing E-Town, adding that they will continue to explore the deep integration of AI with urban governance, delivering more cutting-edge technological advancements from the laboratory to the streets and communities.

Meanwhile, Beijing E-Town has also indicated that the robotic dogs will help ensure the security of an upcoming half-marathon in April, which will see robotic and human athletes competing along the same route.

Among China's rapidly expand-



Robotic dogs attract visitors during a recent event in Beijing E-Town. HE GUANXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ing array of AI-driven innovations, robotic dogs make frequent appearances in the public spotlight. Though the quadruped robot sector is still in its nascent commercial phase, an increasing number of Chinese innovators are entering the field, driven by promising market potential.

In December 2024, a video of an agile wheel-legged robot dog took the internet by storm. It shows the robotic dog executing impressive

stunts like spinning around, performing side flips and leaping from heights.

Research by Shenzhen-based GGII, a consultancy that specializes in emerging industries, shows that the global quadruped robot market is projected to surpass 560,000 units by 2030, with its market value potentially exceeding 8 billion yuan (\$1.1 billion).

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Chinese Economic Prospects

Editor's note: Amid the complex and evolving global economic landscape, China has many advantages to sustain its economic growth, because of its economic resilience and untapped potential. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Djoomart Otorbaev

US should improve ties for own good

The "Make America Great Again" rallying cry is vital for understanding US President Donald Trump's China policy. Among other things, the rallying cry tends to portray China as the primary ideological, geopolitical and economic rival of the United States. However, the self-centered nature of the slogan will not benefit the US; instead, it will likely harm it.

In contrast, the US' cooperation with China and the rest of the world will yield mutual benefit. This raises a question: How do economic relations evolve between the world's two largest economies? There are numerous stereotypes, most of which are misguided.

In 2024, China was the US' fourth-largest trading partner in goods, with a total trade volume of \$582.5 billion; the third-largest source of imports (\$438.9 billion); and the fourth-largest export destination (\$143.5 billion). As for services, in 2023, China accounted for 4.6 percent (\$46.7 billion) of the US' service exports and 2.7 percent (\$20.1 billion) of its service imports.

But the two most prominent economies in the world are today hesitant to invest in one another. For example, in 2023, US foreign direct investment in China totaled \$126.9 billion, accounting for 1.9 percent of the US' total investment abroad, while Chinese FDI in the US was \$28.0 billion, representing just 0.5 percent of its total investments overseas.

According to the US Treasury Department, as of November 2024, US investors held \$331.8 billion in Chinese securities, while China's



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holdings of US securities were nearly six times higher, at \$1.9 trillion.

So it is imperative that the two countries improve their economic relations, because they bring tangible benefits to both. However, the negative public opinion about China in the US, cultivated there for a long time, has led, under a far-fetched pretext, to the implementation of discriminatory measures and various sanctions and tariffs against Chinese exports.

On Feb 27, US President Donald Trump announced an additional 10 percent tariffs on Chinese imports. Beijing responded with 10-15 percent tariffs on US farm equipment, cars, coal and liquefied natural gas, and imposed export controls on certain chemicals.

Trump has long argued that tariffs will be an integral part of his economic policy. During the Inauguration Day parade at Capital One Arena, he bluntly declared, "I always say tariffs are the most beautiful words in the dictionary to me", adding that God, religion and love are the first three in that order, followed by tariffs.

But most experts believe that tariffs will have the biggest negative impacts on the country imposing

them and on end consumers.

A tariff is a domestic tax levied on goods imported into a country. The cost of that tariff is ultimately borne by a domestic company that imports certain goods, not the foreign company that exports them. Thus, a tariff is a direct tax domestic companies pay the government. Higher tariffs on products are passed on to the end consumers or importing companies, leading to higher prices for the consumers.

During Trump's first term, his administration imposed tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars worth of steel, solar panels, medical devices and other goods made in China. At the time, the administration argued that the burden of these tariffs would primarily fall on China. However, an independent study found that that was not the case, as nearly all the tariffs on \$362 billion worth of goods imported from China were passed on to the American companies and consumers that imported them or ultimately bought them.

The impact of these tariffs was particularly significant on low-income households, which typically spend their modest incomes on affordable goods from China. Most other professional studies have shown similar results.

In a September 2024 survey by the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, 98 percent of more than 40 leading global economists agreed that tariffs increase costs that are passed on to consumers.

Based on practical examples, modern economic theory posits that competitive trade enhances economic

output and income while trade barriers hinder them. Recent evidence has shown that tariffs raise prices and reduce the quantity of goods and services supplied by the foreign country. This eventually diminishes the income of both businesses and workers. Higher prices lessen the return on labor and capital, discouraging American people from working and investing, leading to lower production and living standards.

Regardless of the global developments, China should prioritize three key areas in its domestic policy. First, it should enhance its competitiveness, adhering to the well-known Chinese saying: "To forge iron, one must be strong oneself." Second, it should stimulate domestic demand and foster the growth of the domestic market to reduce reliance on exports and external market conditions. And third, it should vigorously promote technological innovation, focusing on improving the synergy between innovation and industry.

The implementation of Trump's discriminatory policies will hinder the success of MAGA; in fact, it will undermine it. China and the US are interdependent economies, and their cooperation will enhance the well-being of their people and those in the rest of the world. New tariffs will hinder the US economy's development and impact American people's life. More important, it is not too late for the US to reconsider and embrace wisdom and common sense.

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Alan Bollard

Service sector has potential to enhance country's prosperity

China's private sector may have grown at an unprecedented speed, taking advantage of new technologies, efficient capital, skilled labor and sophisticated supply chains. But it is still travelling a path envisaged by late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping 40 years ago, that is, of an efficient supplier of manufacturing goods to the world.

China's just-ended two sessions have signaled a further boost to the private sector. This has been to the advantage of Chinese entrepreneurs and workers, offshore suppliers and consumers across the world. It has also stimulated industrial development through East Asian countries which are part of the regional supply chains, and helped stabilize prices in the Western world, thanks to China's achievements in green technology (solar photovoltaic cells, wind turbines, lithium batteries and electric vehicles).

