

Secrets disclosed

Trump makes public thousands of files on JFK assassination

WORLD, PAGE 15



Bangladesh sends patients to Kunming

ACROSS ASIA, PAGE 7



Inherit and innovate

Craftsman carving a career by joining ingenuity with culture

LIFE, PAGE 16

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2025

MODERNIZATION FOR ALL

Sino-Namibian ties deepening across sectors

TCM healthcare program reflects extensive cooperation and pursuit of modernization

By XU WEI and ZHAO JIA

In the heart of Namibia, a weathered medical record speaks volumes about an enduring partnership. Li Bangwei, leader of China's 15th medical team to Namibia and a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine, recalls a patient presenting to him a well-preserved, yellowed booklet — a medical record from nearly 30 years ago — when the patient first received treatment from a Chinese doctor.

"For us, a single acupuncture needle is not just a tool for healing; it is a bridge of friendship," Li said.

Since 1996, China has been sending medical teams to Namibia, each comprising two doctors and two nurses. Stationed at Katutura State Hospital in Windhoek, the Namibian capital, they specialize in acupuncture and massage therapy, sharing their expertise and the healing power of traditional Chinese medicine.

Li and his team arrived in the African nation in February 2023. They offered treatment to over 19,000 patients and training to nearly 60 local medical students before returning to China in September 2024.

Bernard Haufiku, Namibia's former minister of health and social services, personally experienced the benefits of TCM when he received treatment for a back injury. After the treatment, he recorded a video expressing his gratitude and encouraging Namibian medical students to pursue studies in China.

China and Namibia will celebrate the 35th anniversary of their diplomatic relations on Saturday.

The ongoing healthcare program epitomizes the extensive cooperation between the two countries in their shared efforts to build up partnerships across various sectors and forge ahead toward modernization, said top envoys and industry insiders.

"China has stood by us all the way," said Elia George Kaiyamo, Namibia's ambassador to China, highlighting the deepening bond, particularly since the establishment of a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership in 2018.

China has been Namibia's second-largest trading partner and export destination, with bilateral trade volume reaching \$1.4 billion in the first nine months of 2024, a year-on-year growth of 35 percent, according to statistics from the Chinese embassy in Windhoek.

As a participant in the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, the African country has witnessed transformative infrastructure projects, including the expansion of the Walvis Bay Harbor and airport upgrades. Kaiyamo emphasized that these projects have significantly enhanced Namibia's connectivity and accessibility over the past three decades.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Africa in January, with Namibia as his first stop, reaffirmed China's commitment to supporting the country's economic development, helping transform its resource advantages into economic strengths and advancing modernization together.

See *Ties*, page 3

DALIAN CHARTS GREEN ROUTE TO BECOMING SHIPBUILDING LEADER

Northeastern port city targets massive industrial scale as industry undergoes transformation

By ZHANG XIAOMIN in Dalian, Liaoning

zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn



Amid the strong growth in China's shipbuilding industry, Dalian is navigating a course to becoming a global leader in green ship and marine equipment construction, repairs, and retrofitting work.

The northeastern port city in Liaoning province is aiming to surpass an industrial scale of 100 billion yuan (\$13.83 billion) in 2027.

In the Dalian Changxing Island Economic and Technological Development Zone, shipbuilder

Hengli Heavy Industries has already solidified its manufacturing credentials in a relatively short period of time.

At the beginning of the year, two 82,000-deadweight-ton bulk carriers were delivered, marking the first time the company completed the delivery of two ships in a single day since it began full operations in 2023.

See *Dalian*, page 2

Fleeing Gaza



Palestinians flee their homes after the Israeli army issued evacuation orders for a number of neighborhoods following heavy strikes, in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip, on Tuesday. The international community has condemned the latest deadly Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, as the strikes killed nearly a thousand Palestinians in two days. Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, on Tuesday urged Israel to "renounce its obsession with the use of force" and immediately cease military operations in Gaza. ABD ELHKEEM KHALED / REUTERS

Challenges remain in achieving lasting peace in Ukraine

By JULIAN SHEA in London and YANG RAN in Beijing

Inside

Editorial, page 11

The partial ceasefire plan for the Russia-Ukraine conflict agreed upon on Tuesday during a phone call between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President Donald Trump has received a mixed reaction from global political leaders and experts.

Both sides published statements following the conversation, described by the White House as the first step in a "movement to peace", which agreed on a limited ceasefire against targeting infrastructure and energy facilities, but did not address a full cessation of the conflict.

The Kremlin's statement contained a list of demands to avoid escalation, which included a total stop to foreign military and intelligence assistance to Ukraine.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said that China is "glad to see all efforts that lead to a ceasefire and believes that this is a necessary step to realize peace".

