

From idea to industry

Nation bridging gap between laboratories, production lines
BUSINESS, PAGE 7



Russia, Ukraine continue with air attacks
WORLD, PAGE 10



Mystery meets humor

Cinematic endeavour brings alive San Francisco of 1900
CULTURE, PAGE 14

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 MONDAY, MARCH 17, 2025

XI'S VISION | HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

Support for private sector reiterated

Key article, symposium, policy moves demonstrate unwavering commitment

By CAO DESHENG
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An article by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on unwaveringly consolidating and developing the public sector and unwaveringly encouraging, supporting and guiding the development of the nonpublic sector was published on Sunday, sending a clear message again that the country remains committed to bolstering the growth of the private economy.

The article by Xi, who is also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, came nearly one month after he held a special symposium on private enterprises on Feb 17, aiming to boost private businesses. It was published in this year's sixth issue of Qiushi Journal, the flagship magazine of the CPC Central Committee.

The article highlighted that China's basic economic system, in which the core principles and policies of the Party and the country regarding the development of the private economy are laid out, has been incorporated into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the Party Constitution. The system "will not and cannot be changed", the article said.

The Party and the country ensure that economic entities under all forms of ownership have equal access to factors of production in accordance with the law, can compete on a level playing field, and are protected by the law as equals. This enables them to

complement each other and develop side by side, facilitating the healthy development of the non-public sector and those working in it, according to the article.

Both the public and nonpublic sectors are important components of the socialist market economy and an important basis for China's economic and social development, it noted, adding that the two sectors should complement each other and develop in tandem.

China's consistent commitment to the development of the private economy, which has been demonstrated in various forms such as policy announcements and high-level meetings, comes at a time when debates on the relationship between State-owned enterprises and private businesses have gained traction.

In the 1980s, China's private economy started from scratch, but it experienced rapid growth over the past four decades.

In terms of the role of the private economy, Xi's article said that for a long time, the rapid expansion of China's private sector has played an important role in stabilizing growth, powering innovation, increasing employment and raising people's living standards.

Official statistics show that private businesses contribute approximately 50 percent of the country's tax revenue, 60 percent of GDP and 70 percent of technological innovation, and they account for 80 percent of urban employment.

See **Economy**, page 3

Destructive storm



Residents search through a destroyed trailer following a tornado in Poplar Bluff, in the US state of Missouri, on Saturday. At least 34 have been killed by violent tornadoes ripping through central and southern United States. BRAD VEST / AFP See story, page 10

Europe in pursuit of strategic autonomy

WORLD WATCH
By William Hurst

autonomy is no longer a mere abstraction but a concept gaining real traction. The question is whether Europe can develop the means and consensus necessary to stand independently.

Obstacles to European strategic autonomy are numerous. The European Union, despite being a powerful economic bloc, lacks a unified security mechanism. Moreover, European states continue to perceive security threats differently. France has long been the most vocal advocate for European autonomy. The United Kingdom, though outside of the EU, occupies a somewhat ambiguous but vitally important position.

See **Shift**, page 3



People gather around the rubble of a house destroyed by US airstrikes targeting the Iran-backed Houthi group in Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, on Sunday. NAIF RAHMA / REUTERS

US launches large-scale strikes on Yemen's Houthis

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE
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The United States launched large-scale airstrikes in Yemen over the weekend, killing at least 53 people, including children, days after the Houthis vowed to resume attacks on Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea to show solidarity with Palestinians amid the ongoing blockade in Gaza.

Saturday's campaign, which one US official told Reuters might continue for weeks, was the first in Yemen since US President Donald Trump assumed office in January and redesignated the Houthi group as a "foreign terrorist organization".

At least 53 were killed and over 100 injured in the strikes, mostly women and children, Anees al-Asbahi, spokesman for the Houthi-run health authorities, said on Sunday.

"The explosions were violent and shook the neighborhood like an earthquake. They terrified our women and children," a resident of the Yemeni capital Sanaa, who gave his name as Abdullah Yahia, told Reuters.

In a statement, the Houthis' political bureau described the US attacks as a "war crime".

"Our Yemeni armed forces are fully prepared to respond to escalation with escalation," it said.

Palestinian group Hamas also criticized the US strikes, branding them "a stark violation of international law and an assault on the country's sovereignty and stability".

On Tuesday, the Houthis said they would resume attacks on any Israeli ships in the Red Sea, Arabian Sea,

Inside the Gulf of Aden and the Bab al-Mandab Strait until aid was again allowed into the Gaza Strip. The vital route is used by nearly 12 percent of the world's shipping traffic.

Since November 2023, the Houthis have launched dozens of drone and rocket attacks against Israel-linked ships, forcing many companies to take costly detours around southern Africa and setting the US military on an expensive campaign to intercept missiles and drones. The group stopped its attacks on Jan 19 when the Gaza ceasefire deal took effect.

In a social media post on Saturday, Trump vowed to "use overwhelming lethal force until we have achieved our objective". He warned Houthis "Your time is up" and if the attacks did not stop "starting today ... Hell will rain down upon you like nothing you have ever seen before".

He warned Iran that it must "immediately" stop its support to the Houthis and vowed to hold Iran "fully accountable" for actions of the Houthis.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Ministry on Sunday condemned the deadly US strikes, calling them a "gross violation of the principles of the UN Charter". In a post on X, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the Trump administration has "no authority, or business, dictating Iranian foreign policy".

In an apparent sign of efforts to improve ties with Russia, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke on Saturday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov by telephone about the strikes.

"Lavrov stressed the need for an immediate cessation of the use of force and the importance for all sides to engage in political dialogue in order to find a solution that would prevent further bloodshed," the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Sunday.

Nabeel Khoury, a former US diplomat, told Al Jazeera that Trump's decision to launch attacks against the Houthis was misguided, and would not subdue the group.

"If you think that Hamas, living and fighting on a very small piece of land, totally surrounded by land, air and sea, and yet, 17 months of Israeli bombardment did not get rid of them. The Houthis live in a much more rugged space, mountainous regions — it would be virtually impossible to eradicate them," he said.

"So there is no military logic to what's happening, and there is no political logic either," he said.

"For our president who came in wanting to avoid war and wanting to be a man of peace, he's going about it the wrong way. There are many paths that can be used before you resort to war," Khoury said.

Trump's statement did not reference the conflict in Gaza.

In the Gaza Strip, authorities said nine people, including journalists, were killed in Israeli strikes on Saturday, attacks which could further endanger a fragile truce there.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate said an editor and three photo journalists were among those killed. One was a drone photography specialist.

The syndicate's deputy head in

Gaza, Tahseen al-Astal, told AFP that the attack targeted a charity vehicle in which the journalists were preparing reports and documentaries on the work of charitable organizations during Ramadan.

Following the deadliest strikes since the ceasefire took hold on Jan 19, Hamas accused Israel of a "blatant violation" of the truce.

The truce's first phase ended on March 1 without agreement on the next steps. A senior Hamas official said last week that fresh talks had begun in Doha, with Israel also sending negotiators.

Israel is prepared to continue Gaza ceasefire talks based on the mediators' response to a US proposal for the release of 11 living hostages and half of the deceased, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said on Saturday.

However, Hamas said on Saturday it will only release an American-Israeli and the bodies of four other hostages if Israel implements the ceasefire agreement.

A senior Hamas official said long-delayed talks over the ceasefire's second phase would need to begin on the day of the release and last no longer than 50 days, The Associated Press reported. Israel also would need to stop barring the entry of humanitarian aid and withdraw from a strategic corridor along Gaza's border with Egypt. Israel has said it won't withdraw from there, citing the need to combat weapons smuggling.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

YOUNG COUPLES REDEFINE MATRIMONY WITH MODERN TAKES ON LOVE, TRUST

Buying an apartment, meeting parents' expectations no longer major priorities

By ZOU SHUO
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For 24-year-old Lu Yinggui, marrying her boyfriend of three years was as much about trust and taking an unconventional approach as it was romance.

The married couple, both former real estate employees, opted to buy a secondhand home in the suburbs of Changsha, Hunan province, with a mortgage loan.

The apartment is solely in Lu's name. "Rent was 1,400 yuan (\$193) monthly; our mortgage is 2,400. For an extra 1,000 yuan, we own the walls we live in," she said.

Their trust-based approach to marriage also meant they skipped prenuptial health checks and bride price negotiations.

"I did not want to turn marriage into a business, so there was no awkward discussion of the bride price," she said.

"My top priority for the person I was going to marry is their character, and I think he is a trustworthy person," she said. "When we decided to buy the small apartment, he decided to put it only under my name and he sometimes still jokes that the house does not belong to him."

See **Marriage**, page 2



INSIDE
Transformative synergy
Global Views, page 13

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Newstand prices: US \$1, Canada C\$1, UK 1.8, EU 1.6, Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling, Asia Pacific: Thailand 120, Philippines 120 php, Myanmar 2000 kyat, Japan 210 yen, Dubai 10 dirham, Pakistan 300 rupee

PAGE TWO

Marriage: Negotiating modern challenges



partner finally decided to get married.

His parents did not agree with him marrying a woman not from Beijing, so they opposed the relationship for a long time. However, they persisted, and his parents finally changed their mind and gave them their blessings, Li said.

Preparing for the marriage has been very smooth as they have been together for a long time and have already overcome conflicts, she said.

The couple have recently bought an apartment together, ending their life of renting in Beijing.

"I think owning your own home is very important. I wouldn't spend money on home decorations and buying good stuff when living in a rented house. But now I am eager to receive new deliveries every day, and look forward to married life together," she said.

Conditional love

Influencer culture has birthed a new marital hazard — fans who cross boundaries. For 29-year-old He Ting from Changsha, her fiancé's career as a livestreaming gamer has meant sleepless nights monitoring his interactions with female fans.

In addition, she is worried about him having a stable income.

"We have been together for six years and have seriously discussed getting married for four years. We will get married in June, so you can imagine there has been some back and forth," she said.

The relationship was sorely tested shortly before their engagement when she discovered he had cheated on her, which made her apprehensive about marrying him.

Lucky thirteen

After a 13-year marathon relationship Hunan-native Li Chenxi and her Beijing

"I am not so sure that he is now a changed person, but I have witnessed him turning into a more mature and responsible person, so I decided to marry him," she said.

Their 200,000-yuan bride price is funded entirely by his livestreaming earnings, she said. He's parents will give the money to their daughter — as financial security against possible future infidelity. "There is no pure love, and decisions were made after many considerations," she said.

He said her fiancé has promised to let her have the financial say over the household after they are married. This gives her some sense of security. "If he decides to 'mingle' again, at least I have the money," she said.

She also said the couple will wait before they decide to have children. "Many people say that a man changes after marriage, and I want to see whether he will also change," she said.

A suitable girl

Shi Xukui, 28, describes himself as a "pure love warrior". He married his high school sweetheart after a decade of breakups and parental nagging.

Shi claims his wife is the only girlfriend he has ever had, but ironically, he does not believe that she is the only one for him and vice versa.

"It is silly to think that there is a 'one and only' for you, what we can hope for is a suitable one," he said.

The couple married in 2022, because Shi thought they were an appropriate match and her family was pushing for her to get married.

His parents made the down payment for an apartment in Changsha, and bought a car for them.

The bride price, which was 100,000 yuan, was given to the wife to help start a family.

Shi said as a "romantic", he staged a special event to propose to his wife, with friends around to cheer them on.

His wife is now pregnant

with their first child, and Shi is already feeling the financial burden of raising a family.

The couple also needs money to renovate the apartment they are living in as they are still renting.

Shi said he has been working extra hard recently to bring more money home for his growing family.

"Getting married is to seek happiness and being single is also part of life," he said.

"Either way, there are bound to be regrets and people tend to fantasize about the road that is not chosen. But I have not regretted getting married, even though I feel really tired.

"More importantly, I still hold the traditional view that people need to get married and have children to repopulate and pass on wisdom."

the decision, as money can decide lots of things, such as your character and social skills," she said.

Many people who are in love did not marry because of financial mismatches, Zhang added.

Their relationship encountered a big obstacle when her husband failed to land a job after finishing his postdoctoral studies.

"He had great mental and financial stress at that time, and I also felt stressed because I was not certain what kind of job he could find, ... and what my parents would say if I was about to marry someone without a job," she said.

She said she stayed with him because she was firm on their relationship being a success. "Luckily, he did find a teaching position at a different university, she said.

The bride price negotiation ended at 250,000 yuan, a compromise between her parents' demands and his family's budget.

Zhang said her parents have a lot of control over her life, as they paid the down payment of her Beijing apartment and are helping her cover the mortgage.

Finding a compromise

For Beijing couple Zhang Xiaoyun and her professor husband, marriage followed an instant connection, and was strengthened by the fact that they are both from Shanxi province.

"I would not say that he looks exactly the way I wanted, but I had a feeling that I would marry him someday when we first met," she said. "My mother has always told me that women should not marry partners from far away places, which has influenced me deeply."

Zhang also considered many other things, such as his personality, and him being a responsible person and emotionally stable. Above all, she placed a high value on his ability to provide a decent living for a family.

"It is hard to overlook the financial background of a future spouse when making

ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

True foundation of longevity is courage to evolve together

Wang Zichuan, 24, works for a State-owned company in Hebei province.

My perspective on marriage is rooted in mutual respect, emotional connection, and pragmatic adaptability. For me, a lifelong partnership transcends material benchmarks.

While societal norms often equate homeownership with marital stability, I believe flexibility matters more. My partner Xuanxuan and I agree that renting temporarily accommodates career mobility without compromising our sense of "home" — what truly builds security

isn't walls but shared commitment. We'll purchase property eventually, yet refuse to let this goal overshadow our present happiness.

Meanwhile, my parents will buy an apartment for us as my family's financial status is better than theirs. My parents have also agreed to give her parents 188,000 yuan (\$26,000), a lucky number, as a bride price, which her parents will pass on to her as "insurance money".

However, I reject transactional mindsets. Three aspects hold greater weight for me: emotional alignment, compatible lifestyles, and congruent values.

Whether Xuanxuan chooses to

work or pursue personal interests, matters less than her genuine investment in our shared future. Traditional gender roles hold no sway — I'll gladly shoulder more household responsibilities, not as a gender duty, but as an equal partnership. Her worth isn't measured by a paycheck or chores completed, but by the sincerity she brings to our union.

Regarding marriage customs, I view dowries and bride prices symbolically, rather than transactionally. These should represent familial blessings, not archaic ownership notions. What truly empowers a marriage isn't monetary exchange, but the assurance that both fami-

lies support our autonomy as a new family unit. My parents prioritize character over social status, trusting my judgment in choosing a life partner — an attitude I hope Xuanxuan's family shares.

Social pressures around "marriageable age" particularly concern me. While acknowledging Xuanxuan's desire for early stability, I resist the toxic narrative that men must achieve career success before marrying.

Our partnership is a collaborative journey, not a prize for individual accomplishments. Financial adequacy matters, but sufficiency differs from excess — what I earn now sustains our shared life and occa-

sional adventures, which suffices as we grow together.

Crucially, I view marriage as deliberate permanence. The modern divorce epidemic stems partly from entering unions with exit strategies. We approach commitment like our philosophy on arguments — not keeping score of who's right, but solving problems collectively.

Just like I would not easily break up with her when we are in a relationship, I would not think about divorcing her at all, which brings no positive outcomes.

Emotional interdependence coexists with personal independence: we maintain separate social

circles and individual identities while nurturing shared dreams. This balance of closeness and autonomy, I believe, fortifies relationships against stagnation.

Moreover, our marriage blueprint rejects rigid templates. It's built daily through choices — choosing understanding over pride, patience over haste, and faith in each other over societal noise. The foundation isn't a house deed or bank balance, but the courage to evolve together while honoring individual growth.

Wang Zichuan was talking to Zou Shuo.

TOP NEWS

Social security issues highlighted

Welfare system should evolve with progress in technology, expert says

By CHEN MEILING
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While the rapid adoption of robots and artificial intelligence improves efficiency and reduces the cost of human resources, the social security system could face challenges in sustaining individual benefits, pension payouts and healthcare funds — an issue that should be addressed in advance, experts said.

Zheng Gongcheng, president of the China Association of Social Security, said that if automation replaces 70 percent of manufacturing jobs — a plausible scenario given the current technological trends — workers displaced by robots may receive lower welfare benefits during their transition to new roles.

"Traditional social insurance relies on payroll deductions from employers and employees. However, as robots replace human workers, the contribution base shrinks," said Zheng, who is also a professor at Renmin University of China in Beijing.

For example, a factory replacing 100 workers with robots would by default eliminate 100 monthly contributions, straining pension and healthcare funds. This raises a critical question: should enterprises pay social security fees for robots?

"Although there is currently no consensus, social security issues must be addressed with seriousness and prudence," Zheng said, adding that if left unaddressed, these issues may undermine the fairness and stability of the entire social security system.

The social security system, as a mechanism of wealth redistribution, should evolve simultaneously with technological progress, otherwise it will lose its core function of promoting social equality, he said.

Zheng suggested exploring new payment channels for robot-using companies to complement social security contributions, such as imposing a levy on robotic productivity gains.

Starting with the replacement of agricultural workers and expanding to the manufacturing and services



Dozens of UBTECH humanoid robots line up on March 1 for the world's first collaborative practical training program for robots at Zeekr's 5G-Intelligent Factory at Ningbo Qianwan New Area in Ningbo, Zhejiang province. YU CHANGSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

sectors, robots can free humans from simple, repetitive and hazardous jobs, which is a commendable progressive trend. However, the replacement process must be cautiously approached to avoid abrupt unemployment shocks, Zheng said.

"Robots and humans are not always competitors; instead, they can work together. For instance, as China has a large elderly population, robot-assisted elderly care could address labor shortages without fully replacing human roles," he added.

Zhao Ziyi, dean of the Guizhou Institute for Urban Economics and Development at Guizhou University of Finance and Economics, said that low-skilled workers, particularly those engaged in repetitive tasks in labor-intensive industries, face the maximum risk of being replaced.

"An expansion of the unemployed population could further widen the wealth gap. Capital and technology owners will likely reap greater benefits, while ordinary workers who fail to adapt may face exacerbated social inequality," Zhao said.

Adaptive adjustments to social policies are imperative, according to Zhao.

"First, we should build a basic security net by exploring universal basic income, reducing job transition costs and alleviating widespread anxiety," she said.

Next, innovative employment models should be introduced, such as reducing working hours in line with technological advancements and developing shared employment strategies to ease labor market pressures, she said.

The impact of AI on the economy is not strictly negative, there are some positive outcomes as well, Zhao said, adding that it could create new job positions such as AI training and robotics maintenance.

The use of AI and robots also reduces the monotony of labor, allowing the shift of the human workforce to fields that require emotional intelligence, complex decision-making abilities or innovative thinking, she said.

While machines may replace specific jobs, they cannot replicate human ingenuity, Zhao said, adding that shifting education from rote learning to fostering creativity is one way to embrace the change.

According to the Global Talent

Trends 2024, released by international human resource service provider Mercer, 56 percent of executives believe that AI will create jobs within their organizations. Also, the proportion of employees worried about losing their jobs to AI decreased from 53 percent in 2022 to just 10 percent in 2024.

Li Bing, a partner at consultancy Roland Berger, said that more people now view AI as a tool to boost efficiency.

"History shows that technological evolutions eventually create new forms of employment," Li said. "The key is to shorten the painful period of transformation and turn the impact of AI into opportunities for high-quality employment through education empowerment and policy guarantees."