But countries with traditional manufacturing industries have found it increasingly hard to compete with advanced economies. Many studies have been conducted by economists, and not all agree on the economic drivers. But they point to the efficiency and scale of Chinese production, support of the government's industrial policy, and home-country automation.

However complex the reasons, China's production footprint and trading capacity have now become so large that they appear to "swamp" other countries. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, China's annual trade surplus has reached \$1 trillion, which has increased North American and Western European businesses' fears and heightened political tensions.

The US economy has been through a turbulent time — big developments in financial services, energy production and digital technologies offset by a significant contraction in traditional manufacturing.

In recent years, US administrations have seen import competition as a political threat and adopted increasingly aggressive economic policies to deal with it. It is necessary for the US to know how to deal with these challenges but very difficult to do so given the huge uncertainty surrounding US President Donald Trump's policy intentions and threats. Traditional trading ties are now being designed less for economic welfare and more to "safeguard national security".

The incumbent US administration appears to be reverting to a traditional trading policy, that of isolationism. This has happened before — the rebuff of the League of Nations in the 1920s, the Smoot-Hawley tariffs in the 1930s, the rejection of the International Trade Organization at the 1940s Bretton Woods Conference, and the US' withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017.

But isolationism means decoupling from other economies. The US may feel it is possible to double down on its domestic economy, as its external trade represents only about a quarter of its GDP. But it is more complicated this time around because the US is a major part of the world economy, and US-China trade represents the biggest ever bilateral economic interaction in history. Also, for decades the US has led global trade rule-setting. Its recent decisions to withdraw from the World Health Organization, weaken the World Trade Organization, pull out of the Paris Agreement, downgrade other organizations such as the G20, and possibly even abandon the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, all imply an end to the US' leading role in global affairs.

However, the US is also looking to weaponize its economy. Today, its security policy means restricting foreign access to strategic parts of the US economy. It also adopts aggressive policies to use trade to damage other economies.

There is a risk that a traditional industrial policy response from China — increased production to compete in Western markets — may further worsen the already tense situation.

Most countries worried over the rising trade tensions between China and the US hope China does not respond more forcefully by adopting an aggressive trade policy. These countries are watching whether China will seek a bigger global leadership role by building on what it has already achieved (such as helping the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and BRICS New Development Bank), with some countries encouraging China to do so. But this is easier said than done, because China's engagement with organizations such as the WTO has left scars, and the wide use of the US dollar and payment settlement systems will continue.

China could redirect its exports to newer markets to reduce its dependence on the US and Western Europe. But it has already been doing so for some years, with the Belt and Road Initiative helping it in that endeavor.

Besides, Eurasian, Latin American and African markets generate relatively less attractive returns, and as China seeks to diversify its exports, many smaller countries are also trying to reduce their own heavy dependence on the Chinese market.

Furthermore, Chinese foreign investment is still relatively low, even in Southeast Asia. Perhaps China should consider liberalizing border capital controls. It should also consider further offshoring manufacturing, in order to concentrate on developing innovative technologies, and earning profits by developing high-value intellectual property. This will also expand China's service sector.

China has been taking measures to stimulate private consumption. But China's domestic consumption is still low compared with the US and some other advanced Western economies. This means China has the scope of using macroeconomic policy to create a better environment for boosting private spending.

As most Western economies reached high middle-income levels, their key economic driver shifted from industrial manufacturing to services, with their focus being on design, software, innovation, intellectual property protection, marketing and other professional services. Western companies such as Apple have shown this can be much more profitable than direct production. Such a policy will support neighboring economies, and is less likely to arouse tensions with trading partners.

China's manufacturing sector will continue to grow, but in relative terms, it may have reached "peak manufacturing". The path to prosperity is the service sector.

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Michele Geraci

China-EU cooperation mutually beneficial

Premier Li Qiang delivered the Government Work Report during the annual session of the National People's Congress on March 5, outlining the Chinese government's economic priorities for this year. As an economist and former undersecretary at Italy's Ministry of Economic Development, I have been studying China's economy and its relationship with Europe.

China's economy is at a critical juncture. After decades of rapid growth, China now faces significant challenges, including rising geopolitical tensions, and the need for structural reforms.

Despite all these challenges, China has set a GDP growth target of about 5 percent, a figure that underscores the necessity of stabilizing the economy while addressing underlying vulnerabilities. That China has set a growth target of 5 percent for 2025 reflects its pragmatic approach. The country has realized that rapid growth may no longer be sustainable in the face of an aging population, increasing debt and rising unemployment. Therefore, it is vital for China to transition toward a model of growth that emphasizes quality and sustainability over mere quantity.

A central theme of this year's Government Work Report is its emphasis on innovation and technological advancement. This focus is crucial for China's long-term economic success. In order to maintain competitiveness in a rapidly changing global economy, China must transition from an investment-driven model to one that prioritizes innovation and high-tech industries.

The government's commitment to achieve technological self-sufficiency, particularly in critical sectors such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence, is commendable. However, this ambition comes with inherent challenges. The drive for self-sufficiency may heighten tensions with Western countries, particularly the United States, which has imposed restrictions on technology transfers to China. So it is imperative that China cultivate an environment conducive to innovation while remaining open to international collaboration.

As we examine China's economic landscape, the country's relationship



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with the European Union emerges as a vital area for cooperation. The EU is one of China's largest trading partners, and fostering strong ties with it is essential for mutual prosperity. In light of the global challenges, including post-pandemic economic recovery and climate change, there is a compelling case for enhanced collaboration between China and the EU.

The EU's Green Deal presents an opportunity to China to engage in sustainable development initiatives. By working together in areas such as renewable energy, green technology and infrastructure development,

both China and the EU can create synergies that benefit their economies and contribute to global sustainability efforts.

But despite the potential for cooperation, several challenges could undermine China-EU relations. In particular, since the rise of protectionism and nationalistic policies poses a risk to trade and investment, it is essential for both sides to engage in constructive dialogue to address mutual concerns and promote common economic development.