In an online briefing after the call, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he welcomed the proposals as Ukraine supports any proposals that would lead to a last-

ing and just peace.

On Wednesday, Zelensky held a phone conversation with Trump.

However, Moscow and Kyiv accused each other on Wednesday of launching air attacks that damaged infrastructure just hours after their leaders agreed in principle to the limited ceasefire to halt attacks on energy infrastructure.

Zhang Hong, a researcher at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said a key point of contention during the US-Russia talks was that the two negotiating parties had divergent preferences regarding the pace and desired outcomes of the peace process.

"The US seeks a swift resolution, while Russia emphasizes sustainability. Trump aims for an unconditional and rapid ceasefire, but Russia insists on a guaranteed, sustainable one, leading to asymmetrical demands," Zhang said. "Russia wants to address all issues at once, but neither Trump nor Ukraine is ready for this."

The limited focus of the ceasefire seems to have been tactical. "Ukraine's strikes on Russia's ener-

gy facilities have disrupted Russia's economy, while Russian bombing has left Ukraine with power shortages. Both sides have suffered... leading to a consensus to stop them," said Zhang.

"However, the ongoing fighting shows that the pause in targeting infrastructure is mainly to address civilian needs. The two sides haven't reached an agreement on more intense issues such as the military conflict and security," he added.

Russia has dismissed the suggestion of any European involvement in peace talks, and European Commission Vice-President Kaja Kallas said she is skeptical about Moscow's desire to end the conflict.

"If you read the two readouts from the call, it is clear that... Russia does not really want to make any kind of concessions," she told reporters in Brussels.

Phillips O'Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews, said on social media platform X: "Trump and Putin are carving up Ukraine and making fundamental decisions on the future of Europe — and not a single European leader is taking part in the call."

In a video posted on X, Ian Brem-

mer, president of risk research and consultancy the Eurasia Group, was slightly more measured, calling it "a win for both sides, for the Americans and the Russians, and not horrible for Ukraine and Europe, but kicking the can on what's going to be some big problems down the road and setting out where those challenges are going to be".

Although the 30-day ceasefire proposal did at least offer hope of some temporary respite, Bremmer said, in the long run, resolving the situation was still going to be extremely challenging.

"The working-level conversations between the US and Russia, between the US and Ukraine, are going to be far more difficult, and they're probably not going to hold," he said. "It feels a little bit like what we have in Gaza — relatively easy to get the first iteration of a deal in place where no one's really giving anything up, but as you go into the second phase, you find that the fundamental interests don't actually overlap."

Zheng Wanyin and agencies contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at julian@mail.chinadailyuk.com

US evading responsibility by exiting global organizations

WORLD WATCH By Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan

ing from the World Health Organization for the second time in a decade.

The US failed badly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ongoing US preferential health policy has endangered the universal health assistance program, showing its partisan national narrative based on self-claimed protectionism to

marginalize the global fight against deadly diseases and health disasters.

Additionally, the White House announced its serious intention of withdrawing from the United Nations Human Rights Council, accusing it of adopting biased policies against Israel, despite 17 months of catastrophes in Gaza backed by Washington.

Moreover, the US government planned to extend its halt on funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, confirming its biased

and obvious political support for Israel's moves in Gaza and in the Middle East.

Even Volker Turk, the UN human rights chief, expressed deep concern about a fundamental shift in direction by the US, warning that divisive rhetoric is being used to deceive and polarize people. Indeed, such US moves are hurting humanity and eroding the global governance system based on equality, mutual respect and the rule of law.

See *Diplomacy* page 3

INSIDE To be taken with a pinch of salt Global Views, page 13

Newsstand prices: US \$1 Canada C\$1 UK £1 EU €16 Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

www.chinadailyglobal.com Member of ANN China Daily Global ©2025 All Rights Reserved

PAGE TWO



Left: An intern practices automated welding at a training center of Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co in Dalian, Liaoning province, in June. YANG QING / XINHUA **Middle:** A staff member works at a shipbuilding facility of Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co in June. YANG QING / XINHUA **Right:** A ship is put into the water at the shipyard of Hengli Group in Changxing Island of Dalian on Jan 20. SUN PENGWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Dalian: Sailing toward global excellence

From page 1

The new shipbuilder achieved other breakthroughs last year, including its first ship delivery, its first engine delivery, and the launch of its first 306,000-metric-ton very large crude carrier (VLCC).

"Currently, our shipbuilding orders are scheduled until 2028," said Chen Jianhua, chairman of Hengli Group. Hengli Heavy Industries is designing and constructing high-value green ships of the highest standards and the fastest speeds, Chen added.

"After achieving full production, it is expected we will process 2.3 million tons of steel plates annually, build 150 large ships, and produce 180 engines, becoming the world's largest single shipyard," he said.