Li suggested introducing AI skills to vocational training programs, as Singapore and Germany have done. Some parts of the United States introduced a tech dividend tax, taxing businesses with high levels of AI and automation and using the proceeds to support education and employment in low-income communities.

Envoy: Beijing supports plan to rebuild Gaza

By ZHANG YUNBI
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China supports the Gaza Strip reconstruction plan jointly adopted by Egypt and other Arab nations, as "Gaza is the homeland of the Palestinian people", said Liao Liqiang, Chinese ambassador to Egypt and China's representative to the League of Arab States.

Liao, who is also a national political adviser, made the remarks in an interview with China Daily on a range of topics, including the current situation in Gaza



Liao Liqiang

and China's ties with Egypt in bilateral, regional and global contexts.

On March 4, Arab leaders at a summit in Cairo endorsed Egypt's postwar reconstruction and development proposal for Gaza, which would allow roughly 2 million Palestinians to remain in their homeland.

Liao cited Foreign Minister Wang Yi's comments at a news conference earlier this month that changing Gaza's status by forceful means "will not bring peace, but only new chaos".

"The international community should strive for a comprehensive and durable ceasefire in Gaza and step up humanitarian assistance," he said.

The global community should also uphold the principle of "Palestinians governing Palestine" in the postwar governance of Gaza, in line with the two-state solution, in order to ultimately realize the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel, as well as ensure long-term peace and stability in the Middle East, he added.

Liao said that China is a "strategic partner of the Middle East countries" and a "sincere friend of the Arab brothers".

"China will continue to steadfastly fight for justice, peace and development for the people of the Middle East, and support the Middle East countries in independently handling their future and exploring their own path of development, in order to realize their dream of peace and revitalization at an early date," he said.

Speaking about the strategic significance of bilateral ties, Liao said that Beijing will work with Cairo "to make more contributions to speeding up development in the Global South".

This year marks the 80th anniversary of both the founding of the United Nations and China's victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and the World Anti-Fascist War.

For closer international coordination with Egypt, China looks to take these occasions as an opportunity to strengthen cooperation under the framework of multilateral platforms such as the UN, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Liao said.

"China looks forward to Egypt's active participation in various agenda items of the SCO this year, and to its support for relevant work under China's presidency (of the SCO)," he added.

Next year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of China-Egypt diplomatic relations and China will host the second China-Arab Summit.

Speaking about Sino-Arab friendship, Liao noted that Egypt is home to the headquarters of the League of Arab States.

"We should further strengthen and perfect the building up of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, make the second China-Arab Summit successful, and accelerate the building of a China-Arab community with a shared future," he said.

Referring to the two nations' role in boosting China-Africa relations, Liao said it is key to effectively implement the outcomes of the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in Beijing, and carry out the 10 partnership actions of China and Africa to jointly advance modernization.

On China-Egypt ties, Liao said the relationship "stands at a new historical starting point". He emphasized the need to follow the lead of high-level exchanges, realize the outcomes of heads-of-state diplomacy, further strengthen exchanges between the governments, legislatures and localities, and enhance the exchange of experience in governance.

Beijing and Cairo should "build on their high degree of political mutual trust, keep taking care of each other's core interests and major concerns, and support each other's efforts in safeguarding sovereignty, security and development interests," he said.

Referring to practical cooperation, Liao said the two countries should promote high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road.

"The two sides should develop fresh sources of growth for cooperation in emerging sectors, including new energy, aerospace, electric vehicles, the construction of 5G, agricultural technology and artificial intelligence," he said.

Liao called Egypt "a natural partner in the construction of the BRI", noting that Egypt was the first African country to issue panda bonds in China last year, a pioneering move in co-building the Belt and Road.

Economy: Xi says difficulties, challenges 'can be overcome'

From page 1

Paul Frimpong, executive director and senior research fellow at the Ghana-based Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory, said the Chinese government's effective partnership with the private sector has been central to the country's economic success through enhancing prosperity, employment and livelihoods.

"By driving GDP growth, creating jobs and fostering innovation, private enterprises underpin the nation's economic resilience," Frimpong said. "By fostering a dynamic and inclusive private economy, China can sustain high-quality growth, improve living standards and enhance global competitiveness."

However, China's private enterprises have faced mounting challenges in the past few years, including financing difficulties and concerns about fair competition and legal protections, which, to some extent, have thwarted the confidence of private businesses.

To address those challenges, the Chinese government has introduced

several key measures since 2023 to enhance the institutional environment for private enterprises. They include a 31-measure guideline jointly unveiled by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, to boost the private sector, the establishment of the private economy development bureau of the National Development and Reform Commission, and legislative progress on a law to promote the private economy.

Speaking in February at the symposium, which was attended by the nation's leading private entrepreneurs, Xi emphasized that the current difficulties and challenges facing the private sector are partial and temporary, rather than holistic and long-term, and "they can be overcome".

He also mentioned that this is an opportune moment for private enterprises and entrepreneurs to showcase their talent and significantly contribute to the country's development.

Djomart Otorbaev, former prime minister of Kyrgyzstan and a professor of the Belt and Road School of Beijing Normal University, said that the high-level symposium, the first of its

kind hosted since 2018, took place amid the complexities of emerging global economic challenges, including heightened geopolitical tensions and regulatory overreach against some of the country's corporate giants.

"What is certain is that the symposium communicates a clear message of support for private sector entrepreneurs at the highest level, which will inspire much-needed spirit and optimism for renewed growth in China, particularly in its tech sector," Otorbaev said in an article published on the website of the China Global Television Network.

According to the Government Work Report delivered by Premier Li Qiang at the annual session of the National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, on March 5 in Beijing, China will encourage private investment by implementing new mechanisms for public-private partnerships in a well-regulated manner and guiding more private investment toward major infrastructure and public well-being projects, thus creating more opportunities for the development of private capital.

Observers said that the Chinese government's engagement with private entrepreneurs, as well as ongoing policy refinements, reflect a pragmatic approach aimed at fostering an environment where businesses — State-owned and private ones alike — can thrive together. Rather than retreating, the private sector is being empowered to take on new opportunities in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, the digital economy and international trade, they said.

Huang Hanquan, director of the National Development and Reform Commission's Academy of Macroeconomic Research, emphasized the importance of implementing the measures to boost the private economy faithfully.

"Many supportive policies have been in place," Huang said in an interview with China Media Group. "The key, however, is to ensure their implementation. It is essential to enable private enterprises to truly feel tangible benefits, to genuinely experience the value and specific advantages of national policies."

Greenland hits back



A protester holds a sign reading "We are not for sale" on Saturday in front of the US consulate in Nuuk, Greenland, during a demonstration against US President Donald Trump's recent remarks on the sovereignty of the country. CHRISTIAN KLINDT SOELBECK / AFP

providing financial aid and advanced weaponry, but are publicly committing to actively sending troops and air support to guarantee Ukraine's security. This goes beyond ad hoc assistance; it signals a fundamental transformation in how Europe perceives its role in global security.

The willingness to act independently in Ukraine could serve as a test case for broader European-led defense initiatives, pushing Europe toward a more assertive global security posture in years to come.

To the extent that Europe emerges as a more independent geopolitical actor, it will deepen and accelerate the transition toward a multipolar world order. The US post-Cold War hegemony is being eroded, and a militarily more self-sufficient

Europe could further dilute Washington's global influence.

While Russia may be discomfited by a more militarily cohesive Europe, a Europe that prioritizes its own strategic concerns and may not always fully align with US policy creates opportunities for China to engage with European powers on terms more favorable to its interests. Regardless of the final trajectory, what is clear is that the era of Europe's unquestioning reliance on US security guarantees is rapidly coming to an end.

The author is Chong Hua Professor of Chinese Development in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and co-director at the Centre for Geopolitics, the University of Cambridge. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Shift: Europe being pushed toward greater self-reliance

From page 1

Differing attitudes toward Russia and China further complicate the picture. Some countries, particularly in Western Europe, prefer engagement over confrontation, while others see existential threats emanating from Moscow or Beijing.

The Ukraine conflict initially seemed like something that could fracture Europe or drive a wedge between it and the US. Instead, it galvanized NATO, reinforced European solidarity, and confirmed the indispensability of transatlantic cooperation. Even as disagreements emerged over specific issues such as

arms shipments and sanctions, Europe's response remained more unified than many had predicted.

Now, with US President Donald Trump increasingly embracing Russia — and apparently more and more willing to weaken NATO commitments — Europe is being pushed toward greater self-reliance. This was on full display in London on March 2, when European leaders discussed closer military cooperation.

The shift in tone and urgency among European policymakers suggests a growing realization that relying on the US for security may not be tenable in the long term. Europe-

an governments, particularly in Paris, London and Warsaw, have begun to emphasize military investments and deeper defense collaboration, not merely as a reaction to Trump's unpredictability but as a necessary step toward long-term resilience.

The London discussions highlighted a renewed emphasis on collective European defense, with leaders acknowledging that they may soon have to take on responsibilities that were once assumed to be Washington's. Trump's awkward stance on NATO may be producing the very outcome he claims to desire: a Europe that shoulders more of its own security burden,

albeit in ways that may reduce US influence.

How far European strategic autonomy can go remains to be seen. Still, the fact that serious discussions are taking place about issues such as a European nuclear deterrent — potentially with France's nuclear arsenal serving as a substitute for US nuclear umbrella — shows that ideas once considered fringe are gaining currency.

The broader shift toward military self-sufficiency is becoming evident in Europe's more strident stance on Ukraine. Multiple European countries, including the UK, France and Poland, are not only

CHINA

NATIONAL VISION, LOCAL ACTION

Jinhua shows sustainable economic path

City with robust private sector to further reshape industries, trade environment

By CHEN YE in Hangzhou
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Jinhua, a city in the heart of Zhejiang province, is transforming and upgrading its industries while fostering new ones to drive high-quality development, the city's Party Secretary Zhu Chonglie said.

In 2022, the Zhejiang Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China designated Jinhua as a "high-level, inland open hub." In response, the city has developed a robust private economy, with 2 million market entities.

In recent years, Jinhua has deepened its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, developed new trade models such as cross-border e-commerce and accelerated its opening-up efforts. Last year, the city's exports reached 771.92 billion yuan (\$106.62 billion), an increase of 16.4 percent year-on-year, contributing 32.1 percent to Zhejiang's growth and accounting for 3 percent of China's total.

This year, the Government Work Report mentioned the issue of involution, proposing a comprehensive correction to unhealthy, involuntarily destructive price wars between companies and the homogenization of products within an industry.

Zhu highlighted the economic impact of such competition and outlined steps the city government has taken to foster a more sustainable economic cycle. He noted that involutionary competition, particularly in price-cutting, erodes corporate profits and household incomes. Addressing the issue requires systemic reform to reshape the industrial ecosystem and cultivate new growth drivers, he said.

Jinhua is promoting technological and industrial innovation through the Zhejiang Central Science and Technology Innovation Corridor, which connects universities, platforms, enterprises and industrial chains. Last year, the city launched 15 provincial sci-tech initiatives to support more than 1,000 major projects with a combined investment of 1 trillion yuan, established 25 joint research and development centers and led the province in terms of



Zhu Chonglie

R&D investment and high-tech industry investment growth.

Also last year, a key technological innovation and application project for the edible and

medicinal fungi industry chain, developed by Zhejiang Shouxiangu Pharmaceutical Co, won top honors at the National Science and Technology Progress Awards. In 2024, Jinhua was named one of China's top 50 innovative cities, with its innovation capability index rising 16 places.

The city has also strengthened its open economy through the Yiwu International Trade Comprehensive Reform Pilot Zone and the China-Europe freight train network, helping enterprises tap into the markets of countries involved in the BRI.

Last year, the number of import and export enterprises in Jinhua surpassed 17,000, up 10.3 percent year-on-year.

The city has also improved its business environment by enhancing municipal coordination, value-added services, fair competition and enterprise support.

Jinhua has introduced a "double chain" drive mode, pairing a government-led industrial chain leader with industry-led chain owners. The government supports enterprises with innovation, market expansion and problem-solving, while leading enterprises spearhead industry-wide innovation collaborations.

Jinhua's leaders and major enterprises are working together to develop an innovation ecosystem centered on 10 key industrial chains, including new energy vehicles. In the electric vehicle sector, Leapmotor has received strong support, with 38 related enterprises clustered in Jinhua and the local procurement ratio for components and parts exceeding 40 percent.

"The cultivation of new quality productive forces is a long-term task," Zhu said. "We will persist in transforming and upgrading traditional industries, nurturing emerging ones and planning for future industries to promote high-quality development."

Public caution released after black bear attack

By LI SHANGYI
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Authorities have warned about an increased risk of wildlife attacks after a black bear injured two rangers in Wangqing county, Jilin province.

In an announcement on its WeChat account on Friday, the management bureau of the Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park urged local communities to avoid unnecessary entry into the park's core protection area. The bureau said conservation efforts have led to growing populations of tigers, leopards and bears, increasing the likelihood of human-wildlife encounters.

On March 10, Fan Huizhong, a ranger from the Lanjia protection station, was attacked by a black bear during a routine mountain patrol. He was walking ahead of his team when the bear emerged from behind a tree and lunged at him.

Fan sustained severe injuries, including deep lacerations to his head and a serious injury to his left eye. He also received penetrating wounds to both hands and injuries to his back and arms.

Dong Shoubin, another patrol team member, rushed to Fan's aid and fought off the bear with a wooden stick. Dong also sustained a deep laceration to the back of his head.

The management bureau said the Wangqing protection center immedi-

ately activated an emergency response plan, ensuring the injured rangers were transported to a hospital.

By the afternoon of the next day, Fan had undergone eye repositioning surgery and facial sutures. His eye was largely preserved, and his condition remained stable. In addition, Dong's head wound had been stitched, and he remained under hospital observation in stable condition.

Following the incident, the management bureau notified all branches and protection centers, emphasizing the increased risk of wildlife attacks during the winter-to-spring transition. This period marks the end of hibernation for bears and the peak breeding season for many large predators.

"Safety should be prioritized, and predators' activity should be closely monitored," the announcement said. "Patrol routes should be carefully planned to avoid key habitats of large carnivores such as bears and tigers."

In a separate incident on March 11, a black bear weighing approximately 150 kilograms broke into a villager's home in Garze, Sichuan province, in search of food.

The black bear is a second-class nationally protected animal in China. Police have reminded residents to avoid provoking or frightening bears and to refrain from using illegal hunting methods such as traps and metal cages.



Greyhound service

Pet owners play with their pups on a bus in Changchun, Jilin province, on Sunday. The city opened the Route 54 Siberian tiger-themed bus line to boost cultural tourism. The route features a dedicated service allowing owners to travel with their pets during specified times.

ZHANG YAO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

University for senior learners expands enrollments

By LIN SHUJUAN in Shanghai
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Shanghai University for the Senior has expanded to meet the growing demand for lifelong learning, adding 13 district-level branch campuses and 12 new teaching centers this semester, officials said.

Peng Haihong, executive vice-president of the university, said the expansion has strengthened the university's network, which now includes one main campus, 41 branch campuses and 12 teaching centers, allowing for the enrollment of thousands more students than last year. This semester, which began on March 3, the university welcomed more than 25,000 students to over 720 classes across its campuses, a new high.

The university's expansion reflects a broader commitment to fostering lifelong learning in China. The country's educational agenda prioritizes enhancing public services for lifelong education, with Shanghai's educational conference emphasizing the importance of promoting quality lifelong learning and facilitating resource-sharing initiatives.

Shanghai has seen a significant demographic shift. By the end of 2023, people age 60 or older accounted for 37.4 percent of the population, according to the Shanghai government, underscoring the growing need for educational services tailored to seniors.

Most classes at the university focus on training, skills coaching and cultural education, which have remained in high demand.

The transition from on-site to online registration in recent years has significantly expedited enrollment, with classes often filling up within seconds, said Fang Yi, a music instructor at the university.

The recent expansion is part of a broader strategy to establish a four-tier system of educational institutions for seniors at the city, district, subdistrict-town and community-village levels. The initiative aims to improve access to quality education resources for senior residents within their local communities, Peng said.

Established in 1985, the university offers a wide range of classes, including calligraphy, painting, foreign languages, piano, computer training, literature and international culture.

To meet evolving needs, the uni-

versity has introduced innovative courses such as The Beauty of Coffee and Scientific Infant Care, which have attracted strong interest from senior learners. Liu Qingyuan, the instructor for Scientific Infant Care at the university's Songjiang district branch, said the course incorporates practical demonstrations and immersive learning experiences to effectively teach advanced child-rearing concepts.

The university has also embraced digital technology to empower seniors, focusing on areas such as artificial intelligence, digital literacy and senior health management.

"We have established an e-learning center for the elderly, which has been very popular," Peng said.

Luo Bin contributed to this story.

New cancer treatment to improve patient outcomes

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
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Chinese scientists have developed a new treatment for nasopharyngeal carcinoma that helps patients live longer and have a better quality of life compared with traditional therapies that often cause severe side effects.

Nasopharyngeal carcinoma is a type of cancer that originates in the nasopharynx, which is the upper part of the throat behind the nose.

Ma Jun, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said Chinese oncologists have taken the lead in establishing a new immunotherapy-based regimen combined with chemoradiotherapy, eliminating the need for concurrent cisplatin in treating locally advanced nasopharyngeal carcinoma. The new approach has

shown improved treatment outcomes for patients.

The therapy significantly reduces toxic side effects and complications, leading to better overall health, physical condition and emotional well-being, Ma said. He described the research as a breakthrough in China's approach to diagnosing and treating nasopharyngeal carcinoma, shifting the focus from "survival preservation" to "optimal survival".

Radiotherapy is traditionally the primary treatment for nasopharyngeal carcinoma, with chemoradiotherapy using concurrent cisplatin being the standard. However, cisplatin is known to cause serious hematological and gastrointestinal toxicity. When used alongside radiotherapy, it can result in severe oral mucosal inflammation, weight loss and long-term complications such as hearing loss and kidney damage,

significantly affecting patients' quality of life.

The research was published in the oncology journal Cancer Cell in late February.

Ma, who is also executive president of the Sun Yat-sen University Cancer Center and the head of the research team, said the new treatment is expected to shape global clinical practices in the coming years. His center is the world's largest treatment facility for nasopharyngeal carcinoma, handling more than 7,000 cases annually. It ranks first globally in nasopharyngeal carcinoma academic research, according to European institution Experimentscape.

Nasopharyngeal carcinoma is highly prevalent in China, accounting for 47 percent of the world's new cases, Ma said.

In the study, Ma's team treated 152 patients with locally advanced nasopharyngeal carcinoma using

a combination of induction chemotherapy, simple radiotherapy and 12 courses of nivolumab. The treatment was administered in three stages: induction chemotherapy, simple radiotherapy and adjuvant radiotherapy.

Results showed that 88.5 percent of patients achieved three-year failure-free survival, 10.5 percentage points higher than historical data for induction chemotherapy followed by concurrent radiotherapy and chemotherapy. The new therapy also reduced the incidence of severe acute toxicity to 40.2 percent, with only 16.7 percent occurring during radiotherapy.

The study was conducted in collaboration with seven institutions across the Chinese mainland, including Xiangya Hospital of Central South University in Changsha, Hunan province, and Hubei Cancer Hospital in Wuhan, Hubei province.