Moreover, the EU has adopted a



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more cautious approach to China in recent years, particularly on human rights and market access. But it is important for the EU to balance its values with pragmatic economic considerations, because a nuanced approach that fosters engagement without compromising fundamental principles is essential for nurturing a strong and productive relationship between China and the EU.

Looking ahead, China should evolve its economic strategy to address domestic challenges and meet international expectations. The Chinese government's commitment to reform and innovation is critical, but it must be accompanied by a willingness to constructively engage with its global partners, particularly in Europe.

I see significant potential for China to consolidate its position in the global economy this year by focusing on green technology and sustainable development. By aligning its economic goals with that of the EU, China can lay a solid foundation for long-term cooperation that benefits both economies.

As I reflect on the Government Work Report and its implications, I am reminded of the importance of collaboration in today's interconnected world. The path forward for China and the EU is to show mutual respect, understand each other, and build a future of shared vision. Through innovation, dialogue and cooperation, China and the EU can navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing global landscape.

I hope both China and the EU will recognize the potential for collaboration that lies ahead, leading to a more prosperous and sustainable future for all. Together, we can address the pressing challenges of our times and build a brighter future through partnership and cooperation.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

CSABA MOLDICZ

Europe needs to wake up

The EU should realize it would benefit immensely if it did not get into a trade war with China, opened its doors to Chinese capital and was willing to import and export technology to and from China

In recent weeks, the position of the European Union has become challenging and, in many ways, untenable since the United States seems determined to deny it a place at the negotiating table to settle the Ukraine crisis.



While there are still deep political, economic and cultural ties between the US and the EU, a special consideration of Europe

in the US geopolitical thinking is no longer automatically granted. The new US administration's foreign policy seems to have undergone a fundamental shift regarding the EU's future relevance to it.

In addition, a reversed Kissinger strategy is often discussed, which would further weaken Europe. The original Kissinger strategy was to befriend China to counterbalance the Soviet Union; the reversed version would mean to settle the conflict with Russia and focus on the geopolitical struggle with China. In this newly envisaged scenario, the interests of the EU would be far less important to the US than they were before.

This new perception realistically reflects the slow yet steady deterioration of Europe's economic and military positions in the world. According to the International Monetary Fund, the EU's GDP share based on purchasing power parity in the world economy over the past decades has undergone a significant drop — from nearly 28 percent in 1980 to about 14 percent in 2024 — reflecting Europe's declining population and deteriorating competitiveness, something that was highlighted in the Draghi

report on the EU's competitiveness in 2024. While the EU's GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity figures of the IMF was fairly close to that of the US in the 1980s, it had become substantially lower in 2024.

European companies are not at the forefront of technological development, either, and there is no significant sector in which European companies have a significant technological advantage over their peers. At the same time, the members of the EU face severe challenges in terms of natural and energy resources, and the Ukraine crisis has presented a significant threat to the continent's access to affordable Russian resources, which have been a key part of Europe's economic model, particularly for Germany, the backbone of the European economy. Choosing US natural gas does not solve the problem. It is neither cheap nor does it reduce Europe's energy dependence.

The military size of the EU members declined from 3.5 million troop members in 1995 to roughly 1.5 million in 2024. According to estimates by Bruegel, a Brussels-based think tank, Europe would need 300,000 more troop members and an annual defense spending increase of at least 250 billion euros (\$261.21 billion) in the short term to deter Russian aggression. But it is telling that analysis points out that Europe needs 300,000 additional troop members because of the lack of strong coordination among member states.

The decision-making process at the EU level is influenced by a number of factors. The decisions of the European Commission are often influenced by ideological considerations distorting policies.

The influence of ultraliberal and leftist political movements, the negative impact of migration-friendly policies on societal peace, and the effect of failed economic development choices have all come together to make Europe's position no better in a crisis situation when swift action and clear political leadership is needed. The results of German elections make it clear that Europe is turning to more classic conservatism, which is deeply invested in finding the roots of European success in such concepts as nation states, Christianity and traditional values.

When we speak of the economy, the impact of the hasty decisions to prioritize the European economy's environmental sustainability, particularly in the context of the Ukraine crisis and even before that, has been felt by European companies with their declining competitiveness in global markets. While Europe may currently enjoy a period of relative wealth, its geopolitical position remains fragile, relying on US arms for security, foreign technology for its well-being, and the rest of the world for resources.

Therefore, the EU is not in a position to antagonize the big players, but is obliged to cooperate with them. Moreover, the EU would benefit immensely from China if it did not get into a trade war with China, if it opened its doors to Chinese capital, and if it was willing to import and export technology to and from China. What we have to understand is that the EU does not have a clash of geopolitical interests with China, and cooperation with China serves European interests. This is the point at which deeper economic cooperation with



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

China can offer opportunities for the EU.

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WANG BINGJIE AND XIONG WEI

EU's dilemma: To counter or balance transatlantic shock wave

It should work with China to deepen strategic communication and mutually beneficial cooperation, and steer the world to a bright future of peace, security, prosperity and progress

The Donald Trump administration, which is embracing a realpolitik stance, sees the progressive and liberal values that the European Union still champions as outdated.

That divergence reveals a growing rift in the transatlantic partnership based on so-called common



Wang Bingjie

values that have bound the EU to the United States since the end of World War II. This ideological division has far more profound impacts than trade or defense frictions.



Xiong Wei

Due to the lack of activity in the financial markets, insufficient investment in technological research and development as well as supporting infrastructure, the absence of industrial policies that encourage risk-taking and innovation, and excessive regulation in data privacy and environmental protection, the EU has lost its leading position in technology. This, coupled with exacerbating security problems, has sent the bloc into a downward spiral.

On the one hand, the EU is heavily reliant on its alliance with the US, and on the other, it proclaims itself to be a champion of multilateralism. It is thus stuck in a series of dilemmas: While it pursues strategic autonomy, it is unable to break free from its dependence on the US; it champions multilateralism yet is compelled to follow the US "de-risking" strategy, which goes against the trend of globalization; and while it is struggling to inject new momentum into its sluggish economy, the bloc remains hesitant about deepening cooperation with China in technology and



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emerging industries.