Global transformation

The global maritime industry is undergoing an industrial transformation toward a green and low-carbon future, accelerated by digital and intelligent technology, said Li Yanqing, secretary-general of the Beijing-based China Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry.

Li made the remarks in Dalian last month at a conference on the development of the city's marine equipment industry for high-tech shipbuilding. Development of the industry to achieve new heights requires government support, industry insiders' efforts and good international cooperation, he added.

The conference — held to promote the high-end, intelligent, and green development of the city's shipbuilding and marine equipment sector — attracted representatives of around 200 domestic and international enterprises from countries including South Korea, Japan, Finland, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Norway.

In 2024, China's shipbuilding completion volume, new order volume, and order backlog volume accounted for 55.7 percent, 74.1 percent, and 63.1 percent of the global market share, respectively, according to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

The data showed continuous growth, with both the new order volume and order backlog volume the highest in China's shipbuilding history.

Green, intelligent drive

With over 78.5 percent of global green product orders and full coverage of mainstream ship types, the achievements of China's shipbuilding industry in the move to green and low-carbon production were outstanding in 2024.

China's shipbuilding industry is advancing toward mid- and high-end manufacturing through accelerated technological innovation, with new quality productive forces the engine driving the upgrade, said Professor Zhang Hongpeng from the Dalian Maritime University.

"China's shipbuilding industry is focusing on major areas of green and intelligent development, clearing a series of key bottlenecks, and promoting the leapfrog development of design and manufacturing capabilities for green and intelligent ship and marine equipment," he said.

In December 2023, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and several other departments issued an action plan for green development of the shipbuilding industry (2024-2030). The plan proposed establishing a basic system for green development in the

shipbuilding industry by 2030.

In December 2024, a State-level opinion on accelerating the construction of a unified and open transportation market was issued. It proposed promoting the application of new energy and clean energy in ships and other transportation, and the continued implementation of intelligent shipping and other related pilot applications in the transportation field.

Zhang said more designs and equipment are now being independently developed. "Products are gradually covering all ship types in the market, and the research and development design, processing technology, and management levels are continuously improving," he said.

Think big

Dalian can lay claim to the world's largest floating production and storage offloading vessel, which can hold 2 million barrels of crude oil and serves as a multifunctional offshore oil and gas factory.

There are only two such vessels in the world. The first one was delivered two years ago and the second, currently under construction in Dalian, is set to be delivered in June.

As a subcontractor for the vessel, Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co (DSIC), a subsidiary of China State Shipbuilding Corporation, is responsible for the design and construction of the hull. With more than 200 designers involved in the project, the design and construction period was shortened from over 30 months to 20 months.

"For the first vessel, we used integral construction, which takes a long time (working) from the stern to the bow using a segmented layered construction method, like building blocks," said Guo Hongsheng, chief designer of the project.

"For the second one, we used two large sections — the bow section and the stern section,"

These two large sections were also



An engine assembly workshop at a factory of the Hengli Group. SUN PENGWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

built using a segmented building block method in order to save construction time.

"This way, it will greatly save the construction period and reduce labor costs. At the same time, a large number of components, including pipelines, cables, etc, have been pre-installed during the segmented stage," Guo explained.

The vessel's pipelines number 36,000, with a total weight exceeding 4,000 tons. The painted area of the vessel covers nearly 900,000 square meters, and the construction volume is more than three times that of a large oil tanker.

Han Dongwang, general manager of DSIC, said the green and intelligent development of the industry will jointly drive its transformation, adding the prospects for the shipbuilding market and demand for supporting equipment are strong.

DSIC will dive into the high-end shipbuilding field, establish long-term cooperative relationships with suppliers, reduce costs, and enhance service quality, he said.

China's shipbuilders need to unite the world's best suppliers and service providers to jointly build a global ecosystem for the sustainable development of the shipbuilding industry, said Li Yanqing, in an interview with China Ship News in early February.

In addition to predicting market changes and promoting technological innovation, shipbuilders need to effectively control costs, ensure production safety, and deliver high-quality products, he said.

China's shipbuilding industry has been developing for more than 40 years in the international market, and its products have gained the trust of shipowners worldwide, he added.

Thirty-four shipbuilding and marine engineering projects were signed at the Dalian conference, covering areas such as green and intelligent upgrades, raw materials, ship and marine engineering equipment, marine intelligent manufacturing, and construction of industrial parks.

One representative of a foreign company that signed a contract expressed amazement at the efficiency and quality of cooperation with Chinese companies.

He said his company decided to invest in a factory in Dalian after visiting the site, and also after being inspired by the vitality of the shipbuilding industry in the city.

Thriving by the sea

Liaoning province has historically been an important base for China's shipbuilding industry. The country's first 10,000-ton ship, first drilling platform, and first aircraft carrier were all produced in Dalian.