Shanghai seeks to become global hub for 'firsts'

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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The Shanghai government on Sunday announced a series of measures and activities aimed at promoting the high-quality development of what it calls the "debut economy", as the East China metropolis works to become a global consumption hub, according to official sources.

The latest policy package seeks to optimize the business environment in the city and encourage the introduction of more "first" stores, debut products, shows and exhibitions.

According to Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, a series of "first" events is set to take place in Shanghai and other cities aiming to unleash market potential and promote the integration of domestic and international trade.

"We hope Shanghai will continue to lead the development of the debut economy nationwide and drive high-quality econom-

ic growth to a higher level," Wang said.

Since introducing policies to boost the debut economy in 2018, Shanghai has become a top destination for domestic and international brands to launch their first stores, debut products and host shows and exhibitions, said Shanghai Mayor Gong Zheng.

To maintain its appeal as a consumption hub, Shanghai will continue to attract high-quality brands to open their first stores, create new consumption experiences and scenarios, and enhance the business environment, Gong said.

With the aim of creating "First in Shanghai" as a city brand, the measures seek to attract more high-profile events, position the initiative as a global consumption bellwether and make Shanghai the top choice for international brands entering the Chinese market, said the city's Vice-Mayor Hua Yuan.

More than 3,500 domestic and international brands have held debut activities in the city as of the



Katherine Zhang, from Kerry Properties, introduces a tour exhibition during a new brand launching event in Jing'an district, Shanghai, on Sunday. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

end of 2024, with 1,269 first stores opening in Shanghai last year, Hua said. These included 14 first stores across Asia or beyond and 202

debut stores at the national or Chinese mainland level — leading Chinese cities in both quantity and quality, he added.

VISUAL

Villager dedicates life to greening mountainside

Concept of ecological development taking root in people's hearts



Wang Zizhong (left) and Wang Tao take a break during their patrol of the forest they planted near Ciyu village in Zibo city, Shandong province, on March 10. PHOTOS BY ZHAO DONGSHAN AND CHEN MING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Wang Zizhong (fifth from left) promotes forest protection and fire prevention to his fellow villagers on March 10.

By CHINA DAILY

Wang Zizhong, a 78-year-old farmer from Ciyu village in Shandong province, has devoted the past 42 years of his life to greening mountains and protecting forests alongside his 55-year-old son, Wang Tao.

Their unwavering dedication has transformed the barren mountains near their village into lush green landscapes, demonstrating Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, and showing that the concept of green development is increasingly taking root in people's hearts.

In 1983, Wang Zizhong gazed upon the barren hills to the north of Ciyu and started thinking about planting trees on the desolate land. The lack of vegetation and severe soil erosion on the mountains had greatly impacted the livelihoods of the villagers.

He made the bold decision to leave his job as a rural teacher, rented the land from the local government and took on the task of greening the barren hills.

He led his family up the mountains, settling in a stone cave to begin the arduous journey of planting trees.

At that time, he and his wife left their two teenage sons in the cave while the couple dug holes for the trees on the slopes. Due to the lack of roads, Wang Zizhong had to carry sacks of seedlings on his shoulders up the mountains, walking several kilometers to fetch water.

Each load could only water seven or eight trees, requiring dozens of trips each day.

The family would stay on the mountains for

over a month at a time, sleeping on makeshift beds in the stone cave, surviving on water from the mountain streams and simple meals of pancakes and pickled vegetables.

As the pancakes hardened over time, Wang Zizhong would soak them in water to make them easier to eat.

In 1997, Wang Zizhong's wife passed away suddenly from a heart attack while on the mountains due to accumulated fatigue.

Despite the devastating loss, Wang Zizhong's determination to green the barren hills remained unshaken. He continued to live and work on the mountains, planting trees without pause.

Over the course of 42 years, the Wang family overcame numerous hardships and planted over 200,000 trees, including cypress, locust and poplar, covering more than 133 hectares.

Their efforts transformed the once desolate mountains into a big patch of forest, leaving behind an invaluable "green treasure" for future generations.

In 2002, the 50-plus hectares of forest planted by Wang Zizhong and his family were designated as a national public welfare forest. Wang Zizhong took on the responsibility of guarding the forest while continuing planting more trees.

In 2017, as Wang Zizhong grew older, he passed on the task of forest protection to his son.

Wang Tao, who had been influenced by his father since childhood, eagerly took up the baton, tirelessly working in the forests every day to continue the family's legacy of greening and protecting the mountains.



Wang Zizhong (left) and Wang Tao walk toward the slope where they plan to plant more trees on March 5.



Wang Tao (left) supports his father while walking on their patrol route in the forest.



From left: The father and son check the health of trees in the forest on March 10. After a day's work, Wang Zizhong (right) prepares to eat his dinner at home on March 10.

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

CHINA'S LOW-CARBON JOURNEY

By HOU LIQIANG in Beijing, HU DONGMEI in Yinchuan and YUAN HUI in Hohhot

The Inner Mongolia and Ningxia Hui autonomous regions have made substantial progress in developing green hydrogen made from renewable energy, capitalizing on their abundant renewable energy resources to meet the needs of the local and nearby markets.

Government bodies in both regions have urged for the implementation of supportive policies, standardized technical guidelines and safety regulations at the national level to promote further growth of the carbon dioxide-free green fuel.

Inner Mongolia, with its vast wind and solar resources, has positioned itself as a leader in green hydrogen production. It can annually produce 60,000 metric tons of green hydrogen, according to the region's energy administration.

The region has over half of the nation's wind energy resources and more than a fifth of its solar energy resources, said Zhao Junpeng, deputy head of the science and equipment department at Inner Mongolia's energy administration.

This allows for low-cost hydrogen production, which is crucial for meeting the high demand in nearby markets like the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and Ningxia, he said.

Since 2022, the government in Inner Mongolia has introduced 14 policies covering various aspects of the hydrogen industry, from production and storage to transportation. These policies include reducing red tape for green hydrogen projects operating outside chemical parks, he added.

Inner Mongolia has been proactively integrating the development of green hydrogen with various industries, including transportation, metal smelting and coal chemicals, said Zhao. Over 400 hydrogen-fueled vehicles have been put into operation in the region, and a hydrogen-powered train has successfully completed a trial run.

Zhao noted a series of measures to further boost the development of green hydrogen in Inner Mongolia.

As the region advances the low-carbon transformation of coal-fired power generation, the region will implement the co-firing of more than 10 percent of green hydrogen with coal in the sector, he said.

Focusing on developing a complete green hydrogen industry chain from production to storage and transportation, the region aims to create a leading green hydrogen industry zone.

Ningxia is also making significant strides in green hydrogen development, with a production capacity of 26,600 metric tons supported by four renewable energy hydrogen projects, according to a statement from Ningxia's development and reform commission, responding to questions from China Daily.



Workers inspect equipment at a station that produces hydrogen and charges hydrogen-powered vehicles in Changsha, Hunan province, in March last year. The station is able to serve more than 100 vehicles a day with clean, green energy. CHEN ZEGUO / XINHUA

CLEAN HYDROGEN GETS GREEN LIGHT

Inner Mongolia, Ningxia integrating emissions-free fuels as part of low-carbon transition



Left: Workers at a Sinopec green hydrogen subsidiary inspect equipment in Kuqa, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in February last year. TURSON TOHUT / XINHUA Right: A worker checks the seals on hydrogen production equipment in Changchun, Jilin province, in August. ZHANG NAN / XINHUA



A series of efforts have been made in Ningxia to expand the application of hydrogen, it said.

In the Ningdong Energy Chemical Industry Base, 31 hydrogen-

powered vehicles — 25 heavy-duty trucks, two buses and four street sweepers — are in use, the commission said. To date, these heavy-duty trucks have transported 85,000 tons of cargo. Compared to their oil-fueled counterparts, they have mitigated 790 tons of carbon

dioxide emissions.

The region has also launched projects to demonstrate the integration of hydrogen into natural gas for consumption, it added.

The commission, however, also noted a series of challenges for green hydrogen development.

"Although the hydrogen energy industry in our country has entered a period of rapid development and is gaining significant attention, the development pathways, key technologies and business models are still largely in the exploration, testing and research stages," it said.

At the national level, it said, there is a lack of unified technical guidelines and safety regulatory standards for various stages of hydrogen development, including production, storage, transportation and utilization.

Additionally, there are no specific measures in place for policies supporting the hydrogen energy industry, resulting in low investment enthusiasm from enterprises, the commission added.

It also highlighted the high cost as another major factor hindering green hydrogen development.

"Hydrogen, when used as an energy source, incurs high costs in production, transportation and application. Reducing the production costs of green hydrogen is essential for advancing the hydrogen energy industry," it noted.

The cost of purified hydrogen produced through coal gasification is typically 11 yuan (\$1.5) per kilogram, while hydrogen derived from methanol is priced at 22 yuan per kg, it said. The average cost of hydrogen production through electrolysis using renewable energy sources, however, reaches around 30 yuan per kg.

This sentiment is reinforced by the energy administration of Ejin Horoo Banner in Inner Mongolia, where green hydrogen projects with a collective capacity to annually produce 10,000 tons of green hydrogen have been approved and are currently under construction.

It said the lack of integration in the production, storage, distribution and utilization of hydrogen has resulted in high cumulative costs across these processes, impeding its industrial-scale development.

The lack of developed infrastructure for hydrogen energy, specifically in terms of storage and transportation facilities, is also hindering its widespread market adoption.

The administration called for a series of measures at the national level to address the problem.

Increased investment should be allocated to universities, research institutions and enterprises to bolster their research and development endeavors, ultimately leading to a reduction in technological costs, it said.

More efforts should be made to attract high-level talents, teams and entrepreneurs to be devoted to developing key technologies for green hydrogen production, so as to enhance technological innovation, the administration said.

"The country should improve infrastructure construction planning, coordinate national initiatives in developing green hydrogen storage, transportation and other infrastructure, and implement policies to encourage social capital participation," the statement said, adding the national policy support for the sector should be enhanced to ensure stability, continuity and coordination.

Research improves prospects for sustainable commercial production of hydrogen

By YAN DONGJIE

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While China's green energy transition appears to have a heavy focus on electric vehicles, solar, wind and hydro power, another clean energy source being developed is hydrogen.

A Chinese team began researching catalysts for hydrogen generation in 2014, with the culmination of various efforts published in February in the journals Nature and Science. The first achievement was the production of a catalyst lifespan of over 1,000 hours in methanol-to-hydrogen reactions. The second was ethanol-catalyzed hydrogen production that released no carbon dioxide emissions.

Zhou Wu, an expert on hydrogen catalysis has been a driving force behind China's research into the process that could revolutionize the clean commercial production of hydrogen.

"We face severe energy and climate warming crises, and hydrogen production is internationally recognized as a critical solution," said Zhou.

According to research by the United Nations, fossil fuels — coal, oil and natural gas — remain the primary drivers of global climate change, accounting for over 75 percent of greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 percent of all CO₂ emissions.

"While hydrogen combustion produces only water, the production process itself is not clean," said Zhou. Current catalysts are inefficient, leading to energy waste, high costs and CO₂ emissions. "Our goal is to design better catalysts to make hydrogen production greener, more efficient and cost-effective," he added.

Despite a three-year scientist position at Oak Ridge National Laboratory under the Department of Energy in the United States where he earned the prestigious Eugene Wigner Fellowship and published high-impact research, in 2015, Zhou faced a crossroads in his career. Offers poured in for him to continue his research at various institutions from Singapore's top universities to the University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

"Singapore's package — twice as much as the UCAS funding and salary — was historically generous," Zhou recalled.

Yet a pivotal half-hour call with academician Gao Hongjun, then UCAS vice-president, reshaped his decision. Gao emphasized that while China's immediate resources might lag behind Singapore's, the nation's rapid rise in comprehensive strength and surging investments in scientific research promised far greater long-term potential.

"Academician Gao asked me: Did I want to be a 'founder' building something new, or return years later as a

Research requires intrinsic love. Enjoy the process, not just the outcome. Especially in basic research, facing daily failures for long periods is common. Only real curiosity can sustain you through experimental setbacks."

Zhou Wu, professor at the School of Physical Sciences, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences

"joiner"? I chose the former," Zhou said. UCAS demonstrated its commitment by allocating over 26 million yuan (\$3.6 million) from its own funds to establish a world-class electron microscopy lab at its recently inaugurated Yanqi Lake campus in Beijing.

"In 2015, securing 26 million yuan for equipment was challenging for any institution globally," Zhou said, while likening the new campus to a "scientific startup".

For decades, hydrogen industrialization has been stymied by the "impossible triangle": balancing low cost, high stability and zero carbon emissions. Zhou's team tackled this by reengineering catalysts at the atomic scale.

"Success requires four pillars: platform, funding, teamwork and envi-

ronment," said Zhou, adding that State and municipal grants have proved vital.

In 2016, the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Key Research Program in Frontier Sciences provided 2.5 million yuan over five years. By 2019, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission's "Outstanding Young Scientists" initiative had added over 3 million yuan annually. Crucially, both programs minimized bureaucratic hurdles, freeing the team to focus on research.

However, the real journey began in 2014. "A Peking University team had serendipitously discovered a highly active catalyst, but its performance was erratic," Zhou recalled. By 2020, his team had boosted catalyst stability tenfold by increasing surface site density — only to hit a physical limit.



"We were stuck," he said.

A breakthrough emerged from collective resilience. "Remarkable students kept joining us. Together, we tested new strategies and found that incorporating rare earth elements dramatically enhanced both the catalyst's activity and stability — it reignited our hope," he said, emphasizing that "every leap forward has been a team triumph".

While celebrating their latest breakthroughs, Zhou remains grounded. "Publications bring fleeting glory, but our catalysts still rely on expensive precious metals. Industrialization demands cost reduction," he said.

Artificial intelligence is expected to accelerate the progress further by optimizing data analysis, code generation and even manuscript drafting. "We're collaborating with machine learning teams to uncover hidden data patterns — this could lead to quantum leaps," Zhou said.

"Our goal isn't papers; it's making hydrogen energy affordable and practical."

Zhou credits his mentors such as academician Zhu Jing, his adviser at Tsinghua University, who at 68, revised his thesis draft word-by-word over a lunch in the canteen. "Her rigor still guides me — every paper must withstand scrutiny," he said. At Oak Ridge, his mentor Juan Carlos Idrobo's boundless curiosity left a lasting mark. "He'd propose 20

ideas; one or two worked. That fearless creativity is what I teach now."

Today, Zhou prioritizes nurturing students who are "confident yet resilient" in a rapidly evolving China. "Doctor Idrobo helped me selflessly, asking only that I pay it forward. That's my mission too."

From a "scientific startup" campus to atomic-scale breakthroughs, Zhou's individual journey encapsulates China's bold strides in clean energy. As his team races toward industrial-scale solutions, one principle endures: "Science isn't about shortcuts — it's about building foundations, atom by atom."

When asked about cultivating young scientific talents, Zhou shared his educational philosophy: "Many excellent students in my team share one trait: clear goals."

Instead of highlighting research prospects during recruitment, Zhou emphasizes the arduousness of research. He stresses that results may take three or more years, and suggests alternative directions if they lack determination.

"Research requires intrinsic love. Enjoy the process, not just the outcome. Especially in basic research, facing daily failures for long periods is common. Only real curiosity can sustain you through experimental setbacks. I'll constantly encourage them to keep this passion."

Shi Yudie contributed to this story.

BUSINESS

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China transforming into innovation powerhouse

Nation's emphasis on nurturing sectors such as 6G, quantum computing, robotics, AI will help it establish beachhead

By MA SI

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China's sharpened focus on pursuing integrated advancements in technological and industrial innovation showcases its determination to translate scientific breakthroughs into real-world applications, and such a strategy will help it transform into a global innovation powerhouse and maintain its edge amid competition and uncertainties, experts and company executives said.

Highlighting that bridging the gap between laboratories and production lines is a key pillar of China's push for new quality productive forces, they said this emphasizes not only breakthroughs in frontier technologies, but also scientific achievements that fuel economic vitality.

As 2025 marks the last year of China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), the nation's emphasis on nurturing sectors such as 6G, quantum computing, robotics and artificial intelligence will also help it establish a beachhead in these future industries for the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, they added.

President Xi Jinping underlined the need for Jiangsu province, one of China's economic powerhouses, to lead the integration of sci-tech and industrial innovation when he took part in a deliberation with his fellow lawmakers during the third session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, earlier this month.

According to China's 2025 Government Work Report, "We should pursue integrated advancements in technological and industrial innovation, press ahead with new industrialization, expand and strengthen advanced manufacturing, and vigorously develop modern services. This will enable us to build up the momentum of new growth drivers while upgrading and reviving traditional ones."

Pan Jiaofeng, a deputy to the 14th NPC and president of the Institutes of Science and Development, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said economically developed provinces such as Jiangsu should seize the opportunity from a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation.

"By relying on a solid industrial foundation, they should promote the renewal and upgrade of traditional industries, cultivate new momentum, take the lead in shaping new development advantages and drive more regions to catch up," he said.

To integrate technological innovation and industrial innovation, Pan said it is necessary to build platforms, improve institutional mechanisms, strengthen the position of enterprises as the main innovators and seamlessly connect the innovation and the industrial chains.

Lei Jun, a deputy to the 14th NPC and chairman of Xiaomi Corp, said: "We are full of confidence in developing new quality productive forces and remain unwavering in driving high-quality development through innovation. This year's Government Work Report consistently emphasizes 'innovation' and 'high-quality development', which deeply inspires me as a private entrepreneur in the tech sector and reinforces my confidence in achieving high-quality growth."

"I am moved by the nation's resolve to enhance the overall efficiency of its innovation system. One line from the report particularly resonates with me — promoting the spirit of scientists and fostering an innovation environment that encourages exploration and tolerates failure. This is the greatest encouragement for scientific research and entrepreneurial innovation."

He added: "Additionally, the report also emphasizes the need to leverage the leading role of sci-tech enterprises to advance high-level self-reliance and self-improvement in technology, which reminds me of the immense responsibility we shoulder."

The senior executive said Xiaomi, which has invested 105 billion yuan (\$14.5 billion) on research and development over the past five years, will continue to pursue breakthroughs in more crucial technologies and apply them into products.



A Xiaomi SU7 Ultra is presented in Mixc Mall in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Feb 28. ZHANG LANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Left: People check out a newly released AI studying pad from tech company iFly Tek in a shopping center in Shanghai on Jan 17.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Right: People discuss a quantum computer exhibited at Zhongguancun Exhibition Center in Beijing on April 28. REN CHAO / XINHUA



Jin Li, vice-president of the Southern University of Science and Technology and a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said: "Relying on the aggregation of scientific and technological resources, China is well-placed to coordinate the comprehensive reform and development of the education, science and technology talent system, so as to unleash a powerful momentum for scientific and technological innovation to lead high-quality development."

In 2024, China's total R&D expenditure reached 3.6 trillion yuan, an 8 percent increase from the previous year. The proportion of basic research funding within the total R&D budget hit 6.91 percent, and there were 14 high-value invention patents per 10,000 people, data from the government work report showed.

These figures reflect China's commitment to increasing its R&D intensity, which stood at 2.68 percent in 2024, surpassing the average level of European Union countries, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

Meanwhile, China possesses the most complete and largest industrial system globally. It ranks first globally in the production of over 220 industrial products and is the only country in the world that has all industrial categories in the United Nations' industrial classification, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Zhang Li, a deputy to the 14th NPC and president of the China Center for Information Industry Development, said: "Boasting such a strong, complete industrial system, China provides rich applica-

We should pursue integrated advancements in technological and industrial innovation, press ahead with new industrialization, expand and strengthen advanced manufacturing, and vigorously develop modern services."