The shock wave the Trump administration has sent has brought transatlantic relations to the brink of collapse, and the EU may adopt a "soft balancing" strategy or an "adaptation" strategy in response to Trump's policies.

The "soft balancing" strategy advocates countering US influence through multilateral mechanism and expanding collaborations with other global players, while the "adaptation" strategy suggests compromising to align with US demands.

Countries represented by Hungary and Poland advocate "accommodation", believing that compromise

should be made as soon as possible to repair relations with the US. They fear that clashes with the US would jeopardize European security.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk recently criticized French President Emmanuel Macron's statement of "introducing some kind of competitive game between the EU and the US" as a futile effort, and proposed to ramp up Europe's defense budgets to ease the transatlantic tensions. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán voiced his support for Trump after the US president's furious exchange with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the White House.

The "adaptation" strategy implies that the US will continue to hold sway over the EU. When Trump turns his focus to China, the EU may follow the US closely in policies aimed at curbing China's rise.

France and Germany once jointly adopted the "soft balancing" strategy, achieving milestones such as the signing of the Iran nuclear deal. During Trump's first term, with the Franco-German cooperation at the core, the EU sought to expand its ties beyond transatlantic relations to counter the uncertainties brought by US trade protectionism and isolationism.

In this sense, the EU did not fully

join the US in decoupling from China, instead opting for a softer approach of "de-risking" to maintain cooperation with China. And in this way, the EU aimed to enhance its economic competitiveness and mitigate potential impacts from the US sanctions or trade frictions. This reflects the EU's "soft balancing" strategy and multilateral diplomacy.

The EU's US policy will not only shape the future of Europe, but also have a significant impact on the future international order. Specifically, on the issue of EU-China cooperation, political forces favoring the "soft balancing" strategy and greater European autonomy advocate more cooperation with China to foster genuine multilateralism.

The EU should be aware that Trump's second term will not only widen the transatlantic divide in trade and security but also deepen their rift in values. The ruptured relations between the US and the EU will not only have a major impact on both sides, but also threaten global responses to challenges such as climate change and disarmament. To prevent a regression in global governance, the EU should work with China to steer the international order toward a more just and equitable direction.

Although some European politicians clinging to a Cold War mentality remain vigilant against China, sanctioning some Chinese companies which they claim provide support to the Russian military and imposing tariffs on Chinese new energy vehicles, China is committed to resolving issues through dialogue and consultation.

And as the world's second-largest economy, the leading industrial nation, and a front-runner in green technologies, China shares profound common interests with Europe in areas such as the green transition and global governance.

Thus, the EU can further its cooperation with China in advancing the green transition and bringing an end to the Ukraine crisis. On the one hand, China has been expanding imports by opening up the Chinese market to provide broader market opportunities for European businesses. On the other hand, China's efforts to stabilize global industrial chains and seek peaceful resolutions to conflicts stand in stark contrast to the US' trade protectionism and profiteering from geopolitical conflicts.

China practices a global governance philosophy featuring extensive consultation and joint construction with shared benefits, upholds genuine multilateralism, and promotes the democratization of international relations. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at the Munich Security Conference, "China upholds true multilateralism and advocates the vision on global governance featuring extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit... China has always seen in Europe an important pole in the multipolar world. The two sides are partners, not rivals".

To counter the shock wave from the Trump administration, the EU should rise above traditional alliance mentality and ideological prejudices, and work with China to deepen strategic communication and mutually beneficial cooperation, and steer the world to a bright future of peace, security, prosperity and progress.

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CULTURAL HERITAGE



Above: The Shanghai Museum and The Metropolitan Museum of Art collaborated on a new exhibition at The Met, showcasing Chinese bronzes, as well as a selection of paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, and lacquer and jade items. **COURTESY OF THE MET** **Below:** A visitor takes a photo of a bronze artifact during the ongoing exhibition, *Recasting the Past: The Art of Chinese Bronzes, 1100-1900*. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

Carriers of history and tradition

The Met and Shanghai Museum unite to celebrate Chinese bronzes from across the ages, **Mingmei Li** reports in New York.

Forged from the same material yet shaped by different eras, the artifacts converge in a dialogue across millennia. From important bronzes to a selection of paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, lacquer and jade, the artifacts, though nearly 1,000 years old, are themselves tributes to even older masterpieces.

These *figu* (return to the past) bronzes tell a story of tradition and innovation that spans the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, as well as of the enduring global exchange and appreciation of bronze artistry.

In collaboration with the Shanghai Museum, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art's new exhibition, *Recasting the Past: The Art of Chinese Bronzes, 1100-1900*, is a record of the evolving artistry of Chinese bronze from the 12th to the 19th centuries. It weaves a narrative of craftsmanship, tradition and innovation, bringing to life the eternal elegance of these masterworks.

The ongoing exhibition kicked off last month. It will run until September before leaving for the Shanghai Museum, where it will continue from November until March 2026.

Good storytelling

"No single museum can fully tell the story of Chinese bronzes on its own, so we need more exchanges. China, the United States, and many other countries around the world have collections," Lu Pengliang, curator of Chinese Art at The Met, told China Daily.

The exhibition is divided into five thematic and chronological sections that detail over 200 pieces — some 100 from The Met collection, augmented by nearly 100 loans from major institutions in China, Japan, South Korea, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the US. The result is the most comprehensive narrative of the ongoing importance of bronze as an artistic medium throughout China's history.

Featured in the exhibition are 60 loans from institutions in China, including major pieces such as a monumental 12th-century bell embellished with an imperial procession from the Liaoning Provincial Museum, documented ritual bronzes used in Confucian temples from the Shanghai Museum, and luxury archaic-style vessels made in an 18th-century imperial workshop from the Palace Museum in Beijing.

As part of the curatorial process, Lu says that he has used many parallel displays, placing exhibits from The Met and the Shanghai Museum side by side, to allow visitors to fully understand the cultural narrative.

For example, he points to three goose-shaped bronze incense burners from The Met, displayed alongside a Ming Dynasty painting by Chen Hongshou, *Lady Reclining Over an Incense Cage*, from the Shanghai Museum.

"This pairing vividly illustrates the refined lifestyle of the mid-17th century," Lu says. "By placing these pieces side by side, viewers first encounter the bronze incense burners shaped like ducks or geese.

"Through them, we can understand how they were used — observe the hollow interior and the space for burning incense, which was intricately designed in the form of a duck."

Incense burners in the shape of geese or ducks were among the most popular archaic designs from the Song Dynasty onward. Known as *xiangya* (incense ducks), they frequently appeared in literature that captured the elegance of the era.

Lu says that the Shanghai Museum's painting reveals how the incense



From left: Visitors at the exhibition. A twin dragon brush rest, vessel and crab-shaped bronze, from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). **PHOTOS BY MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY**



Incense burner in the shape of a goose, of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). **COURTESY OF THE MET**

um's painting reveals how the incense ducks were depicted in art and in the cultural expressions of the time.

"Chinese poetry often mentions 'incense ducks'. But what exactly were they? By examining the physical artifacts preserved in The Met's collection, we can see how these references come to life, forming a dialogue between literature, painting and material culture.

"The collaboration between the Shanghai Museum and The Met has elevated the exhibition to new heights in both breadth and depth," Lu says, adding that together, the bronzes and artwork tell a comprehensive tale for visitors.

Another example, two apparently identical vases, actually highlights a form of cultural appreciation, according to Lu.

Upon closer inspection, one vase is revealed as a piece from the imperial workshop during the reign of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty, and is made of parcel-gilt copper alloy and bears the Qianlong

hallmark. The second, as indicated by the hallmark on its base, is a 19th-century French copy, produced by Parisian tableware makers.

"The latter was copied after the French collector bought the original back to Paris and invited artisans to see this inspiration from China," Lu says.

He adds that French companies were so inspired by the Chinese bronze that they made an exact, almost identical copy of the original, even down to the parcel building.

"This is the power of culture and the power of art. That's why I have placed these two pieces together, and you can see a really good combination," he explains.

Recalling significance

This exhibition raises an important point about the way Chinese bronzes are perceived, Lu says.

"Traditionally, when we think of Chinese bronzes, we tend to associate them with the Shang (c. 16th century-11th century BC) and Zhou

(c. 11th century-256 BC) dynasties. However, this time, we wanted to focus on the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing periods. A simultaneous presentation of these later periods offers a fresh academic perspective and exploration."

The exhibition unfolds through five sections of different themes, beginning with "Reconstructing Ancient Rites", which explores how emperors and scholar-officials (12th-16th centuries) commissioned bronzes to revive ancient ceremonies.

"Experimenting with Styles" (13th-15th centuries) highlights creative reinterpretations of form and function, while "Establishing New Standards" (15th-17th centuries) examines aesthetic and technical innovations. "Living with Bronzes" (16th-19th centuries), displayed in the Ming Furniture Room, illustrates their role in literati life. The fifth section, "Harmonizing with Antiquity" (18th-19th centuries), reveals how scholarly appreciation led to a final flourishing of bronze production.

"Bronzes were not just ritual vessels used in ancient times," Lu says.

"During the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, they became decorative objects in studios — incense burners, vases and even elegant desk ornaments. During the Qianlong era, the rise of epigraphy brought the collection and reproduction of bronzes to new heights."

"This innovation connects China's culture to that of other countries.

"From the Song Dynasty onward, the revival of bronze craftsmanship

was akin to the Renaissance in Europe. Bronzes from this period also influenced Japanese tea ceremonies and *ikebana* (the Japanese art of flower arranging). Many shogun (military rulers), daimyo (feudal lords) and emperors collected and used these artifacts," he says.

A striking bronze-themed banner hangs prominently at the main entrance of The Met. Lu says that he is proud that Chinese culture is on display at such an important American museum.

"Having Chinese culture on display at The Met, right in the heart of Fifth Avenue, is a powerful statement," he says, adding that he hopes "this global exhibition helps more people connect with and appreciate China's history and culture."

"More and more people in the US are showing interest in Chinese culture, and we see this as a great opportunity to deepen cultural understanding with China," he adds.

Max Hollein, director and CEO of The Met, says that "The Met has always been very closely connected with the appreciation and understanding of Chinese art and culture."

"There will definitely be more collaborations in the future, absolutely," he adds.

According to Hollein, the museum is taking a unique approach to Chinese bronzes, showcasing their artistic excellence from 1100 to 1900 and offering a fresh perspective to museumgoers.

"This exhibition is a prime example of partnership, friendship, and collegiality — working together as

scholars and curators to develop an important exhibition," Hollein says. "It's a joint effort with the Shanghai Museum to bring together the best examples of Chinese bronzes, to celebrate their ingenuity, artistic excellence and reimagining."

For Chu Xiaobo, director of the Shanghai Museum, the collaboration with The Met reflects the long-standing friendship between the two institutions and is a practical exploration of curation.

"The planning of this exhibition is of great significance in promoting Chinese culture, particularly in highlighting late-period bronzes after the Song Dynasty, which present a unique curatorial perspective," Chu says.

The Met is known around the world for its role in the dissemination of Chinese art, Chu says, adding that museums play a crucial role in fostering cultural exchange.

"This collaboration marks the beginning of a new chapter in the long-term partnership between our two museums and will facilitate broader cultural exchanges with other cultural and art institutions worldwide," Chu says.

In this exhibition, the Shanghai Museum, as a co-organizer, took the lead in coordinating the borrowing of Chinese exhibits from various domestic institutions, such as the Palace Museum, the Capital Museum, Liaoning Provincial Museum, Hebei Museum, Qinghai Provincial Museum and Fujian Museum. By doing so, it aimed to collectively showcase the value of Chinese culture overseas and contribute Chinese wisdom and strength to deepen exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations.