2025 Government Work Report

tion scenarios and enormous market potential for technological innovation, as well as solid support for the development of emerging industries and future industries."

Li said that by combining new ideas and technologies with China's robust manufacturing capabilities and vast market potential, the nation can better harness its strengths.

Industrial innovation must remain rooted in the real economy, emphasizing both the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and the development of strategic emerging industries and future sectors, Zhang said.

"China's economy has historically relied on the real economy, and it is through this foundation that it will continue to progress," he added.

According to the Government Work Report, China "will establish a mechanism to increase funding for industries of the future and foster industries such as biomanufacturing, quantum technology, embodied AI and 6G technology."

Guo Guoping, a deputy to the 14th NPC and deputy director of the Key Lab of Quantum Information at the

Chinese Academy of Sciences, said he was deeply impressed by China's emphasis on nurturing strategic future technologies such as quantum computing.

"China has become the third country in the world capable of delivering complete quantum computers, positioning itself in the global first tier of quantum computing research. But challenges remain in some areas," he said.

Guo also stressed the need for increased investment in basic research, which he describes as the foundation of high-level scientific and technological independence. He advocated for leveraging China's unique advantages in mobilizing resources to tackle key core technologies and advance frontier and disruptive technologies.

"We need to build a robust industrial ecosystem that can support the transition from laboratory prototypes to commercial products," he added.

Qiao Hong, a member of the National Committee of CPPCC and an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said China has made rapid progress in robotics and artificial intelligence.

"Over the past three years, China has accounted for more than half of the global installations of industrial robots, and its lunar exploration robots have successfully returned lunar soil samples," Qiao said.

Qiao pointed to the development of humanoid robots as a particularly promising area, with China establishing a core technological foundation for large-scale, cost-effective production of high-performance robotic systems.

Her insights underscore the importance of integrating AI and robotics into traditional industries to enhance efficiency and productivity.

By leveraging digital technologies such as the internet of things, big data and cloud computing, companies like Unitree Robotics are transforming their operations and creating more efficient supply chains. This approach not only improves competitiveness, but also contributes to the broader goal of developing new quality productive forces.

Zhejiang province is a bellwether for China's regional innovation strategies.

As a manufacturing and e-commerce hub, Zhejiang has channeled its entrepreneurial culture into tech innovation, and startups like DeepSeek exemplify Zhejiang's knack for aligning private-sector agility with national goals, experts said.

Gao Yingzhong, an NPC deputy and head of the department of science and technology of Zhejiang province, said the province added 18 national key labs last year, bringing the total to 38, and it achieved 110 major scientific and technological achievements and received 30 national science and

technology awards.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of market consultancy Roland Berger, said China is making a strategic shift toward modern and sustainable economic growth.

"The China stories of the past — low labor costs, relatively few added-value products, massive exports and massive fixed-asset investments in infrastructure building and fueling the economy — are gone," he said. "The new China story relies on factors such as advanced manufacturing, decarbonization, growing innovation prowess and the services economy."

The evidence is already clear.

China dominates the Global Lighthouse Network list, a project launched by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with consultancy McKinsey & Company to track advanced manufacturing plants, known as lighthouse factories, that apply state-of-the-art digital technologies.

To date, China is home to 79 lighthouse factories, the highest number of any country and accounting for more than one-third of the global total.

China also ranked 11th in the 2024 Global Innovation Index, solidifying its status as one of the fastest-improving economies, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization.

As the nurturing of new quality productive forces gains traction in China, "In the future, we may see more similar patterns in industries such as healthcare, new materials and AI, and these efforts will provide big opportunities for foreign companies," Depoux added.

Ma Jun, senior vice-president of Volvo Group and president of Volvo (China) Investment Co Ltd, said: "We see great potential in China's AI growth. With its vast market and diverse application scenarios, China provides a unique space for AI innovation. I look forward to seeing more creative AI solutions in the transport and infrastructure sectors, to help reduce logistics costs further and support sustainable development in China and globally."

Ma said that the Swedish company aims to drive prosperity through sustainable transport and infrastructure solutions, which is in line with China's top agenda for nurturing new quality productive forces.

"We are committed to leading the industry to move toward electrification, and we are doing this with an international setup, and China matters a lot in our plans," Ma said.

"Through our R&D center in Jinan, Shandong province, and production base in Shanghai, Volvo CE has launched a range of electrified equipment, which has helped expand our new energy product lineup in both Chinese and international markets," she added.

Volvo is not alone in seeing great opportunities that China's innovation-driven strategy brings to foreign enterprises.

David Poon, president of Infineon Technologies Greater China, said, "China's focus on green, low-carbon and high-quality development aligns with Infineon's strengths and opens a new growth opportunity."

He said that new quality productive forces span a wide range of industries, such as intelligent connected new-energy vehicles, renewable energy, new materials and humanoid robots, and Infineon's semiconductor empower innovation across all these fields.

"With our 'In China, For China' strategy, we plan to increase local production of general-purpose semiconductors to address customer needs about supply resilience ... In the coming years, we aim to expand collaboration with local partners and broaden our local production to cover a wide range of automotive products," Poon said.

Zheng Yongnian, a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen) and president of the Qianhai Institute for International Affairs, said, "For a country to develop new quality productive forces, it needs to possess three core elements, namely promoting basic scientific research, facilitating the translation of basic research into applied technology, and ensuring a supportive financial environment."

BUSINESS



A salesman shows how to use a car's central control system to a potential buyer at a 4S store in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on March 5. DING GENHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

How China is lifting consumer spending to boost its growth

Nation to focus strongly on economic policy to improve living standards

BEIJING — Vowing to make domestic demand “the main engine and anchor of economic growth”, China’s policymakers have sent fresh and firm signals on empowering the vast number of consumers to spend, countering skepticism about the country’s shift toward a consumption-driven economy.

China will “place a stronger economic policy focus on improving living standards and boosting consumer spending”, according to this year’s Government Work Report submitted on March 5 to the National People’s Congress, the national legislature, for deliberation.

Boosting consumption is hardly a fresh concept in the Chinese policy toolbox, and consumer spending has played an increasingly vital role in China’s economy. In 2024, final consumption contributed 44.5 percent to China’s economic growth, surpassing investment and exports, and drove GDP up by 2.2 percentage points.

This year, however, the push has been particularly important as China’s economy contends with rising trade protectionism and global headwinds, while the domestic shift from traditional growth drivers, such as real estate, to new and more sustainable ones poses new challenges.

“Expanding domestic demand through stimulating consumption

can effectively counter external uncertainties, and it stabilizes short-term growth while aiding structural shifts over time,” said Yang Decai, a national political advisor and economics professor at Nanjing University, during the annual meetings of China’s top legislature and political advisory body, known as the two sessions.

To support this pivotal transition, the Government Work Report unveiled stronger supportive measures, including issuing ultra-long special treasury bonds of 300 billion yuan (\$41.3 billion) to back the consumer goods trade-in program, doubling the scale from last year.

The trade-in program, launched a year ago, has played a vital role in revitalizing consumer markets. In 2024, it led to sales exceeding 1.3 trillion yuan, including over 6.8 million vehicles, 56 million home appliances and 1.38 million e-bikes. More items have been added to the list of subsidized products this year.

“The trade-in program is more than just an economic policy,” Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao told a news conference on the sidelines of the third session of the 14th NPC on March 6, noting that it has fostered new development engines and improved the quality of life for millions of households.

Wang pointed out that the primary issue constraining goods con-

sumption is the ability and willingness to spend, while the main challenge for services consumption is the lack of high-quality supply.

To tackle these weaknesses, the Chinese government, in addition to clinching cheaper deals for consumers, aims to lift consumer confidence by bolstering people’s well-being, with a focus on creating jobs, raising incomes and easing their financial burdens.

More funds and resources will be used to serve the people and meet their needs, according to the Government Work Report.

Targeting over 12 million new urban jobs this year, the government will provide stronger support for full and higher-quality employment, according to the report. It also pledged to raise the minimum basic old-age benefits for rural and non-working urban residents as well as the basic pension benefits for retirees.

“Raising farmers’ pension payments may be the most effective way to boost consumption because it will significantly reduce the savings rate and boost consumption for half of China’s population,” said Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, who expects more will be done in this regard in coming years.

Government spending on education will rise by 6.1 percent this year and that on social security and employment by 5.9 percent, with strong gains also expected in health care and housing, Finance Minister Lan Fo’an revealed at the news conference on March 6.

Chinese policymakers have also tied consumption to lifestyle upgrades, not just spending volume, as the Government Work Report highlighted the need to create new consumption scenarios to accelerate the growth of digital, green, smart, and other new types of consumption.

It promised to improve the leave system and ensure its implementation to unlock consumption potential in sectors like culture, tourism and sports, which are among the most powerful service consumption engines.

Meanwhile, new consumption trends, from winter sports boom to silver-haired consumer spending upsurge, are already stoking fresh growth.

The silver economy, which caters to China’s aging population, could reach 30 trillion yuan by 2035 and create at least 100 million jobs by 2050, according to national political advisor Jin Li, vice-president of Southern University of Science and Technology.

Sun Guangzhi, head of the provincial culture and tourism department of the ice and snow-rich Jilin province, said the northeastern province sparked over 100 million yuan in direct spending by issuing consumption vouchers in the latest snow season.

“This demonstrates the combined benefits of policy incentives and local resource strength,” said Sun, a national lawmaker.

Fengxian mulls smart pivot in electric tricycles

By HAN JINGYAN
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In Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, Fengxian county — the hometown of Liu Bang who founded the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24) — is known as China’s largest industrial base for electric tricycles.

The number of new energy electric tricycles and supporting enterprises within Fengxian has surpassed 1,000, with an annual production capacity of more than 5 million units and products exported to over 130 countries, said Sun Fenghua, a local expert.

The county not only has more than 60 percent of the domestic electric-tricycle market share, but also takes up over 95 percent of the country’s motor market, she said.

As the birthplace of the nation’s electric tricycle industry, the growth of Fengxian has had a bumpy ride, growing from scratch and expanding with an industrial cluster after more than 20 years of development.

However, traditional electric tricycle manufacturing still faces such problems as low technological content, low level of intelligence, and low production size and efficiency, becoming obstacles to further development.

Fengxian is now steering the industry toward greener and smarter development, eyeing high-end, intensive and intelligent products and driving new quality productive forces, Sun said.

At the production plant of Jiangsu Zonsen Vehicle Co Ltd — a well-known electric tricycle maker — multiple tricycle frames are lined up and conveyed onto the production line on March 7, with robotic arms on both sides precisely applying paint.

“Our plant has adopted an intelligent vehicle production IoT system, monitoring the entire automated production process. Robotic arms handle all the welding work for the vehicle bodies and frames, while robots have replaced over 70 percent of the labor in the painting workshop, raising production efficiency by

more than 40 percent,” said Liang Huijian, production chief at the company.

In addition to the intelligent and digital upgrading of production lines, the local industrial base has bolstered the research and development of new products and iterative upgrades, integrating intelligent features such as seamless unlocking, voice interaction and Bluetooth connectivity into new products, focusing on smart mobility.

Within Keya Electromechanical Co Ltd, two recently installed wireless controller production equipment are running smoothly, with wireless controllers continuously coming off the assembly line.

“Our original production capacity of a wired controller production line was only 200 units per hour, but after upgrading to a wireless controller production line, its output has climbed by four times,” said Wang Zaifeng, general manager of Keya Electromechanical, noting that a controller with high speed, high efficiency and high reliability can make tricycles have better performance and longer service lives.

However, high-end automatic production equipment needs safer and more stable power supply.

In line with the local enterprises’ need, employees from State Grid Xuzhou Power Supply Co regularly visit firms to check the reliability of their power supply, internal safe power management, operation status of substation equipment and electrical wiring of distribution rooms, in a bid to eliminate safety hazards and ensure a stable power supply for all.

In the exhibition hall of Xuzhou Shengxiang Special Vehicle Co Ltd, various kinds of new energy special vehicles, such as fire engines, express vehicles and tour buses, are arranged in order.

Yu Xiaozhong, general manager of the company, said: “This is our newly launched Shengxiang cold chain car series — specially designed for the express logistics and distribution fields such as medicine, fresh food and takeaway.”

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A staff member of State Grid Xuzhou Power Supply Co (right) visits Keya Electromechanical Co Ltd in Fengxian county, Jiangsu province, on March 7, to help deal with power supply issues. YANG MENGJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

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BUSINESSINSIGHT

Reciprocal tariffs disguise US avarice

EAGLE EYE

By Cheng Dawei

The “reciprocal” tariff strategy is an iconic move by US President Donald Trump in his administration. According to Kevin Hassett, director of the US National Economic Council, trading partners of the United States are charging tariffs “two or three times the amount the US is charging” — which is apparently not true, yet has become an excuse for the US to seek so-called reciprocity in its trade with other countries — be it a reduction in tariffs by the other side or an increase in tariffs by the US. The approach to achieving such a goal is simple as well. Take vehicle trade for example, if a country imposes a 40 percent tariff on US auto exports, the US will impose a 40 percent tariff on vehicles from that very same country.

Reciprocal transactions in international trade negotiations normally consist of two basic elements — reciprocal trading conditions and returns, that is, one party gives certain conditions and the other party makes a corresponding return. Reciprocity should be based on mutuality, which is consistent with the basis of international trade practices — interdependence. The reward given on the basis of reciprocity is also a conditional return — good for good, evil for evil. For example, between 2018 and 2020, when the US also ignited trade tensions with China, Washington negotiated with Beijing on a so-called principle of reciprocity and used threatening means before negotiations, but the true nature of seeking such “reciprocity” is purely to benefit the US.

Reciprocity has become a popular term in international trade negotiations nowadays, albeit an overly used one. There are four different scenarios that normally occur in reciprocal trade negotiations. First, trade barriers between A and B should be dismantled on an equal footing so that free trade can be achieved on a reciprocal basis. Sec-

ond, countries participating in multilateral trade agreements relax trade protection levels to build a multilaterally reciprocal trading dynamic. Third, country A unilaterally raises the level of protection, and country B raises its level of protection on a reciprocal and corresponding basis. Fourth, when country A makes reciprocal demands on countries B, C, and D, the countries will begin their own round of retaliation, and the free trade system is undermined, triggering a proliferation crisis wherein all parties seek reciprocity.

The above four situations have repeatedly appeared in US trade history. This time, chances are that many US households have no idea what so-called reciprocity might mean or look like.

In 1890, the US Congress passed the McKinley Tariff Act, which for the first time formalized “reciprocal trade” as the basis of US foreign trade policy, with aims of expanding US exports, restricting imports and protecting the domestic market. According to the act, the average US tariff level was maintained at 48.9 percent.

When Franklin Roosevelt was in office, Congress passed the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934, which reduced tariffs by up to 50 percent. After World War II, Roosevelt combined the principle of unconditional most-favored-nation treatment with the principle of reciprocity so that a reduced tariff level could be applied to any country which the US signed a trade agreement with. Such multilateral reciprocal free trade then became the core of the post-World War II global trading system.

In the 1980s, with the gradual decline of the US in the global trading system as a hegemony and the loss of some of its advantages in trading competition, a group of trade protectionists in the country proposed an aggressive reciprocity to pursue a higher level of trade protection.

And now we're seeing another reciprocity cycle in US trade policy and practice. What could be the new features of the latest round of moves?

First, it is definitely a protectionist move. Peter Navarro, a senior White House adviser on trade and manufacturing, has said: “If President Trump succeeds like he wants



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

Trading partners of the United States are charging tariffs “two or three times the amount the US is charging” — which is apparently not true, yet has become an excuse for the US to seek so-called reciprocity in its trade with the other countries — be it a reduction in tariffs by the other side or an increase in tariffs by the US.

to succeed, we are going to structurally shift the American economy from one over-reliant on income taxes and the Internal Revenue Service, to one which is also reliant on tariff revenue and the External Revenue Service.” This serves as solid

evidence of the protective aspect of Donald Trump’s “reciprocal” tariff strategy.

Second, the tendency for aggressive reciprocity never truly leaves the stage. In the 1980s, Japan had its time of honor on the global stage with astounding economic indicators, showing a trend of catching up with and surpassing the US. However, at the time, the US launched a trade war to contain Japan. As with Japan at that time, during the first term of the Trump administration, the US government saw the rise of China’s economy as a threat, hence trade conflicts ensued.

Third, there is diffuse reciprocity. Robert Keohane, a US academic and international relations theorist, in his study of international organizations, proposed the concept of diffuse reciprocity, which he defined as a second type of reciprocity. This very type of reciprocity refers to the reciprocal transactions between two parties based on long-term mutual trust and cooperation within the framework of an international organization.

But the reciprocity currently proposed by the US is the fourth type, which will trigger a contagious crisis. Douglas Irwin, a US scholar, wrote in a Wall Street Journal article that “about 200 countries in the world with 13,000 separate tariff lines would lead to 2.6 million individual tariff rates, depending on the product and the country of origin”.

The US reciprocal tariff strategy has many drawbacks, and is difficult to build up and regulate, but will only undermine the existing multilateral trading system.

Fourth, the end of the US reciprocal tariff strategy is isolationism. The general meaning of reciprocity includes the recognition of interdependence, while in the context of the current US administration, it will eventually lead to isolation. In the US’ reciprocity game, countries will frequently use retaliatory tools, and they will unite to deal with trade woes brought about by the US moves and conclude trade agreements that exclude the US, which will trigger a downtrend for the US and lead to its further isolation.

Additionally, such reciprocity urged by the US is superficially fair but substantively unfair. The US demands “reciprocity” in trade between developing countries, which is like letting a group of average-sized individuals to compete with NBA stars. At present, most of the countries with higher average tariffs than the US are like such “average-sized” players, that is, developing countries, which will be victims of such a “reciprocal” tariff strategy.

Finally, it will be US consumers who pay for the cost of such reciprocal tariff strategies, just as trade specialist William Alan Reinsch wrote in his piece: “Trump’s Tariff Reciprocity: ‘Reciprocal’ tariffs like these will add to inflation and disproportionately hurt poor people, who use a higher percentage of their income to purchase necessities like shoes.”

The writer is a professor at the School of Economics at Renmin University of China. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

More diversified, vital pension system sought to ensure smoother golden years

MAIN STREET

By Zeng Gang

With increasing policy support and market innovation, a more diversified and vital pension finance market is being formed in China amid rapid population aging.

Pension finance, put forward as one of the “five major sectors” at the Central Financial Work Conference held in 2023, has received significant attention. Then in 2024, the State Council, the country’s Cabinet, issued a series of policies intended to accelerate the establishment of a comprehensive pension finance system and promote the integration of medical and elderly care, including eldercare services and industrial synergy. Among basic endowment insurance, enterprise annuities, private pensions and the three-pillar pension insurance system, private pensions are becoming a key factor.

To meet varied needs, financial institutions have introduced diversified products such as target-date funds, pension wealth management, commercial pension insurance and pension trusts to the market, helping the pension finance market expand rapidly. Meanwhile, emerging innovative products and improved adaptability have also enhanced the user experience for seniors.