The ongoing exhibition at The Met appears to resonate with the trajectory of time.

In 1980, shortly after reform and opening-up began, a historic exhibition, *The Great Bronze Age of China*, was held at The Met. Co-presented by the National Cultural Heritage Administration of China, it was the first large-scale display of Chinese bronze ware in a Western country since the founding of New China in 1949.

"After 45 years, we were once again back across the Pacific Ocean, gathering for the sake of Chinese cultural relics, Chinese culture and the cherished value of cultural heritage as the common wealth of humanity," said Luo Wenli, deputy director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, referring to the 1980 exhibition, at the opening ceremony for the new exhibition.

"Over the past years, cultural exchanges between Chinese and American museums have flourished. We believe that through this special exhibition, American visitors will not only appreciate the treasures of China but also feel the vitality unleashed by the innovative development of traditional Chinese culture."

Luo says that the administration is willing to support further museum exchanges and cultural heritage cooperation between China and the US, and to continue to provide a platform to build bridges for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between the two countries.

Wang Kaihao contributed to this story.

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CULTURE



National Museum springs into season

The imperial aesthetics of the flowering time explored at latest of annual exhibitions dedicated to the new year, **Lin Qi** reports.

A tripod incense burner with scrolling lotus motif of the Qing Dynasty. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

When he ascended to the throne, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) inherited an affluent monarchy from his industrious grandfather, Emperor Kangxi, and father, Emperor Yongzheng.

Qianlong was in his mid-20s at the time. The country he was to reign was politically stable and economically well developed, and so besides fulfilling his duties as a ruler, he was able to invest more time and energy than his predecessors into cultural life, inside and outside the imperial palace.

The successive reigns of Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong produced one of the most prosperous periods in Chinese history. Qianlong in particular was known for his discernment and patronage of art.

For instance, on a spring day such as this, the emperor would enjoy the warmer weather and green views with excursions. He would experience much the same pleasures in his living spaces, where he was surrounded by works of art and craft dedicated to blooming spring scenes, objects presented to him by his subordinates, or made to order.

Visit Beijing's National Museum of China, and the ongoing long-term exhibition *Embracing the Spring*, it presents close-up views of some of the finest objects that once adorned Qianlong's life.

It is no longer possible to hold the elaborate pieces on show as the emperor once did, such as the small cup with majestic *yanzhishui* (watery rouge-red) glaze made during his grandfather's rule, or the lantern-shaped vase with the unique *taohuadong* (peach blossom hole) glaze made during his own reign.

Tang Ying, a senior court official and ceramic artist of repute, served in the courts of Yongzheng and Qianlong, and supervised production at the imperial kilns.

He once described how the eye-catching *taohuadong* glaze was made via a glaze-blowing method. "Use a cut bamboo tube, cover one end with a piece of gauze, dip it in different colored glaze, and blow the glaze onto a thin, white pot to achieve the effect. Do this three or four times, depending on the size of the piece and the type of glaze, and even more than a dozen times, if necessary."

The result is a dazzlingly colorful effect, reminiscent of fireworks lighting up the night.

Embracing the Spring continues an annual tradition at the museum on Chang'an Avenue, which regularly holds a themed exhibition right before Spring Festival to celebrate the new year in anticipation of spring.

The exhibitions usually include artifacts featuring the specific Chinese zodiac animal of that year. For example, this year, it is the snake, as well as other objects that embody good wishes and blessings, such as longevity, prosperity and peace.

This year, the National Museum has about 200 objects on display, from archaic bronzes, jade, coins, and gold and silverware, to calligraphy, coins and ceramics.

Following a routine that highlights the exhibitions, each time a statue from a collection of 12 pottery zodiac animals in the uniform dress of an ancient man, is



Above: An ornament with lotus and intertwining dragon from Qing Dynasty.

Below: A Ming Dynasty carved lacquer box that depicts children playing.

selected for the show.

According to Zhao Yuliang, a researcher at the museum, the pottery animals were unearthed in 1955 in a Tang Dynasty (618-907) tomb on the eastern outskirts of Xi'an, Shaanxi province. He says the rarity of the set is that it is complete. Standing between 38 and 43 centimeters in height, all 12 zodiac animals, colored in red and green, are dressed in long robes with wide sleeves that fall to the ground. Their forearms are raised to chest-level, and their hands are hidden in their sleeves.

Zhao says that scholars widely agree that the custom of burying the dead with zodiac-themed objects emerged in the Northern Dynasty of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-581) period, and that the practice became quite popular during the Tang Dynasty but dwindled after the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

He adds that zodiac figures were made in a seated position, standing, or with human bodies, and the higher social status the deceased enjoyed, the bigger the statues.

This year, the snake statue is being shown alongside the 11 other statues, a rare public appearance of the set in its entirety.

A striking owl-shaped *zun* vessel from the 3,000-year-old tomb of Fuhao is one of the star exhibits of the National Museum.

It is normally on display in the permanent *Ancient China* exhibition, but has been moved to the galleries where *Embracing the Spring* is taking place. This is because the

feathers on each side of the owl are sculpted in the relief of a curling snake.

It was one of a pair of identical vessels found in a tomb in 1976 in Anyang, Henan province, which is believed to be the site of the capital of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) during its later stages. The other vessel is in the collection of the Henan Museum in Zhengzhou.

The vessel's intricacy and solemnity suggests the privileged status of the defunct — Fuhao is believed to have been the wife of Shang Dynasty king Wuding, who was active in state affairs and a daring general in war.

Zhuge Yingliang, the exhibition's curator, says blossoms are one of the exhibition's themes and are a motif visible on dozens of the objects on show, where they are juxtaposed alongside floral displays to accentuate the vibrancy of spring.

Jade butterfly pendants from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties can be seen above the *Baihua Tu* (Scroll Painting of One Hundred Flowers), a masterpiece by Zou Yigui, a favored official and painter at the court of Emperor Qianlong, who took particular delight in Zou's floral paintings.

A variety of flowers from different seasons are detailed in delicate brushwork and graceful colors on the 8-meter-long scroll.