By optimizing market-oriented operational mechanisms, revitalizing idle assets, attracting foreign investment and developing the silver economy, pension services are developing at scale and strengthening their branding effectiveness. The diversification of China’s pension market is also accelerating, with active engagement of banks, insurers, funds and trusts alongside significant social capital support.

Meanwhile, the pension finance and eldercare sectors are facing deep integration in China, promoting the construction of eldercare facilities, integration of medical and eldercare services and travel-related eldercare. The combination of the pension financial market and the silver economy also releases the potential for more pension consumption.

To meet the diverse needs of the elderly, financial institutions need to diversify the design of financial products. For seniors with low risk tolerance, financial institutions can launch principal-protected savings products, high-yield time deposits or annuity insurance to ensure the safety and stability of funds. For seniors with some investment capability, low-risk wealth management products or pension target funds can be designed to take into account incomes and liquidity. In addition, long-term care insurance and medical savings accounts combining health needs can also provide more targeted protection for seniors.

To further enhance the services experience, it is necessary to adopt age-appropriate transformation.

For the online experience, optimizing the mobile banking application interface and simplifying the operating process for seniors are necessary undertakings. In offline outlets, communities need to set up a dedicated service window for seniors to provide them with transparent patient consultation services.

For the purpose of providing more comprehensive pension security for the aged, financial institutions should actively unite pension communities, medical institutions and cultural tourism enterprises to launch “one-stop” services as well as enhance the attractiveness of related products.

To assist the elderly to make rational decisions and prevent financial fraud, it is helpful to strengthen risk warnings and simplify product descriptions. At the same time, exclusive complaint channels should be opened in a timely fashion to respond to the needs of the elderly in protecting their rights and interests.

Next, policymakers should prioritize coordinated reforms to enhance the multi-pillar pension framework with the aim of ensuring the healthy development of China’s pension finance system. The first step is to expand coverage of basic endowment insurance and improve its long-term stability. The second step is incentivizing more businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to adopt enterprise annuity plans through tax breaks and policy support. Simultaneously, accelerating the rollout of private pensions remains critical, requiring optimized account man-

agement, diversified investment products and enhanced tax incentives to boost participation.

Furthermore, more attention should be paid to regional coordinated development for the inclusiveness and fairness of eldercare financial services. On the one hand, the government should support underdeveloped areas and promote the extension of pension financial services to rural and underdeveloped areas through fiscal transfer payments and policy preferences. On the other hand, pension financial policies should be formulated based on local economic conditions and characteristics of seniors to meet the needs of different regions.

In terms of financial institutions, they should innovate financial products to deliver targeted support for the senior care sector. For capital-intensive sectors such as senior living communities and nursing facilities, institutions can provide long-term low-interest loans, specialized funds or public-private partnership financing to bolster the construction and operation of eldercare infrastructure. Additionally, developing insurance products linked to eldercare services — such as long-term care insurance and health insurance — will not only secure financial protection for seniors, but also enhance the sustainability of eldercare providers. The promotion of reverse mortgage pension insurance options could further unlock seniors’ housing assets, channeling more funds into the sector.

Deep integration of financial services with eldercare is essential to

improve seniors’ quality of life. By collaborating with senior living communities, institutions could introduce installment payment plans and dedicated pension savings accounts, thus lowering barriers to accessing high-quality care. Establishing on-site service stations within communities would offer seniors convenient financial services, while integrating value-added offerings like health management and rehabilitation care to create “one-stop” pension finance solutions.

Financial institutions can support medical-eldercare integration projects by funding the development of healthcare facilities within care institutions, elevating service capabilities as well. Partnerships with medical providers could yield health management-linked financial products, such as health savings accounts and chronic disease insurance, to deliver comprehensive coverage for seniors — spanning check-ups, rehabilitation and nursing care.

Resource integration will also drive ecosystem development in the eldercare sector. Establishing senior care sector investment funds can attract social capital to fuel collaborative industrial chains across services, healthcare and smart eldercare technologies. Supporting research and development in smart care solutions, such as telemedicine and health monitoring systems, will enhance service efficiency and quality.

The nationwide implementation of the private pension system, a key third-pillar component, has bolstered the sustainability of the pen-

To meet varied needs, financial institutions have introduced diversified products such as target-date funds, pension wealth management, commercial pension insurance and pension trusts to the market, helping the pension finance market expand rapidly.

sion framework by complementing basic endowment insurance and enterprise annuity. Its long-term capital inflows are expected to stabilize capital markets and optimize investment structures. For financial institutions, this shift presents both opportunities and challenges.

Financial institutions should innovate by designing stable, long-term investment products tailored to client risk profiles, streamlining account management processes and leveraging fintech tools to enhance user experience. It is also crucial to conduct investor education campaigns to drive public engagement, alongside data-driven strategies to deliver personalized services.

The writer is director of the Shanghai Institute for Finance & Development. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLD

Russia, Ukraine continue air attacks

MOSCOW/KYIV — Russia and Ukraine continued aerial attacks on each other, officials said on Sunday, as the fate of a proposed cease-fire to the three-year-old conflict remained uncertain.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday he supported in principle Washington's proposal for a 30-day cease-fire with Ukraine but that his forces would fight on until several crucial conditions were worked out.

Both sides have since traded heavy aerial strikes, and Russia moved closer on the battlefield to ejecting Ukrainian forces from their months-old foothold in the western Russian region of Kursk.

The Russian defense ministry said on Sunday that its air defense units destroyed a total of 31 Ukrainian drones over Russian territory.

Of those, 16 were downed over the southwestern region of Voronezh, nine over the territory of the Belgorod region and the rest over the Rostov and Kursk regions, the ministry said on the Telegram messaging app.

In a Ukrainian drone attack on the Russian border region of Belgorod, three people were injured, including a 7-year-old, regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said earlier on Telegram.

Two of the people were injured after a drone hit their house, sparking a fire in the Gubkinsky district of the region, while the other person was injured in a drone attack on the village of Dolgoye, Gladkov said. Alexander Gusev, governor of Voronezh, said on Telegram that there were no immediate reports of injuries or damage.

The acting governor of the



Firefighters work at the site of an apartment building hit by a Russian drone strike in Chernihiv, Ukraine, on Sunday. MAKSYM KISHKA / REUTERS

southern Russian region of Rostov said there were no immediate reports of injuries or damage reported there either.

In Ukraine, authorities reported several Russian drone strikes, including on the northern region of Chernihiv, where firefighters were battling a blaze at a high-rise building that was sparked by a Russian drone attack, Ukraine's state of emergency service said.

Ukrainian media reported a series of explosions in the region surrounding the capital Kyiv, after Ukraine's air force issued warnings of a threat of drone attacks on Kyiv and a number of other central Ukrainian regions.

Diplomatic efforts

While there were no signs of easing on the battlefield, diplomatic efforts were underway to resolve the conflict.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in a call on Saturday, "discussed next steps," US State

Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said.

The statement gave no details on when the next round of US-Russia talks hosted by Saudi Arabia would begin.

But Rubio and Lavrov also "agreed to continue working toward restoring communication between the United States and Russia," Bruce added.

Since returning to the White House in January, US President Donald Trump has stressed his desire to end the conflict. Trump on Saturday appointed Keith Kellogg as special envoy to Ukraine.

A former national security adviser during Trump's first term, Kellogg had previously been described as a special envoy for both Ukraine and Russia.

But he was excluded from recent talks in Saudi Arabia on ending the conflict, with NBC News in the United States citing a senior Russian official who said Putin considered him too pro-Ukraine.

The diplomats' call came after a

virtual summit hosted by London earlier on Saturday.

At those talks, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told some 26 fellow leaders that they should focus on how to strengthen Ukraine, protect any cease-fire and keep up the pressure on Moscow.

Speaking to reporters in Kyiv on Saturday, after virtual talks between Western allies hosted by Starmer, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy voiced Ukraine's support for the 30-day full cease-fire proposal to discuss a longer-term peace plan, but said Russia would attempt to derail talks with conditions and "buts".

Starmer said the "ball was in Russia's court" and that Putin would "sooner or later" have to "come to the table".

Military leaders from about 30 countries met in Paris on March 11 to discuss plans for a peacekeeping force in Ukraine, and will meet again Thursday in Britain.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Innovation to elevate status as tech leader

Observers hail growth target as realistic amid changing geopolitical landscape

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE
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A realistic and meaningful target set by China for its 2025 GDP growth shows the pragmatism and wisdom of the Chinese leadership, observers in the United Arab Emirates said, also noting that China's innovation push will help bolster the nation's status further as a global leader, bringing both economic benefits and political leverage.

According to the Government Work Report delivered on March 5 by Premier Li Qiang to the national legislature for deliberation, the government is targeting a GDP growth of around 5 percent this year, similar to the goal set in 2024 — successfully achieved despite various challenges.

Habibul Haque Khondker, a professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, UAE, described Beijing's 2025 economic growth target as realistic amid changes in the global geopolitical and economic landscape.

China's economy will remain robust because of its focus on technology-driven productivity growth, Khondker said, suggesting that growth will remain resilient despite additional tariffs from the United States.

As 2025 marks the final year of China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period and is also crucial for crafting the next five-year blueprint, the topic of innovation, especially in the field of artificial intelligence, has stood out during the annual two sessions.

Khondker said the Global South will benefit from China's innovations in AI, electric vehicle batteries and communications technologies, among other spheres. Meanwhile, China is also on the road to becoming a global leader in science education, he said, adding the Middle East and Africa can benefit from Chinese partnerships in that field.

On a global scale, the overall growth rate of around 5 percent places China among the world's fastest-growing major economies, with the economic increment equating to the annual output of a mid-sized nation.

But US President Donald Trump's tariff strategy has injected some uncertainty into the world economy, Khondker noted, citing worries about the potential impact of tariff hikes on international trade.

"The silver lining is the Chinese focus on consumer spending. China

is a huge market in itself and as ... (people) spend more on consumption goods, this will offset some of the losses from the external trade caused by the high tariffs," he said.

Vigorously boosting consumption has been cited as a top priority in the Government Work Report, he added.

Speaking about the Trump administration's moves, Khondker said: "I think that the tariff war, which will lead to a trade war, is unsustainable. I foresee a backtracking (by) the US soon."

He also said Washington's economic decoupling attempt, as part of a containment strategy against Beijing, is unlikely to succeed because it would have a major impact on the global economy.

"If China suffers, the whole world will suffer economically," he said.

Khondker said that in the event of a slowdown and reduction in trade with the US, China can offset that through closer business relations with Europe as well as other regions and countries, including Mexico and South America.

Trade ties

Since China has the rest of the world to trade with, the nation's economy will remain strong, he said, adding that Beijing's "focus on technology-driven productivity growth" will also ensure the economy will continue to power ahead.

Rasha Al Joundy, a senior researcher at the Dubai Public Policy Research Centre, said China's global economic position will strengthen despite challenges, given the nation's commitment to further opening up.

China and the Middle Eastern nations can deepen cooperation through strategic pathways by combining infrastructure-driven economic integration through the Belt and Road Initiative; institutionalized multilateral frameworks such as BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization; and through conflict-resolution diplomacy, she said.

This triad of cooperation aligns developmental goals with security imperatives, positioning China-Middle East ties as a stabilizing force in an evolving global landscape, Al Joundy said.

"China's mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a successful deal that still has a positive effect on regional security and stability, which will be replicated on more fronts on the global stage," she said.

Chinese firms' role in Africa's industrialization lauded

By WANG XIN in Shanghai
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Chinese companies have been playing a critical role in accelerating the process of energy transition and industrialization in Africa, and are expected to further unleash the continent's huge potential of its rich energy resources, said a top executive of the African Energy Chamber as it signed a memorandum of understanding Thursday with a Chinese firm to create a \$100-million fund to drive technologies in Africa.

NJ Ayuk, founder and executive chairman of the African Energy Chamber, said during a forum held Thursday in Shanghai that Chinese and Africans "get along very well like 'peanut butter and jelly'", highlighting Chinese investors' contribution to Africa's energy and social development. He expected further cooperation on both sides in energy sectors, including renewable energy such as solar, wind and hydrogen powers, as well as fossil fuels like coal, natural gas and oil.

"The energy transition in Africa has to be different, and we cannot pursue it in the same way as China or Western countries have done. We have 600 million people without electricity, 900 million without clean cooking technologies, and most of them are women. Our first job in Africa right now is to provide electricity and energy access for all Africans. ... You have seen massive opportunities in the African energy sector today and it makes that market exciting for not just China, but for all the investors that are looking at the continent," he told China Daily.



NJ Ayuk (right), founder and executive chairman of the African Energy Chamber, signs a MoU with Tima Networks during a forum held in Shanghai on Thursday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Africa boasts rich oil and gas resources, and is particularly rich in renewable energy resources. The continent holds approximately 60 percent of the world's most optimal solar energy resources and possesses enormous wind, hydro and geothermal potential. However, Ayuk said the "regulatory environment" and "financing" are the main challenges hindering the sector's growth.

Chinese investors are playing a key role, he said, citing the example of a Chinese company providing clean cooking technologies across Africa. "They take LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) from the oilfield. But instead of shipping it to China or to other markets to make something big out of it, they are selling it across Africa. It is improving Africans' lives and enabling them to use modern, cleaner and better cooking technologies — not by cutting trees. It is protecting women's

health and getting them back to work. Those are the stories that most people don't tell about China."

China and Africa have demonstrated a solid and long-standing relationship over the past six decades. China has been the continent's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years, and the bilateral trade between the two sides exceeded 2.1 trillion yuan (\$276.24 billion) in 2024.

Energy transition

Currently, 52 African countries and the African Union Commission have signed Belt and Road cooperation documents with China, and over 10,000 Chinese companies have established themselves in Africa, said Beini Da, the chamber's chief representative of China Region.

Phuti Joyce Tsipa, South African consul general in Shanghai, said at the forum that as the African conti-

nent accelerates its energy transition and industrialization, the Chinese firms' technical strength, financial support and project experience will become a key force in helping Africa achieve energy independence and economic growth.

Ayuk valued Africa's close connection with China, hoping to continuously drive cooperation and ensure Africans participate in the process and walk hand in hand with Chinese partners.

During the forum, Ayuk, representing the chamber, signed a memorandum of understanding with Shanghai-headquartered Tima Networks, aiming to support the adoption of electric vehicles and boost the technology sector in Africa.

"We always say when we go to many Western countries, we get a lecture. But when we come to China, we get a project. You (Chinese investors) have the technology, skill set and know-how. We want to learn a lot from you. Chinese investors have built infrastructure across Africa, which is benefiting African businesses built upon it. I am very excited about our future cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, and I think it is only going to grow bigger and stronger, as we see our people connected and B2B business backed with governments," he added.

Seeing Shanghai as a commercial and business center in China and describing it as a "futuristic city", Ayuk said the preparation of the chamber's Shanghai office is in full swing, aiming to better connect and benefit the city, and the whole of China and Africa.

34 killed as severe storms batter US

HOUSTON — At least 34 people died as of Saturday night as dozens of violent tornadoes, blinding dust storms and gust-driven wildfires continued to batter the central and southern United States on Saturday.

More than 40 tornadoes had hit eight US states, while severe weather threat continues in southern and southeastern areas in the country, ABC News reported.

In the southern state of Mississipi,

Governor Tate Reeves announced on Saturday that six people died in three counties and three more people were missing.

"It appears that multiple tornadoes moved through our county from the southwest to the northeast, causing significant damage to multiple areas," said Tylertown Police Chief Jordan Hill.

Up to 19 tornadoes may have passed through the Midwest state of Missou-

ri, killing at least 11 people in four counties while causing widespread havoc, said Missouri Governor Mike Kehoe's office. Later in the day, local media reported the death toll in the state rose to 12 due to tornado strikes.

In Oklahoma, one person died from wildfire smoke, Governor Kevin Stitt said at a news conference.

As of Saturday morning, more than 170,000 acres have burned with nearly 300 homes and build-

ings damaged as more than 130 blazes were reported across 44 counties in Oklahoma, Stitt said.

Georgia Governor Brian Kemp announced a state of emergency on Saturday.

"This storm will hit at the worst possible time, as people are heading to or already in bed. Be prepared ahead of time and remain weather aware as long as this system is in the state," Kemp said in a statement.

Extreme weather conditions could impact more than 100 million people across the country, the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction

Center warned on Saturday. The center has issued a 5 out of 5 "high risk" of severe weather for Saturday.

"A tornado outbreak is expected across the central Gulf Coast States and Deep South into the Tennessee Valley. Numerous significant tornadoes, some of which should be long-track and potentially violent, are expected this afternoon and evening," said the center.

At least 200,000 homes and businesses across the central United States were without power by Saturday evening, according to tracking site poweroutage.us.

The central and southern states of Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas get the most violent ones due to their unique geographical and meteorological conditions.

Dubbed "Tornado Alley", this is where winds of widely varying temperatures meet in volatile, potent storm clouds, with most storms occurring from May to June.

In 2024, 54 people died in tornado-related incidents in the US, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

COMMENT

Editorials

Due care and attention to all parties' concerns key to peace and stability in the Middle East

Although the US president said the series of air strikes on the Houthi-held areas in Yemen on Saturday were to protect US shipping, air, and naval assets, and to restore navigational freedom, there should be no doubt the move aims to exert pressure on Iran, the backer of the Houthis.

The United States' air strikes, which continued on Sunday, came one day after the Houthis issued a four-day ultimatum to Israel, saying they would resume attacks on Israeli ships in the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and nearby waters unless Israel allowed humanitarian aid into the besieged Palestinian enclave of Gaza.

The US' attacks essentially serve to ease the pressure on Israel that is engaged in ceasefire talks with Hamas, another Iran-backed militant group.

Compared with the Iran-backed Hezbollah in neighboring Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, the Houthi targets are about 2,000 kilometers away from Israel, making the militant group, which can easily attack Israeli ships sailing in the Red Sea, a thorn in Tel Aviv's side. To take the initiative in the Gaza ceasefire talks, Israel has to rely on the US' assistance to at least prevent the Houthis from trying to lend a hand to Hamas.

The US leader also took the air strikes he ordered to be launched on Saturday as an opportunity to warn Iran to stop supporting the Houthis, promising to hold the country "fully accountable" for the actions of its proxy, two weeks after he sent a letter to Iranian leaders offering a path to restarting bilateral talks between the countries on Iran's advancing nuclear program.

Tel Aviv has long regarded Iran's nuclear program its largest security threat, and has thus been pushing the US and other Western allies to try and neutralize it.

But considering such broad-based missile strikes against the Houthis were carried out multiple times by the previous US administration in response to frequent attacks by the Houthis against commercial and military vessels in the region, if not at the call of Israel, to what extent the latest US air strikes can have their intended effects remains unclear.

The situations in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria are all at a crossroad now and instead of threats from any party the focus should be on dialogue and negotiations, as the Middle East crisis cannot and should not be resolved by force.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi put forward China's five-point proposition on the proper settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue in his meeting with visiting Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov Sergey Alexeevich in Beijing on Friday, before the US' air strikes on the Houthis, in which China calls for all parties to actively work to create conditions conducive for dialogue and negotiation, and refrain from actions that might escalate the situation.

As Wang said, there are already enough problems in the Middle East. All parties should focus on the Palestine-Israel issue and find a resolution to this historical injustice that has been delayed since World War II, rather than creating new tensions or crises.

The US should respect Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy and return to the Iranian nuclear talks at an early date. The framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action should be the basis for a new consensus built through consultation on the foundation of political sincerity.