"It is an occasion to show how people captured beauty in works of art, and imbued it with cultural connotations. The aesthetic spectacle is timeless," Zhuge says.

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Virtuoso's donated works carry on artistic lineage

By LIN QI

Among the artists who captivate audiences with their depictions of spring scenery are the *manhua* (Chinese-style comic) works of Feng Zikai (1898-1975), a beloved painter who was also a virtuoso in calligraphy, literature and music.

He left a body of work marked by free-flowing strokes and soft palettes, with an underlying peace and humor. Beneath the brushstrokes, the arrival of spring is visible in blooming willow trees, sprouts of grass, flower sellers on the street and people watching swallows fly above.

Feng's family recently donated some of his works to the China National Academy of Painting in Beijing, including six *manhua*-style paintings in which the artist depicted the vivid spring scenery, his used ink slab, and a hand scroll of 10 drawings created by his family members.

"Feng Zikai's works are unique

because he integrated literature with painting, creating a narrative with lyrical beauty," says Liu Wanming, head of the China National Academy of Painting, who has been close to the Feng family for years.

He says that Feng depicted everyday life, with shrewd observations of not only an artist but also a writer keen to reveal the truth of life and human nature, making his paintings thought-provoking with philosophical depth.

One donated piece was inspired by *A Boat Trip at Night*, a poem by Wang Yu of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) — "In the bawls of street vendors who peddle flowers, one hears the sound of spring." The original verses convey nostalgic sorrow, though Feng's brushwork delivers hope and delight.

"He favored simple, clear outlines to summarize the appearances of the figures he painted," Liu says. "Sometimes he skipped detailing the facial features, but relied on



From left: Donated works by Feng Zikai to the China National Academy of Painting include: *Not Knowing the Spring Has Come*, *Spring in the Cries of Flower Sellers*, and *Willow Sways Across the Hair*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

body language to reveal people's inner worlds."

The donated paintings show Feng's typical style, and also an intimate world and spiritual realm that he created to rest his heart and mind, and also that of his audiences.

Feng once said: "My mind has been preoccupied with four things — the deities and stars in the sky; the art and the children on Earth."

Liu says that Feng particularly loved painting children, the interesting things his children did, or

children he observed. Feng's art is widely beloved by generations because it exudes innocence, sincerity and kindness.

One of the donated paintings visualizes a scene from a poem by Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) poet and

essayist Yuan Mei: "Not knowing the spring has come, children inquire about why the grass has turned green."

Liu says: "Feng's works show the extraordinary in the ordinary and the greatness in the small, and create long-lasting resonance."

The donation includes a 5-meter-long horizontal scroll comprised of 10 ink paintings made by Feng, his children, and other family members, spanning from the 1960s to 2022. The work bears calligraphic inscriptions by Liu: "Realistic, humorous, philosophical, heartwarming."

Feng Yu, a grandson of Feng Zikai, says he hopes the works entering the State collection will inspire more artists. They belong to all people and must be shown to the public to carry on the cultural lineage.

Liu says that, encouraged by the Feng family's donation, the China National Academy of Painting plans an exhibition of Feng Zikai's art later this year.

LIFE



From left: Conductor Li Xincao, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and president of the China Conservatory of Music, together with his colleagues and students, perform in Hamburg, Germany, on Jan 27. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A scene from *The Peony Pavilion* by the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, which toured Paris and Bordeaux in France in October. YU JING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE The Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe stages *The Peony Pavilion* at the National Opera of Bordeaux in October. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The art of taking China to the world

CPPCC members discuss better ways of showcasing and introducing Chinese stage performances to foreign audiences, **Fang Aiqing** reports.

The Chinese performing arts industry is looking forward to bringing more quality work to the world, experts said during the recent two sessions.

"Since reform and opening-up began in 1978, we have exported art forms such as Peking Opera, folk music and dance. Now I believe it's time to let foreigners experience the beauty of the Chinese language — theater, for example — even if it's through subtitles," says Tian Qinxin, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and president of the National Theatre of China.

"Deeply rooted in China's poetry tradition, Chinese theater is known for its romantic structures, blend of multifaceted spaces, and elegant rhetoric. We have great stories to be appreciated by foreigners," Tian says.

She adds that international audiences can easily enjoy foreign language performances through subtitles, and that Chinese theater production teams should not view language as a barrier.

Tian is calling for more government support in building a long-term collaborative mechanism for international art exchanges and improving the training of young artists.

A theater director and playwright herself, her recent musical drama, *The Summoning of Dunhuang*, was inspired by the life of Chang Shuhong (1904-94), the founding director of the Dunhuang Academy, who dedicated his career to protecting and promoting the art of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province.

Tian hopes the drama, which integrates artificial intelligence and auto-stereoscopic technologies (which allow users to view 3D images without wearing headgear), will be accessible to an international audience.

Her idea resonates with Xu Zhong, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress and president of the Shanghai Opera House, who has long been promoting the country's art to the world — specifically, the way to convey Chinese culture on the world's top stages through Chinese-language operas.



Left: Members of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Gu Haoqiao (second left), director of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, and Shen Tiemei (second right), president of the Chongqing Sichuan Opera Art Center, at the two sessions in Beijing on Sunday. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY Right: Tian Qinxin, president of the National Theatre of China, speaks at a news conference for the launch of musical drama *The Summoning of Dunhuang*. WANG HAOSHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Xu particularly emphasizes the importance of borrowing from traditional Chinese culture and the integration of creative content and cutting-edge stage technology.

An upgraded version of the dance drama *White Snake*, for which Xu produced the music, made its debut two weeks ago. This adaptation of the *Legend of the White Snake*, a millennium-old household folk tale, is a dialogue between the ancient and the modern, ballet and Chinese classical dance, Western instruments and Chinese folk music.

White Snake is scheduled to premiere in July at the Lincoln Center in New York, its first overseas appearance.

Xu, a conductor and pianist, also

stresses the need to enhance intellectual property protection for Chinese creations, calling for the establishment of an early warning system and a prevention mechanism for copyright infringement disputes.