With that in mind, parties should think twice before initiating the emergency brake built into JCPOA — the so-called snapback provision that allows for any participant state to trigger the swift reimposition of United Nations sanctions against Iran, as doing so will only worsen the situation and escalate tensions.

Acting from a position of strength to try and bully Iran into submission will be counterproductive. Upholding the principle of mutual respect is the only viable path to finding the greatest common ground that accommodates the legitimate concerns of all parties and enables the region to move on from the turmoil that has convulsed it for decades.

G7 statement shows its ideological bias

In their meeting in Charlevoix, Canada, on Friday, the G7 foreign ministers released a joint statement, in which they again bad-mouthed China on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, South China Sea issue, and the Taiwan question, as well as nuclear weapons.

They falsely labeled China as an "enabler" of Russia's military operations in Ukraine and the reconstruction of Russia's armed forces, willfully distorting the truth of the matter. China has never got involved in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, except as a promoter of peace talks. It has never provided weapons or any military-related products to either side. It is G7 countries that have been adding fuel to the flames of hostilities by providing a steady stream of ever more sophisticated weapons and other assistance to Ukraine and imposing ever tougher sanctions on Russia.

As parties deeply involved in the conflict, they are not in a position to point an accusing finger at China on this issue.

China has done what it can to bring the two parties to the negotiating table and has constantly maintained that the conflict should be settled once and for all through talks.

On the issue of the South China Sea, the G7 foreign ministers accused China of using "force and coercion" to change the status quo, and said that they were concerned about China's "dangerous maneuvers" and "use of water cannons" against Philippine and Vietnamese vessels. Again they have distorted the facts. China has never done anything to change the status quo by force or coercion. It is some regional parties that have been trying to change the status quo with the overt support of some of the G7 countries. Due to the continual provocations China has been left with no alternative but to firmly respond. At the same time, China has continually called on relevant parties to settle the territorial disputes through talks and to shelve their differences for joint development of the waters.

What is totally unacceptable is that the G7 foreign ministers talked about the Taiwan question in the joint statement by emphasizing the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. Despite it being China's internal affair, they reiterated their opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion while turning a blind eye to the increasingly provocative moves of the secessionists on the island.

No party is more concerned about the peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait than the Chinese mainland. Beijing has reiterated time and again that it will try its best to realize the reunification of the island with its motherland through peaceful means. But that does not preclude the alternative of taking back the island by force.

It is the secessionists on the island — especially its leaders from the Democratic Progressive Party, who are attempting to promote the impression of the island's "independent status" — who have recklessly increased cross-strait tensions. It is their refusal to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus that both sides of the strait belong to one China and the one-China principle that has established barriers for the island to participate in relevant international organizations.

It is also ridiculous for the G7 foreign ministers to express their concern over China's military buildup and modernizing of its nuclear arsenal. The nuclear powers among the G7 countries have a significantly greater number of nuclear warheads than China has, whose nuclear arsenal is at the level to meet the needs of defense. Unlike the G7, China also has a clear no first-use stance.

It is the G7 countries that have sabotaged nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament efforts. They are not in a position to dictate to other countries what to do when it comes to nuclear arms control.

The G7 foreign ministers even accused China of "nonmarket policies" and practices that are leading to overcapacity and market distortions. This is absurd. It is the sanctions of the G7 countries and their imposition of unilateral tariffs that have disrupted international supply chains and trade rules. It is they that have launched trade wars and exercised unilateralism and trade protectionism, yet they seek to shift the blame onto China.

The G7 countries should reflect on what they have done and are doing to create so much trouble in the world, rather than looking at the world through the prism of ideological bias.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Consumer protection must be more than just day in spotlight

March 15 is Consumer Rights Protection Day, and on Saturday China Media Group broadcast its annual gala exposing a series of practices infringing on consumer rights.

Following the CMG report, market regulatory authorities in multiple regions launched overnight enforcement actions. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology also promptly organized investigations into the implicated entities by communications administrations in related places.

Consumer rights protection is not only the foundation for maintaining fair market competition but also a key factor in stimulating consumption potential and promoting the growth of domestic demand.

On March 13, the China Consumers Association released the 2024 consumer satisfaction evaluation report

for 100 cities, with an overall score of 80.36, indicating a generally good level of satisfaction. High consumer satisfaction has directly contributed to the recovery of the consumer market, with total retail sales of consumer goods reaching 47.78 trillion yuan (\$6.6 trillion) in 2024, a year-on-year increase of 3.5 percent. These findings demonstrate a positive correlation between consumer rights protection and consumers' willingness to spend.

Domestic demand is a crucial engine for economic growth, and consumer rights protection is a key factor in unlocking this potential. By improving consumer rights protection mechanisms, consumers' willingness to spend can be effectively enhanced and consumption upgrading promoted to drive economic growth.

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2022, final

consumption expenditure contributed 44.5 percent to GDP growth, driving a 2.2 percentage point increase in GDP. This indicates that consumption has become a primary driver of economic growth.

However, as the CMG gala pointed out, infringements on consumer rights do not occur only on March 15, and the crackdown on such violations should not begin only after the CMG reports.

Consumer rights protection should be a continuous effort, not just reliant on an annual gala that names and shames. The channels for reporting and seeking redress should be streamlined, and punitive compensation clauses for offending businesses should be strengthened to deter them from infringing on consumer rights for illegal gains.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Weight weighs heavily on health system

Over the years, the overweight and obesity rate among Chinese people has been on the rise. In 2018, the overweight and obesity rate among residents aged 18 and above had already reached 50.7 percent. If not effectively curbed, this proportion is expected to rise to 70.5 percent by 2030.

Obesity not only affects personal appearance and work efficiency but may also lead to psychological issues such as depression. It is also a key trigger for chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and even some cancers, which are currently the most significant risk factors and health threats to Chinese residents.

Given the large population base, the prevalence of overweight and obesity poses challenges to health-

care resources. In a sense, weight management is both a personal and a national issue.

It is worth noting that the Healthy China Initiative (2019-30), released by the State Council in 2019, explicitly identified maintaining a healthy weight as a key indicator. Last year, the National Health Commission and multiple other departments launched the "Weight Management Year" initiative, aiming to foster a societal emphasis over the next three years on weight management, healthy eating, and active participation in physical exercise.

It is important to emphasize that weight management is not merely about weight loss but also about scientific management, aiming to improve the overall health of the pop-

ulation and reduce the risk of chronic diseases caused by abnormal weight.

Weight management represents a lifestyle transformation that affects millions of households, requiring the participation and active engagement of the whole of society. Whether it is the construction of health trails in parks, the establishment of weight management clinics in hospitals, community health education campaigns, or the improvement of healthy food options in cafeterias, all are essential components. Creating a supportive environment for weight management and promoting the widespread adoption of healthy lifestyles will provide more favorable conditions for the prevention and control of chronic diseases in China.

—ECONOMIC DAILY

What They Say

Dynamic circle formed for AI's adoption

ByteDance's Doubao large model team has open-sourced a new generation of MoE (Mixture of Experts) training optimization technology called COMET, achieving a 40 percent reduction in model training costs and an average 1.7-fold increase in training efficiency, a breakthrough that could potentially reduce the demand for high-end Nvidia GPUs.

DeepSeek has led the trend among Chinese companies in using algorithmic innovation to break through US chip restrictions, creating conditions for the widespread application of AI in China.

Historically, the United States has held a leading advantage in computing power and algorithms, while China has excelled in application scenarios and data scale. Now, DeepSeek has disrupted this dynamic by using innovative algorithms to overcome the computing power constraints, unleashing China's advantages in application scenarios and data scale, a process that has accelerated thanks to innovations like Doubao. This means China can take the lead in applying AI across numerous industries and is forming

a virtuous cycle of research, development, and application.

For this reason, this year's Government Work Report emphasized policies to strengthen AI applications, calling for the continuous advancement of the AI Plus initiative. It aims to better integrate digital technology with China's manufacturing and market advantages, support the widespread application of large models, and vigorously develop intelligent connected new energy vehicles, AI-powered smartphones and computers, intelligent robots, and other next-generation smart terminals, as well as intelligent manufacturing equipment.

By empowering the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, AI will help consolidate China's manufacturing advantages. Traditional manufacturing is not only the cornerstone of China's modern industrial system but also underpins a comprehensive industry chain and a vast amount of employment. Applying AI to the R&D, production, procurement, sales, and operational management of traditional manufacturing can improve efficiency and foster innovation. Over the years,

China has continuously advanced industrial digitization and the construction of infrastructure, such as big data and cloud computing centers, laying a solid foundation for the application of AI.

AI can also play a significant role in cultivating emerging and future industries. In fact, many of China's breakthroughs in emerging industries are related to AI, including the intelligent connected new energy vehicle industry, industrial and humanoid robots, and embodied intelligent applications such as smart drones. In the future, AI will be indispensable in service sectors such as education, healthcare, and entertainment, as well as in future industries such as commercial aerospace and the low-altitude economy.

The global competition around AI has just begun. China needs to continue to make efforts to cultivate talent for basic research and breakthroughs in computing power bottlenecks, so that it can accelerate technological penetration and achieve a virtuous cycle of intelligent and integrated development.

—21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Chinese Economy

Editor's note: China's economy remains resilient with reforms continuing to yield results in the last year of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) despite the internal and external pressures, while confidently moving toward realizing high-quality development. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Zhao Zhongxiu

Economic resilience limits impact of tariffs

The US administration is contemplating its next move following China's swift response to the US' recent arbitrary increases in tariffs on Chinese goods. China's economic resilience has seemingly changed the calculus of trade disputes. While the United States has been using tariffs as a tool to coerce China into giving concessions, Beijing's response not only demonstrates defiance but also highlights that its economic ecosystem is capable of withstanding external pressures.

China's most powerful economic shield against external pressure is its massive domestic market of over 1.4 billion consumers. Unlike export-dependent economies that can be crippled by major trade restrictions, China has in recent years pivoted toward a "dual circulation" development paradigm in a bid to boost domestic consumption and transform it into a primary growth engine. "Dual circulation" development paradigm allows domestic and overseas markets to reinforce each other, with the domestic market being the mainstay.

The recently concluded annual session of the National People's Congress reaffirmed this strategic reorientation. The fundamental trend of long-term economic growth remains unchanged and will persist.

China's unparalleled industrial ecosystem is perhaps the best explanation for its economic resilience in the face of external pressures. As the only country possessing all 41 industrial categories in the United Nations industrial classification system, China today is the world's sole manufacturing superpower, with its production capacity exceeding the combined total of the next nine largest manufacturing countries. China's manufacturing dominance explains why some countries trying to decouple their economies from China's are facing formidable obstacles.

China's comprehensive industrial base provides both protection against and strategic strength for facing trade confrontations. When another country uses tariffs to target specific sectors, Chinese manufacturers can rapidly and efficiently reconfigure production across the country's complete industrial ecosystem, either absorbing the impact through internal adjustments or redirecting resources to unaffected sectors. This versatility has been frustrating US policymakers; as a matter of fact, US policymakers have come to realize that any significant decoupling from Chinese supply chains will be difficult, slow, expensive and disruptive,



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

with the economic pain felt disproportionately by manufacturers and consumers in G7 countries.

This resilience was evident in China's response to the tariffs imposed by US during Donald Trump's first presidency in 2018. Rather than witnessing the predicted mass exodus of manufacturing industries, China executed a multifaceted strategy by accelerating industrial upgrading toward higher-value goods, selectively relocating tariff-affected export operations to third countries, and strengthening regional supply chains through initiatives such

as regional free trade agreements.

China's trade policy has significantly evolved since the 2018 tariffs. Chinese exports to the US declined from about 19 percent of its total exports in 2018 to about 16 percent in 2022, while trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the European Union, and Belt and Road countries has significantly expanded. In 2023, the China-ASEAN trade volume reached 6.4 trillion yuan (\$883.49 billion), accounting for 15.3 percent of China's total foreign trade. These are China's remarkable diversification achievements.



The author is president of the University of International Business and Economics.

This rebalancing is complemented by China's structural transformation in export composition. The rise of the "New Three" — electric vehicles (EVs), lithium batteries, and solar photovoltaic cells — has created export categories in which Chinese manufacturers enjoy significant technological advantages and pricing power.

True, Western economies' restrictions on high-tech exports have created challenges for Chinese enterprises, but they have also catalyzed domestic innovation and self-sufficiency initiatives.

China's governance system allows for coordinated fiscal, monetary and industrial policies that can quickly adapt to the changing trade environments. Export tax rebates, totaling 1.8 trillion yuan in 2023, offset the impacts of tariffs, while reductions in targeted reserve requirement for banks provided liquidity to the affected sectors, with the flexibility of the yuan's exchange rate further helping neutralize tariff costs for Chinese exporters.

The expansion of free trade zones to 22 regions, along with the development of the Hainan Free Trade Port, demonstrates China's commitment to high-level institutional opening-up despite rising protectionism in some countries.

But despite these resilience factors, China's economic planners face some challenges. The property market correction has dampened consumers' confidence, while demographic headwinds present long-term structural challenges.

Rather than matching the US' measures, China's targeted response to agricultural products from key electoral states in the US shows its appreciation for the political dimensions of economic policy.

In a world where China can redirect exports, stimulate domestic consumption, and expedite its efforts to become self-sufficient in advanced technology, the leverage provided by tariff threats has diminished considerably. The future of productive economic relations may depend less on coercive measures and more on finding areas of mutual benefit amid strategic competition.

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

Berthold Kuhn

China's high-tech path to a greener, brighter future

One of the most compelling aspects of China's economic transformation is its strategic embrace of digital technology and artificial intelligence as catalysts for sustainable growth. Across multiple sectors, including energy, transportation, manufacturing and agriculture, China is using AI to optimize processes, reduce waste and increase productivity. This technological advancement is not only reshaping traditional industries but also driving the development of emerging sectors, reinforcing China's position as a global leader in innovation.

AI-enabled smart city projects are among the most visible manifestations of this transformation. In urban planning and infrastructure development, AI-driven solutions are improving energy management, optimizing traffic flow and improving public services. Intelligent traffic systems, for instance, use real-time data to ease traffic congestion, reduce fuel consumption and reduce emissions. Likewise, AI applications in energy management contribute to efficiency, by predicting electricity demand, integrating renewable energy sources and optimizing grid stability.

In the agricultural sector, AI and precision farming techniques are being leveraged to boost crop yields while minimizing the environmental impact. By employing big data analytics, machine-learning, and internet-of-things devices, farmers can optimize water usage, reduce chemical inputs and improve soil management. These advances align with China's dual goals of achieving food security and environmental sustainability.

Beyond these sectors, AI is revolutionizing China's manufacturing sector. Smart factories, equipped with advanced robotics and AI-powered quality control systems, are driving efficiency and reducing operational costs. Automation in industrial production is enhancing competitiveness while mitigating labor shortages, especially in high-tech and export-driven industries.

China's concerted effort to build a robust digital infrastructure is another key factor accelerating AI development. Major technology hubs in cities such as Shenzhen, Beijing and Hangzhou serve as innovation clusters that attract global talents and foster breakthroughs in machine-learning, robotics, and big data analytics.

While China's digital transformation continues to be a pillar of its economic development, a notable shift in emphasis is underway. The government now prioritizes boosting domestic consumption and improving the efficiency of investment to increase internal demand.

Efforts to stimulate domestic consumption involve policies that boost consumer confidence, support small and medium-sized enterprises, and expand social safety nets. Measures such as income tax cuts, wider healthcare coverage, and initiatives to boost employment are expected to increase household spending.

At the same time, improving the efficiency of investment is essential for sustaining economic momentum. Rather than relying solely on large-scale infrastructure projects, the government is channeling resources into high-tech industries, digital services and green energy. This refined approach ensures capital allocation aligns with long-term productivity gains and environmental sustainability, reinforcing China's transition toward an innovation-driven economy.

China's economic policies are being shaped by its response to global trade conflicts, too, particularly those necessitated by the US administration's tariffs and rising geopolitical tensions with Western economies.

In the semiconductor industry, for instance, China has intensified efforts to develop home-grown alternatives to foreign chip technology, while major State-led initiatives and investments are promoting innovation, reducing dependency on imports, and better safeguarding national security in critical technologies.

Besides, the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative continues to play a crucial role in boosting country's economic resilience. By investing in infrastructure projects and expanding trade networks across Asia, Africa and Latin America, China is developing new markets, including in BRICS and Belt and Road countries.

Scholars such as Wang Jisi and David Dollar argue that these long-term strategies may help counteract the effects of the Western economies' containment efforts, and position China as a central force in shaping the global economic order.

China's economic trajectory will increasingly depend on its ability to balance technological innovation, demand expansion, and economic diplomacy. While AI and digital transformation will remain key drivers of progress, the government's renewed emphasis on stimulating domestic consumption and enhancing investment efficiency reflects a pragmatic strategy for sustaining growth in an evolving and complex global landscape. At the same time, China is accelerating its transition toward a green economy, investing heavily in renewable energy, electric mobility, and sustainable infrastructure.

In short, China's economic outlook remains optimistic, underpinned by its commitment to AI and digital transformation, a strategic shift toward boosting domestic demand, and a proactive approach to trade conflicts. By continuously using its economic strategy to meet emerging challenges, China is aiming to build long-term resilience and achieve sustainable prosperity.

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



The author is a German political scientist (Freie Universität Berlin) and an international cooperation expert.

Kazuyuki Motohashi

Demographic lessons to boost development

China faces significant challenges in sustaining its economic growth, prominent among which is the demographic issue, particularly a declining population and population aging. What's more, China's population is projected to decline further, leading to an increase in the average age of the population. This demographic shift will reduce the proportion of the working-age population, undermining China's potential GDP growth rate.

Japan has already experienced the severe consequences of an aging society, and thus can offer some valuable lessons. Japanese enterprises have addressed labor shortage by investing in automation and robotics, turning demographic challenges into innovation opportunities. The Japanese government, on its part, has implemented policies aimed at bridging the urban-rural gap.

One of China's most pressing economic challenges is the rapid decline in its working-age population. Since total fertility rates remain low despite the adjustments in the family planning policy, China faces a demographic headwind that threatens economic growth. A shrinking workforce leads to lower overall productivity, increasing dependency ratios, and mounting pressure on the social security and healthcare systems.

Japan's is a cautionary tale of the economic consequences of an aging population. For decades, Japan has struggled with labor shortage, slow economic growth and rising costs of eldercare.

However, rather than succumbing to these challenges, Japanese enterprises



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have used technological advancement to offset the negative impacts of a declining population and an aging society. Japanese enterprises have extensively adopted automation, artificial intelligence and robotics in sectors ranging from manufacturing to healthcare.

In fact, companies such as Toyota and Fanuc have set global benchmarks in industrial automation. These innovative measures have enabled Japanese enterprises to maintain their competitiveness despite demographic constraints, helping Japan pioneer the development of eldercare robots to assist with care-giving, reducing the strain on human workers.

Investing in automation and AI could help Chinese enterprises maintain their productivity despite a shrinking workforce. China is already a global leader in high-tech and manufacturing, with strong capabilities in AI, automation and robotics. So, by fostering innovation in eldercare technology, the country could create new industries that cater to the needs of its aging population, turning a demographic challenge into an economic opportunity.

However, further investments in these areas are needed to offset the effects of a declining workforce. Poli-

cies that promote research and development in automation technologies, encourage industry-academia collaboration, and provide incentives for businesses to adopt labor-saving technologies could prove beneficial.

China could also consider integrating robotics into eldercare, especially because its rapidly aging population will increase the demand for eldercare services in the coming decades. Developing smart eldercare solutions, such as robotic assistants, AI-driven healthcare monitoring systems and telemedicine platforms, could improve the quality of elderly people's lives as well as create new economic growth channels.

Another significant challenge China faces is the development gap between urban and rural areas. To improve eldercare, China requires robust infrastructure, especially in rural areas, including channels which would give elderly people easy access to healthcare, assisted-living facilities and digital connectivity.

Japan has addressed similar problems through initiatives such as the "Digital Garden City Nation" policy, which focuses on vitalizing rural areas through digital transformation, ensuring that people in even remote areas have access to high-quality medical and eldercare services.

China could adopt a similar approach by leveraging its high-tech capability to improve eldercare and healthcare services in rural areas. Expanding telemedicine services, integrating AI-based diagnostic tools, and improving digital infrastructure could

help ensure equitable healthcare distribution across the country.

Effective policy measures are crucial for addressing China's demographic challenges. Japan's policy measures are examples of how to better manage an aging population and mitigate its economic impacts.

Furthermore, Japan adopted a very cautious approach in the past when it came to its immigration policy. But in recent years, it has been gradually opening its doors to foreign workers, even in some critical sectors.

At this moment, due to the rapid structural changes and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the job market for young people may not be so rosy. But in the future, the demographic changes will cause a labor shortage in China. A relatively open immigration policy is key to addressing that shortage and developing an innovation-driven economy.

By investing in automation, AI, and robotics, China can boost its labor productivity and mitigate the effects of a shrinking workforce. The development of innovative eldercare solutions could help China transform its demographic challenges into economic opportunities. And by taking policy measures including those encouraging the elderly people to remain in the workforce, fostering skilled immigration, and intensifying R&D in automation, China can address the issues arising out of the demographic changes.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

FAJAR HIRAWAN

Toward a multipolar world order

Indonesia's BRICS membership will enhance its role as a bridge between Asia, Africa and Latin America

Indonesia's formal inclusion as a full member of BRICS signals a strategic shift in its foreign and economic policies. As the world's largest archipelagic nation and Southeast Asia's largest economy, Indonesia stands to gain significantly from BRICS membership, not only in trade and investment but also in diplomatic influence.



At the heart of Indonesia's interest in BRICS lies its ambition to diversify global partnerships, secure alternative financial resources, and strengthen economic and political ties, particularly with China. Given China's dominant role within BRICS, Indonesia's participation would institutionalize economic collaboration between the two nations while simultaneously promoting South-South partnerships.

By joining BRICS, Indonesia will gain a formal channel for improving trade relations, negotiating more favorable export conditions, and tapping into preferential deals within the bloc. Reducing reliance on Western markets can bolster Indonesia's supply chain resilience and widen its customer base among BRICS economies. China, one of the bloc's key members, already plays a pivotal role as Indonesia's largest trading partner.

BRICS membership can also fast-track Indonesia's path to industrial advancement. Indonesia's nickel reserves, among the world's largest, are crucial for electric vehicle battery production. As China dominates the global EV supply chain, deeper cooperation under BRICS will allow Indonesia to move beyond raw material exports and develop its own battery and EV industries. This aligns with Indonesia's ban on nickel ore exports, implemented in 2020, to boost domestic processing. Through joint



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

ventures and technology transfers with China and other BRICS nations, Indonesia can become a major player in the global green technology supply chain.

Infrastructure development is a critical area where BRICS membership could benefit Indonesia. The New Development Bank, BRICS' financial institution, offers an alternative source of funding apart from traditional lenders such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This aligns well with Indonesia's infrastructure ambitions, including the construction of

the new capital, Nusantara, which requires \$32 billion in investment. With China's active role in the Belt and Road Initiative, BRICS can complement existing China-led investments in Indonesia's ports, railways and energy projects, further integrating Indonesia into regional and global trade networks.

Additionally, BRICS membership will enable Indonesia to diversify its energy partnerships. As Indonesia transitions toward renewable energy, collaboration with BRICS nations, particularly China

which leads in solar panel and wind turbine technology, can facilitate knowledge exchanges and investment in sustainable energy projects.

Indonesia has historically positioned itself as a leader in the Global South, advocating for more equitable economic policies and increased representation for developing nations in global governance. BRICS, which aims to counterbalance Western-dominated financial institutions, offers Indonesia a platform to push for fairer trade policies, financial system reforms and increased economic cooperation among emerging economies.

One key area where Indonesia can contribute is food security and agricultural cooperation. As one of the world's top palm oil producers and a major exporter of agricultural products, Indonesia can work with BRICS to strengthen food supply chains, promote sustainable farming practices, and expand agricultural trade within the bloc. Given the increasing global food security concerns, particularly in the wake of geopolitical conflicts and climate change, BRICS can serve as a crucial platform for ensuring stable food supplies for developing nations.

Maritime cooperation is another strategic dimension of Indonesia's BRICS membership. Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum vision aligns with BRICS' interests in securing critical sea routes, enhancing trade efficiency and improving maritime security. Coordinated efforts between BRICS countries can enhance regional security in the "Indo-Pacific" region, particularly in areas such as the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait, which are crucial to global trade.

Beyond economic benefits, BRICS membership will enhance Indonesia's geopolitical standing. As a leader of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Indonesia can serve as a bridge between BRICS and

Southeast Asia, fostering regional cooperation in trade, infrastructure and security. With ASEAN's growing importance in global economic and security frameworks, Indonesia's role within BRICS can elevate its influence in shaping policies that impact both regional and global affairs.

Indonesia's membership in BRICS represents more than just economic integration — it is a strategic move to reshape its global influence. By strengthening ties with China and leveraging BRICS as a platform for South-South cooperation, Indonesia can expand its trade and investment opportunities, particularly in high-tech industries and green energy. Additionally, it can secure alternative financial sources through the NDB, reducing reliance on Western-led institutions, and enhance its diplomatic leverage, positioning itself as a key player in both BRICS and ASEAN.

However, Indonesia must ensure that its participation in BRICS remains balanced and aligned with its broader economic and geopolitical objectives. If navigated effectively, BRICS membership can serve as a catalyst for Indonesia's long-term economic transformation, industrial development and global influence. Ultimately, Indonesia's entry into BRICS will not only solidify its position as a leading economy in the Global South but also enhance its role as a bridge between Asia, Africa and Latin America, contributing to a more inclusive and multipolar world order.

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LIU JINGYE AND ZHAI KUN

Transformative synergy

Cooperative relationship between China and ASEAN is a cornerstone of regional stability

Donald Trump's second term as president of the United States is shaking the global political and economic landscape. However, a pertinent question remains: where is the new version of the "Indo-Pacific" strategy? During Trump's first term that started in 2017, the US formally unveiled its "Indo-Pacific" strategy. Yet, about 50 days into his second term, there has been no official comment regarding the "Indo-Pacific" strategy, particularly concerning its Southeast Asia policy. US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has drawn criticism for his apparent lack of familiarity with affairs concerning the Association of Southeast Asian Nations during Senate hearings. The Trump administration's strategic positioning on China-ASEAN relations is still in development. This period of policy formulation



Liu Jingye



Zhai Kun

presents both challenges and opportunities for the relationship between China and ASEAN.

Examining the evolution of the US global strategy, regardless of whether the Trump administration positions China as a primary strategic competitor or a potential partner, the strategic reality cannot be ignored: Southeast Asia remains a priority region in China's neighborhood diplomacy, and the synergy generated by China-ASEAN relations serves as a model of regional cooperation. The shock wave during Trump's second term will inevitably test China-ASEAN relations. China and ASEAN should prepare in advance, plan collaboratively, respond proactively, turn challenges into opportunities, and transform this into momentum.

This requires China and ASEAN to focus on three areas of work. First, assessing the emerging and potential impacts, including their intensity and scope. Second, proactively examining whether China-ASEAN relations are sufficiently solid and resilient, identifying any gaps and weaknesses, and determining if they can withstand the "shock wave". Third, developing stronger synergy between both sides to build a closer community with a shared future, making it a cornerstone for stability in the Asia-Pacific order.

The new Trump administration will create certain disruptions to China-ASEAN relations. Some analysts maintain a cautious outlook regarding the future direction of China-US-ASEAN relations. First, as the originator of the "Indo-Pacific" strategy, the Trump administration has historically employed a combination of pressure and inducements to maintain distance between Southeast Asia and China. Currently, the US may view Middle East developments and the Ukraine crisis as more pressing issues, which explains why Trump's new "Indo-Pacific" strategy has not yet formally emerged. However, it is reasonable to expect that by the second or third quarter of this year, the Trump administration may redirect its strategic focus toward the Asia-Pacific region, introducing a series of unexpected, unconventional transactional policies.

Second, the Trump administration has already articulated its global tariff policies, which — combined with its "America First" approach in technology, manufacturing and finance — could potentially draw ASEAN countries away from China's economic sphere, directly challenging the long-standing cornerstone role of China-ASEAN economic relations.

Third, the South China Sea issue has consistently served as the US' most effective lever for manipulating and deteriorating China-ASEAN security and political relations. Particularly since President Ferdinand Marcos Jr took office in the Philippines, China-Philippines relations have experienced turbulence, increasing the difficulty of advancing negotiations on the South China Sea Code of Conduct between China and ASEAN.

Finally, the Trump administration's disregard for multilateralism could impact regional cooperation initiatives from APEC to ASEAN-led East Asian regional cooperation, potentially reducing US engagement and limiting opportunities for China and the US to coordinate strategically through ASEAN platforms.

However, the foundation of China-ASEAN relations is systematic, solid and resilient, continuously making dynamic adjustments based on changing internal and external circumstances. First, both sides have long maintained their commitment to the UN-centered international order and the broader Asia-Pacific regional architecture, jointly advancing comprehensive regional cooperation. Second, they have maintained their status as each other's



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

largest trading partners for many years, with Chinese enterprises demonstrating strong intrinsic motivation to expand into Southeast Asian markets, while ASEAN countries have developed deeply integrated economic complementarity with China. Third, Trump's tariff policies and potential inclination to dismantle the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity may draw China and ASEAN economically closer. Fourth, on traditional security issues such as the South China Sea, China and most relevant ASEAN countries have exercised restraint. Meanwhile, in humanitarian assistance for disaster relief and pandemic response, as well as non-traditional security cooperation in areas such as counter-narcotics and anti-telecom fraud, both sides have already developed a cooperation model — forming networks of cooperation that expand from individual cases to systematic collaboration. Building on this foundation, ASEAN and China are gradually replacing the US to become the joint leader in advancing regional cooperation.

Taking a comprehensive view, while China-US relations, US-ASEAN relations and China-US-ASEAN trilateral relations may trend downward during Trump's second term, China-ASEAN relations could poten-

tially strengthen against this backdrop. Indeed, during Trump's first term, China-ASEAN strategic relations experienced comprehensive development. Therefore, China and ASEAN are fully capable of transforming their passive response to the "Trump shock wave" to proactively leverage the momentum of ASEAN-China relations. By utilizing leadership exchanges and existing comprehensive institutionalized cooperation mechanisms, they can comprehensively upgrade China-ASEAN relations, shape a China-ASEAN zone of peaceful development, and establish a cornerstone for stabilizing the Asia-Pacific order.

First, given the universal challenges that US policies pose to China and ASEAN countries, both sides can strengthen hot-line communication, strategic dialogue and policy coordination, particularly in macroeconomic policy harmonization. For instance, they might consider strategies for collective resilience against Trump's divide-and-conquer tariff policies.

Second, considering the potential impacts of US policy on East Asian and broader Asia-Pacific cooperation, China and ASEAN can champion multilateralism, open regionalism, ASEAN centrality and an inclusive regional order. They should

defend the moral high ground and fundamental architecture of regional cooperation while exploring emerging fields of collaboration and cultivating new forms of regional leadership. These new leadership models encompass green cooperation, digital collaboration, artificial intelligence governance, connectivity enhancement and inclusive regional rule-making.

Third, considering how US policies may impede economic globalization while reinforcing regionalism, China and ASEAN can advance global cross-regional cooperation by expanding horizontal connections. This approach might include promoting China-ASEAN-South Pacific (Australia/New Zealand), China-ASEAN-European Union, China-ASEAN-Gulf Cooperation Council, China-ASEAN-Africa, China-ASEAN-Central Asia, China-ASEAN-Latin America and China-ASEAN-South Asia cooperation frameworks, creating a more expansive and robust global cross-regional cooperative network.

Fourth, in response to the global value fragmentation and geopolitical-economic polarization that US policies may trigger, China and ASEAN can jointly advocate more inclusive, pluralistic value concepts and promote exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations. Examples include promoting ancient Chinese admiral Zheng He's peace culture, Asian-value initiatives and actions, Global South-value initiatives and actions, BRICS-value initiatives and actions, and global governance-value initiatives and actions.

The shared journey of China and ASEAN transcends its initial chapter of "interconnectivity 1.0", ascending toward what might be called "civilizational coexistence 2.0" — a profound harmony between civilizations. While the US remains fixated on constructing walls of separation, China and ASEAN should contemplate how to build bridges that span divides. These bridges have foundations deeply rooted in the fertile soil of digital civilization, with structures inscribed with the wisdom of joint consultation and construction. They lead toward a new regional community of civilizations befitting the 21st century — where diverse traditions flow together like tributaries joining a mighty river. This represents nothing less than a new model of regional cooperation that acknowledges diverse civilizational contributions while creating shared prosperity suitable for contemporary global challenges.

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CULTURE



From left: A poster for *Detective Chinatown 1900*, featuring actors including Chow Yun-fat (top middle). PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A photo of seven miners, three white and four Chinese, in Aubine Ravine, California, circa 1852. A group of Chinese workers seen in another photo taken in the Western Montana Rockies, during construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which 1,500 Chinese helped to complete. PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES Another poster for the movie. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Detectives from another era grab attention

San Francisco in 1900 provides backdrop to tale of xenophobia and crime, **Rena Li** reports in Los Angeles.

When a movie presents tragic history in a comedic way, it goes beyond entertainment to convey profound meaning. *Detective Chinatown 1900* is one such cinematic endeavor.

Set in San Francisco in 1900, the film follows detectives Qin Fu and Ah Gui as they investigate the murder of an American woman in Chinatown. Starring Chow Yun-fat, Wang Baoqiang and Liu Haoran, this fourth installment of the *Detective Chinatown* franchise premiered during the Spring Festival holiday, quickly capturing public attention.

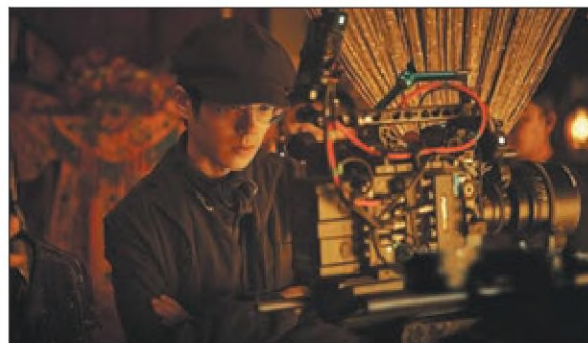
Praising the movie for its seamless blend of mystery and humor, Georges Chamchoum, an Emmy Award-winning film director and producer, says that the film effectively employs over-the-top acting and comedic elements to depict the harsh realities of historical racism.

"I believe the story resonates with a broad audience, including American viewers, as it vividly portrays the racism of that era," Chamchoum told *China Daily* at a recent special screening hosted by the Asian World Film Festival in Culver City in the United States.

Co-directed by Chen Sicheng and Dai Mo, the film explores issues of race, immigration and national identity. Despite the invaluable contribution of Chinese immigrants to the development of the US during the Gold Rush, and the construction of the Pacific Railway, they faced discrimination and were even labeled the "yellow peril", and the subject of derogatory rumors. The film highlights the rhetoric surrounding the Chinese Exclusion Act and its exploitation by one of the film's characters, a mayoral candidate named Grant, who attempts to frame Chinese laborers in order to drive them out of the US.

Although the film treats these serious historical themes with a touch of caricature, its subtext regarding racial discrimination remains "significant," according to Chamchoum.

For Chow, the role of Bai Xuanling was a long-awaited opportunity. Speaking to *Chinese media*, the actor said that he had been offered a similar role in the 1990s when he first arrived in Hollywood seeking opportunities. The late director King Hu had given him the script for *The Battle of Ono*, a film about Chinese



Clockwise from top: Chen Sicheng, who co-directed the movie with Dai Mo, giving instructions at the set. Images from the film featuring actors Liu Haoran and Wang Baoqiang. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

laborers building American railways during the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). However, Hu died before the project could be realized.

Three decades later, Chow finally found his dream role in *Detective*

Chinatown 1900. The film dramatically portrays the real-life injustices suffered by Chinese immigrants through its fictitious plot in which San Francisco elites fabricate a "Chinese Jack the Ripper" to justify

dismantling Chinatown.

One of the most powerful scenes in the film has Chow's character Bai delivering a passionate courtroom monologue in English. Facing an all-American jury, he exposes the

discrimination endured by Chinese immigrants, despite their critical role in the growth of the US. The moment has been widely discussed for its emotional impact and historical significance.

"I think a lot of Americans didn't know this history before, but the film brings it back to life and explains it to younger audiences, and I was so proud of those Chinese workers," Miriam Ajibekova, an audience member, told *China Daily*.

Detective Chinatown 1900 is more than just an action-comedy mystery; it is a cultural bridge between China and the US, according to Chamchoum. Chen who studied in Hollywood has successfully merged Chinese and American cultural elements in the *Detective Chinatown* series through international collaborations. The latest installment features Hollywood actor John Cusack in the role of mayoral candidate Grant.

The film's composer, Nathan Wang, a University of Southern California-trained musician born in the US, shared his experiences of working on the film after the special screening. "We recorded the *pipa* (a four-stringed lute), *guzheng* (plucked zither), and *erhu* (a two-stringed fiddle) here in LA and layered them with Western orchestration," says the composer, who worked with German film composer Hans Zimmer on *Kung Fu Panda 3*.

Wang adds that he took pride in writing a score that blends Western orchestral elements with traditional Chinese instruments.

The film was shot in Shandong province at the Laoling Film Studio in Laoling county-level city, Dezhou, where a replica of 1900s San Francisco Chinatown was built. Covering a 200,000-square-meter area, the set took seven months to complete, adding to the film's authenticity.

"The production value is incredible," Chamchoum says, expressing hope for further collaborations between Chinese and American filmmakers.

Detective Chinatown 1900 is among the flagship Chinese films released internationally during Spring Festival, China's most profitable box-office period. The film opened to 460 million yuan (\$64 million) on its first day, Jan 29, the first day of Chinese New Year, and grossed 3.4 billion yuan in early March. The three preceding films in the franchise amassed over 8.74 billion yuan before the latest installment.

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Nepali group inspired by China's modern approach to preserving its past

CHENGDU — A delegation of the Nepali Congress party recently visited the Sanxingdui Museum in Guanghan, Sichuan province, where its members were impressed by the innovative use of advanced technologies for preservation and presentation.

In the museum's interactive experience hall, they found themselves immersed in the ancient Shu civilization centering on present-day Sichuan. Donning the traditional attire, elaborate hairstyles and ceremonial crowns of Sanxingdui, they briefly stepped into the ancient past.