He suggests that the associated departments strengthen support mechanisms to ensure the use of legal means to protect rights and minimize losses abroad.

With years of experience in cultural exchange, performing arts industry insiders are attaching greater importance to creating quality work while building cultural confidence.

Shen Tiemei, a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee and president of the Chongqing Sichuan Opera Art Center, has been involved

in Sichuan Opera for over four decades and over the course of her career, has performed in countries such as the Netherlands, the United States, Switzerland and Hungary.

After receiving positive feedback from her foreign audiences, who speak highly of the singing, costumes and stage setting of Sichuan Opera, Shen says she has gained a deeper understanding of the artistic value of the opera and Chinese culture.

She sees 300-year-old Sichuan Opera as traditional and yet contemporary in expression and now places growing emphasis on protecting traditional expressions, such as *bianlian*, or face-swapping techniques, which allow the audience to directly perceive shifts in the

characters' inner thoughts and emotions, and *dafenhuo*, a technique used to reproduce fire scenes.

"We need to demonstrate the full breadth of the art to foreign audiences, rather than merely exporting single aspects," Shen says. She calls for enhanced people-to-people exchange with the global art sector.

From Jan 27 to Feb 4, conductor Li Xincao, president of the China Conservatory of Music, took his colleagues and students on a European tour to celebrate Spring Festival, bringing traditional music to Brussels, Vienna and Budapest, as well as Hamburg and Dusseldorf.

The tour followed shortly after the inclusion of Spring Festival, social practices of the Chinese peo-

ple in celebration of the traditional new year, on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December.

Li, who is also a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee, emphasizes that quality work — whether produced by small or large ensembles — is fundamental to promoting international cultural exchange, adding that both classical pieces and contemporary innovations are needed.

He says that classical, universal work fully respects the principles of artistic creation and the nature of the art form. "We must return to the essence of music, regardless of the theme we're creating. Music should touch hearts and souls, and inspire them."

Gu Haoqiao, a member of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC and director of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, says that in exploring new mediums, such as films and short videos, and integrating new technologies to promote traditional art, they have become more confident and determined to polish their performances.

In October, the troupe toured Paris and Bordeaux with *The Peony Pavilion* to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between China and France.

"I think foreigners are curious about traditional Chinese opera. Our troupe has gained a lot of experience, and has a long-term commitment to bringing Kunqu Opera to the world."

"Through our performances, I believe that foreign audiences will get to know more about China's culture and history, thereby gaining a better understanding of China today," she says.

Gu adds that the troupe will perform at World Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan, in April, as well as in Tokyo schools, where they will engage in exchanges with the students.

Shi Xuefan contributed to this story.

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Deputy and veteran Yuju actor all about being close to the people

By WANG RU and SHI BAOYIN

After decades of ups and downs, Jin Buhuan, deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, says that Yuju Opera is gaining in vitality and has a big role to play in promoting cultural tourism.

Jin, a Yuju Opera performer himself, and director of a Yuju Opera research institute in Hebi, Henan province, has been involved in the art for more than four decades. Even at 57, he continues to give 300 public performances a year.

As a form of traditional opera popular in Henan, Hebei and Shandong provinces, Yuju Opera is known for its richness, delicacy and a strong rural flavor. Jin knows precisely that the soil in which Yuju Opera grows is in the grassroots.

"The opera grew in people's sorghum fields. As they farm, people sing a few lines, and that brings a certain strength as everyone laughs and forgets their fatigue," Jin says.

He believes Yuju Opera can play a role in the development of cultural tourism and suggested giving full play to the art's role in driving tourism with its high-quality work during this year's two sessions.

He says that only scenic spots with beautiful landscapes may have limited attractiveness for tourists, but when they are decorated with



Left: Yuju Opera actor Jin Buhuan performs in *Sesame Official* in Hebi, Henan province, in 2022. Right: Jin at this year's two sessions in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

cultural elements that tell local stories, they can make visitors feel their trip is fruitful.

For example, Jin's Yuju Opera *Dashiyuan* is adapted from the real story of retired government official Xu Guang, who applied to go back to his poor hometown of Dashiyuan village, Qixian county, Hebi and spared no efforts in guiding villagers out of poverty, vitalizing their village by developing rural tourism

and characteristic agriculture.

"The show has been welcomed by the public, bringing quite a number of visitors to Qixian. Knowing more and more villagers can increase income by providing tourist services makes me very happy. This shows culture's role in driving tourism," he says.

In addition, Jin's interactive performance *Sesame Official*, staged in a historical area of Xunxian county, has enabled people to participate,

attracting more visitors to the scenic spot.

Guan Meili, who is also a performer, says that in a specific environment, dressing the visitors in costumes and immersing them in culturally rich settings as they appreciate traditional opera may impress them and give them a good experience.

"Yuju Opera has a strong popular base. Staging the performances in

scenic spots gives visitors an in-depth trip to Henan. I hope each line helps people decode the culture of China's Central Plains and the entire country," Jin says.

Born in 1968 in Fengqiu county, Henan, he started to learn Yuju Opera as a teenager out of interest and has witnessed the ups and downs of this art form over the years.

The 1980s was a prosperous time

for Yuju Opera, but in the 1990s, pop songs began to eclipse it, although soon it regained vitality thanks to its strong base among grassroots people. The year 2000 saw another peak in development, but this was followed by a decline in popularity. However, with the country's new emphasis on traditional culture, it is developing renewed grandeur, says Jin.

The government has adopted a series of policies like introducing shows to campuses, subsidizing performances for the grassroots and providing art funds. This support has enabled the troupe to create vivid characters and good shows with fewer anxieties of making a living, he says.

"Now, Yuju Opera has entered a stage of high-quality development, which means each performance has its highlights and shows unique skills. The work now excels in both artistic and entertainment value."

Jin remains passionate about his work. "I'm approaching 60, but I never feel I'm that old. I continue to immerse myself in acting and feel it isn't enough to give two performances a day. Being close to grassroots people and acting for them is my biggest responsibility and happiness in life," says Jin.

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