What fascinated them even more, however, was the museum's extensive use of advanced technology in the excavation, restoration and preservation of artifacts. They were impressed by the way cutting-edge techniques, such as artificial intelligence and 3D scanning, have helped breathe life into long-lost civilizations, allowing ancient artifacts to tell their stories once again.

Many say that such technological integration has played a crucial role in the effective preservation and transmission of China's cultural heritage.

Believed to be the remnants of the ancient Shu civilization, the Sanxingdui Ruins open a window into a mysterious civilization that thrived more than 3,000 years ago.

For the delegation, witnessing the way technology is protecting and revitalizing cultural legacies left a profound and lasting impression.

Sujata Koirala, leader of the delegation, and former deputy prime minister and foreign minister of Nepal, says that she was impressed by the AI technology used to restore artifacts. "I believe that cultural heritage restoration empowered by new technologies will promote the development of cultural heritage protection," she says.

"This museum displays old masks and different instruments, and the way people lived thousands of years ago. It is quite an experience for me and my delegation. It reflects the



A delegation of the Nepali Congress party visiting the Sanxingdui Museum in Guanghan, Sichuan province. YU AICEN / XINHUA

culture, tradition, civilization and history of the Chinese people. I'm impressed," she adds.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Nepal, and the

delegation of the Nepali Congress party visited China at the invitation of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

China and Nepal share a deep-root-

ed friendship and have maintained close exchanges over the years, says a department official, noting the visit would enhance communication, foster people-to-people connection, and strengthen friendly cooperation between the two countries.

As well as the Sanxingdui Museum, the delegation also visited Mount Emei, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where they gained more firsthand insight into China's deep commitment to preserving artifacts and heritage.

For Mahendra Nakarmi, chairman of the Nepal Jay Harati Maa Cinema, the mission to preserve cultural heritage is very relatable. Growing up as the son of a blacksmith, he inherited not just memories of his father's craft, but also the tangible remnants of his trade.

"When my father passed away, he left behind tools," Nakarmi says. "Although none of my siblings took up the trade, we preserved these tools as a family legacy. Similarly, a country must protect its cultural

artifacts, as they are the inheritance of civilization."

Keshab Joshi, director of the Arunima College, says "Mount Emei in China reminds me of Lumbini in Nepal, also a world heritage site".

"Many people come to Mount Emei to pray for peace and prosperity, just as visitors to Lumbini do," Joshi adds. "This shows that people everywhere have similar aspirations and that we have much more in common than differences."

Koirala says the visit had given her a deeper appreciation of China's coordinated development of material and cultural civilization.

Preserving cultural heritage is no small feat. Nakarmi, who has dedicated much of his career to documenting Nepal's culture through film, understands the challenges. "First, the government must promote this," he says. "Then the people must be committed, and policies must be put to work."

XINHUA

LIFE



Above and left: To prepare for her *yuanqu* album, Gong Linna (center) learns *pingtan* in Suzhou with Sheng Xiaoyun (right) on Aug 13, 2024. **Right:** Gong performs three songs from her new album at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on March 3. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In the spring of 2024, celebrated singer Gong Linna embarked on an exciting new musical journey to breathe fresh life into an ancient art form: *yuanqu*. The genre, popular during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), is known for its colloquial language and accessibility, an intriguing mix of songs and drama that resonated deeply with everyday people at the time.

The Yuan period saw the rise of famous plays like *The Romance of the Western Chamber* by Wang Shifu and *Dou E Yuan* (Injustice to Dou E) by Guan Hanqing, both of which belong to the *yuanzaju* genre, and captivated audiences across China. Masters like Guan Hanqing and Bai Pu composed numerous *sanqu* (scattered lyrics) and *xiaoling* (short songs) that showcased the emotional depth and popularity of *yuanqu* — a genre that was equal parts entertainment and cultural reflection.

Inspired by this tradition, Gong teamed up with a group of talented musicians, ranging from traditional Chinese opera artists to contemporary composers and instrumentalists. The result is a new album, *Gong Linna Sings Yuanqu*, which blends the essence of this ancient genre with modern musical sensi-

bilities, creating a bridge between the centuries.

On March 3, Gong performed three songs from the album — *Twelve Butterflies*, *Forget Your Worries Tune*, and *Idle Joy* — at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing.

"*Yuanqu* was originally performed as part of theater productions, with its songs and lyrics essential to the drama. This genre marks a crucial development in the Chinese literary tradition, and it laid the foundation for later theater arts in China. What we have today are mostly the lyrics without the music," Gong explains. "With this album, my friends and I sought to capture the spirit of *yuanqu* by blending traditional lyrics with contemporary production techniques. We wanted to make ancient poetry feel timeless, but also refreshingly modern."

Singing across the centuries

Artist's exploration of Yuan Dynasty genre brings the popular side of ancient culture to modern life, **Chen Nan** reports.

“With this album, my friends and I sought to capture the spirit of *yuanqu* by blending traditional lyrics with contemporary production techniques.”

Gong Linna, singer

On the album, Gong pushes the boundaries of artistry, experimenting with a variety of regional operatic styles.

"Through this *yuanqu* series, I want to work with different forms of Chinese opera, like Qinqiang Opera and Yuju Opera," she says. "I hope these songs will be as widely sung as the lyrics from the Yuan Dynasty."

One standout track on the album is *Twelve Butterflies*, a piece by Yuan Dynasty poet Zhao Yan. Gong's rendition marks her debut at *pingtan* —

“

a traditional art form that blends singing and storytelling in the Suzhou dialect. Adding a fresh twist, she collaborates with Sheng Xiaoyun, a renowned *pingtan* artist, resulting in a rich, cross-generational fusion of past and present.

Another track, *Idle Joy*, adapted from a *sanqu* by Guan Hanqing, injects humor and liveliness into the album. With lines like "he brought a pair of chickens, I brought a goose. Idle joy, idle joy," the playful tone of the lyrics finds counterpoint in a

blend of reggae rhythms and traditional Chinese poetry. Gong's singing and producer Chen Junwu's arrangement infuses a carefree energy into the song in a joyful nod to the simple pleasures of life.

Meanwhile, *Forget Your Worries Tune*, based on a piece by Bai Pu, combines the poignant lyrics of a Yuan Dynasty song with the musical style of Kunqu Opera. Gong says that the song resonates deeply with her, its introspective message urging the listener to release their worries.

Bai Ning, a professor in the Chinese Traditional Vocal Music Department at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music and an expert on *yuanqu*, makes a point of the distinctiveness of this art form. "*Yuanqu* is very different from the classical poetry of the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties. It's much closer to the everyday language of the people, making it

accessible and full of life," she says. "It's the music of the streets — vibrant and full of wisdom."

Gong's exploration of *yuanqu* comes at a time when she's already left her mark on a variety of traditional Chinese poetic forms. She's previously performed work from *The Book of Songs*, *The Songs of Chu*, and poetry from the Tang and Song dynasties.

As she moves forward, her *yuanqu* project will continue to expand with more pieces that celebrate the leisure and pleasures of ancient times.

"I want to bridge the gap between the past and the present, to ensure these beautiful, centuries-old songs continue to resonate with modern listeners," she says.

With her innovative approach to blending the traditional and modern, Gong Linna's new album promises not only to honor the past but also target these ancient melodies to life for a new generation of music lovers.

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Online
Scan to
watch the
video.

Manchester University head seeks closer ties with Chinese academia

By XING WEN
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Duncan Ivison, president and vice-chancellor of The University of Manchester, recently completed a visit to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong to connect with partners, alumni, and universities in China.

It was his first official overseas visit since assuming the role last August. His stops included Tsinghua University, Peking University, the China Scholarship Council, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Fudan University and the Asia Society Hong Kong Center.

"It's all about building those connections and creating good partnerships," Ivison said about his visit. For example, at Tsinghua University, where he met with the university's president Li Luming, discussions focused on developing further collaboration in fields like electrical engineering, chemistry, astronomy, health, and environmental sustainability. He also visited the Tsinghua University Art Museum to explore potential partnerships with the Manchester Museum.

During the visit to Peking University, Ivison met Gong Qihuang, the university's president, who praised The University of Manchester's remarkable research achievements in fields like atomic physics, artificial intelligence, and graphene materials. Gong expressed his eagerness for the two institutions to enhance exchange and collaboration on scientific research, interdisciplinary studies, sustainable



Left: Duncan Ivison (center), president and vice-chancellor of The University of Manchester, poses with visitors at an alumni event in Shanghai. **Right:** Ivison delivers a speech at Peking University during his recent visit to China. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



development, as well as digital and intelligent education.

"It gives us opportunities to work with amazing researchers, connect with great students, provide opportunities for our students and staff to do really good work, have a really good sort of student experience, and diversify our revenue," he said, referring to UoM's collaboration with Chinese universities.

Qiu Xin, Party secretary of Fudan University, shares a similar perspective. He eagerly anticipates increased collaboration in areas like artificial intelligence, materials, the environment and biomedicine.

"This collaboration will foster research innovation and talent development, ultimately making significant contributions to global edu-

cation and technological advancement," Qiu said.

At the Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University, Ivison gave students a speech titled "What Constitutes a Great 21st-century University?" to discuss topics such as the AI revolution, AI-enhanced learning and challenges facing universities.

"We're writing a new strategy at The University of Manchester this year. We're considering what kind of university we need to be by 2035. I would try out ideas on really smart students to see what they think," he said.

Ivison argued that a great 21st-century university must prioritize interdisciplinary research, and bring together diverse fields to address

critical global issues like climate change and sustainability. The UoM excels in this regard, ranking second in the world in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings for its outstanding contribution to multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Ivison also highlighted the role of universities in navigating the challenges posed by AI, particularly in combating misinformation.

"So, universities have to be the institutions that focus on evidence, rigor, knowledge, critical thinking, and good communication skills — not taking shortcuts or attempting to misinform or deceive people. We need to be the source of trusted knowledge for society. We must be the source of

rigorous reasoning, argument and evidence, rather than contributing to the shouting that often occurs in the public sphere. This is a truly important role," he emphasized, adding that universities should take the lead in researching and teaching related to trustworthy AI systems, to clarify their capabilities and limitations.

He also stressed the importance of universities fostering cultural competence as a key skill in preparing students for the future and said that cultural competence is defined as "the ability to understand and effectively engage across different cultures".

Ivison earned his bachelor's degree in political science and philosophy from McGill University in

Montreal, Canada, and his master's degree and PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Over the course of his career, he has held positions at the Australian National University, the University of York in the United Kingdom, the University of Toronto, and, notably, at the University of Sydney for more than 20 years.

"I think such experiences help me understand what someone else might be thinking, especially if they are different to me or have a different perspective," he said. "It tends to make you a bit more empathetic toward people."

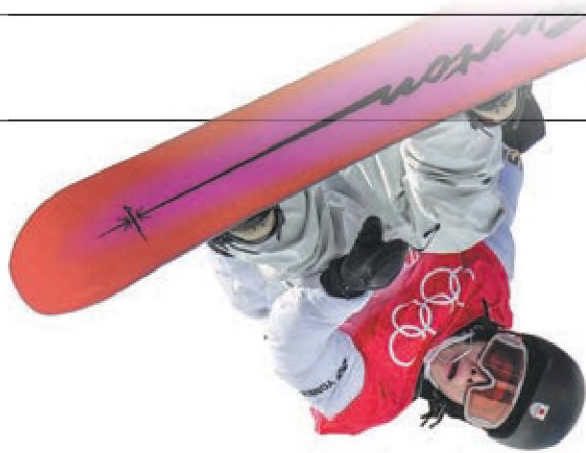
As head of The University of Manchester, which has a diverse student body, 40 percent of whom are international, including around 10,000 Chinese, Ivison is determined to create a supportive environment for students from different backgrounds to forge connections with each other and with the university's leadership.

"I've tried to create an environment in which students feel they can ask me any question about anything," he said, adding that the university plans to develop programs to train students in managing difficult conversations, leadership skills, and effective chairing of meetings, especially targeted at enabling them to run inclusive societies.

"We are definitely committed to having a large proportion of international students," he said.

During his visit, Ivison attended alumni receptions in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, connecting with graduates in China.

SPORTS



WINTER SPORTS

Of all his titles, 'Dad' is the most important

With the Olympics looming, Japanese snowboarder Hirano faces an even greater challenge: fatherhood.

The biggest life-changer for snowboard champion Ayumu Hirano since he won an Olympic gold medal: He became a father.

That, as much as triple corks or big airs, has been his focus over the last few months. It doesn't figure to change much, even as he ramps up his run for a repeat at the Olympics next year.

"My private life, outside of snowboarding, is to enjoy spending time with my child," the Japanese rider told reporters as he prepared for the debut of The Snow League, a new pro half-pipe circuit being fronted by Shaun White. "That, and practicing."

Three years ago, Hirano redefined what's possible by landing a once-unthinkable triple cork — that's three head-over-heels flips — as part of a winning run at the Beijing Olympics.

Last Saturday in Aspen, he was reminded that it will take more than just that triple cork to stay at the top of his sport. Hirano landed it during both his runs in his one-on-one semifinal

showdown against Yuto Totsuka. But the judges deemed Totsuka, who filled his runs with technical tricks that featured fewer flips, the better rider.

Totsuka saved his own triple cork for the final round, and led a Japanese sweep of the inaugural Snow League event. Hirano finished third.

Even before the third-place finish, the 26-year-old Hirano said he's well aware he has to concentrate every bit as much on all the other jumps, grabs and transitions as the triple cork.

"If I focus on the overall performance, I think that I can minimize the risk that doing (big) tricks brings," he said. "However, the overall composition has become very high level. How I come up with a new trick within that composition is my challenge, and I am looking forward to it."

Outside the half-pipe Hirano stays very private.

He does not divulge much about any-

thing off the snow. He wouldn't reveal his baby's name and even demurred when asked if his child was a boy or a girl. "Not yet," he said when asked for the details.

Lingering beneath that privacy is the question of whether, as the defending Olympic champion, he has any desire to assume a spot that White has held for the last two decades: the face of professional snowboarding.

It's not easy, and those with short memories might forget that Hirano has already been out there for more than a dozen years.

His first big splash, in fact, came at the same mountain he competed on last week, where, at age 14, he won a silver medal at the Winter X Games, becoming the youngest athlete to reach the podium in one of his sport's marquee events.

That set him up to be labeled as the wunderkind who someday was going to beat White at the Olympics. But that took time. He won silver medals in 2014 and 2018 — the second of those in a spirited

battle with White, who snatched away the gold medal, his third, by landing every trick he had never completed successfully on a run before.

"I've seen his arc and his career, where he came out swinging and he had so much tension, so much pressure," White said. "I think that kind of hurt his trajectory a little. But he came back, and he's in the spot of heading into the Olympics being the top guy."

"The fact he landed that last run at the Olympics shows he's got some grit to him."

The final run White speaks of came in 2022 when, after landing the triple cork on his second run, Hirano still found himself in second place behind Australian Scotty James.

Hirano came back, repeated the trick

and, that time, got the score and the gold medal that came with it.

And that's how Japan ended up with a snowboard champion. Hirano's star, already a bright one back home, started radiating even further.

White said it was hard to miss the life-size posters of the 1.65-meter daredevil hawking athletic gear at a mall in Sydney earlier this month.

For Hirano the snowboarder, the fame isn't something he seeks — it simply goes with the territory.

For Hirano the dad, though, being really good at what he does has a new meaning now — he's not just doing it for himself.

"I feel like I have to do it right to leave my legacy for this child's future," he said. "I'm fortunate to continue doing things I love, and I feel that I can keep on competing, not just with my own will, but with that of my family."

"The family has become the source of my energy."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Ayumu Hirano of Japan competes in the men's snowboard halfpipe competition on day two of The Snow League at Buttermilk Ski Resort in Aspen, Colorado, on March 8. AFP

OLYMPICS

Golden girl Khelif 'a locomotive' driving Algerian women's boxing

AZAZGA, Algeria — In a gym in northern Algeria's Kabylia region, 15-year-old Cerine Kessal drives her fists into a punching bag. The two-time national champion is dreaming of greater feats after Algerian Imane Khelif won Olympic gold last year.

Khelif's victory generated newfound interest among Algerian girls and women in the male-dominated sport, with gyms across the North African country witnessing a surge in memberships.

She emerged from the Paris Olympics as a trailblazer for aspiring women athletes in Algeria, despite a gender controversy over her eligibility.

"I want to compete in African and world championships," Kessal said, speaking in a blend of Arabic, French and Tamazight, the language of the Amazigh people, also known as Berbers.

Her coach, Djaafar Ourhoun, said Khelif had become "a role model for the other boxers at the gym", after Kessal won her local club, Jeunesse Sportive Azazga, its only medal at a recent national championship.

The small gym, refashioned from a former municipal slaughterhouse with the help of local families, now trains 20 women boxers, said Ourhoun.

The young girls' "hunger for results" has often sparked "competitiveness, even jealousy, among their male counterparts," he said.

"I want to be like Imane Khelif and win an Olympic gold medal," said Kessal.



Young women practice boxing in the Algerian city of Tizi Ouzou. Algerian boxer Imane Khelif's 2024 Olympic gold has aroused newfound domestic interest among girls and women for the male-dominated sport, with gyms across the North African country witnessing a surge in memberships. AFP



In 2023, the International Boxing Association barred Khelif from its world championships after it said she had failed gender eligibility tests for carrying XY chromosomes.

The 25-year-old champion denounced the IBA's "false and offensive" allegations, and vowed last month to keep fighting "in the ring" and "in the courts".

"I have seen adversity before," she said in a statement, "but I have never stayed down."

'Shattered taboo'

In Bejaia, further east of Algiers, clubs such

as Dream Team and Sidi Ayad Boxing Club have also welcomed more women and girls. Lina Debbou, a former boxer and now sports adviser, said this momentum started right after the Olympics.

"Imane Khelif brought so much to women's boxing," she told reporters. "More girls are joining the sport thanks to her." Even in relatively more conservative parts of the country, like Djelfa in the Saharan Atlas range, some 300 kilometers south of Algiers, more women are said to have taken up the sport.

"We first tried introducing women's

boxing in 2006, but it was not successful due to the region being conservative," Mohamed Benyacoub, the director of local club Ennasr, explained.

Now, "the women's sports movement has begun to revive," he said, adding that Khelif had "shattered the taboo that women can't box".

Nacim Touami, a boxing referee whose wife is also a professional boxer, said parents are playing a pivotal role in this "real obsession with boxing now".

"Parents used to prefer volleyball or swimming for their daughters," he said.

"But, after Khelif's gold medal, we've seen a real shift."

A 'phenomenon'

Manel Berkache, a former national champion who also coaches at JSA, said it was mothers, in particular, who were driving the change.

"Mothers are now the ones who register their daughters and attend training and matches, and this is a beautiful thing," she said.

Hocine Oucherif, vice-president of the Algerian Boxing Federation, called it "the Imane Khelif phenomenon".

"She is the locomotive of women's boxing in Algeria," he said. "She gave us such strong momentum."

He said over 100 female junior boxers had turned up at this year's national championship — more than double the number from last year.

It was at this competition that Kessal won gold, sparring against athletes from clubs including the Tiaret Civil Protection Club where Khelif debuted.

Like Kessal, 14-year-old Hayat Berouali, who picked up boxing less than a month ago, dreams of becoming a champion, too.

"I liked boxing after watching fights at the Olympic Games, especially those of Imane Khelif, and my parents encouraged me," she said, smiling.

AFP