After more than a century of development, the shipbuilding and marine equipment industry in Dalian has become a national leader in terms of industrial strength, research and development and industrial cooperation capabilities.

Major shipyards in Dalian are already operating at full capacity after a strong start to the year.

DSIC recently announced the signing of a contract with NBP, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Japan's NYK Line, for the construction of up to four 33,000-deadweight-ton deck transport vessels.

The vessels, slated for delivery in 2027, will be designed for transporting oversized modular equipment, and have a wide deck and high-load capacity to efficiently serve offshore wind, petrochemical modules, and other mega-cargo logistics, according to Xinde Marine News.

"This order underscores international trust in China's shipbuilding

and opens new avenues for DSIC in Japan's premium vessel market. We're committed to delivering excellence with precision," He Xu, DSIC deputy general manager, said at the signing ceremony, Xinde reported.

Toshiro Hasegawa, NBP's module transport division general manager, said: "DSIC's engineering strength, proven track record, and dedication made them the ideal partner. These vessels will elevate our competitiveness and advance sustainable global logistics."

Modernization drive

In recent years, Dalian has promoted the modernization of the city's growth through coordinated development of shipbuilding and marine equipment.

In 2024, the value of ship exports from Dalian Port reached 18.79 billion yuan, an increase of 28.3 percent year-on-year, Dalian Customs data shows.

"Dalian was born by the sea and thrives because of the sea. The shipbuilding and marine equipment industry has grown together with the city," said Xiong Maoping, Party chief of Dalian.

The city has formed a complete industrial system integrating shipbuilding with repairs, support, technical research and testing, he said.

Construction of a world-class high-tech shipbuilding and high-end marine equipment manufacturing base can also be leveraged to promote the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and to cultivate and development of strategic emerging industries, Xiong said.

Dalian will actively adapt to the trend of green development in the shipbuilding industry, layout large-scale ocean ships and deep-sea equipment industrial chains according to local conditions, and enhance the design and construction capabilities of high-value-added ship types and equipment, he said.

In 2024, Dalian's shipbuilding and marine equipment industry achieved an annual output value exceeding 60 billion yuan for the first time, said Qiu Baolin, deputy mayor of the city.

Breakthroughs were made in the research and development of new ships such as new high-speed passenger and roll-on-roll-off ships, he added.

A number of firsts, both domestically and internationally, were achieved. The world's first LNG dual-fuel ultra-large crude oil ship and methanol dual-fuel low-speed diesel engine were both successfully delivered.

At the beginning of this year, the city's three-year action plan for the shipbuilding and marine industry was formulated. A total of 18 policies were proposed, with four regions to promote specific support measures to boost the industry's development.

The Supporting Policies for the High-Quality Development of Dalian's Shipbuilding and Marine Equipment Industry was released at the February conference.

"In 2025, Dalian is expected to deliver 84 ships, with shipbuilding completions reaching 8.8 million deadweight tons, and the output value is expected to grow by over 20 percent," said Qiu.

"By 2030, we aim to build Dalian into an international first-class shipbuilding and marine equipment industry base," he said.

Right: A large container ship built by Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co. YANG QING / XINHUA **Bottom:** A technician trains a student at the DSIC training center.

HAN HAIDAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



TOP NEWS

Diplomacy:
Inconsistent
policies a
real danger

From page 1

Speculations are rife that the US administration is going to quit the World Trade Organization as a logical conclusion to its ongoing spree of imposing tariffs. The US has already paralyzed the dispute settlement mechanism of WTO for years.

While no official decision has yet been made, experts believe that the US administration may use the threat of withdrawal as leverage to reshape global trade rules in accordance with its "America First" vision, which would be a huge blow to the international trading system, global supply chains and investment.

It is being aired in the Western media that the US administration may evaluate its role in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the near future. A future US decision to cut or suspend its funding or even withdraw would be a big blow to developing and underdeveloped economies seeking loans while shaking global economic governance.

It is warned that economic globalization, international cooperation, openness and digitalization would be in real danger in the days to come because of the US' unprofessional and inconsistent policies.

Even the global fight against climate change and bid to ensure biodiversity, green transformation and artificial intelligence governance would be weakened because of the unfriendly and harsh US attitude.

The US' climate measures could have an impact on its macroeconomy, hurting its own green transformation and badly affecting small island nations.

Worse, the US' refusal to sign the Statement on Inclusive and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence for People and the Planet, adopted at the AI Action Summit held in Paris in February, is putting world peace and prosperity in peril, as the US hosts databases of the internet and much of the world is using AI tools provided by US-based companies. Only the shock of DeepSeek portends a much more inclusive and promising path of AI development for the international community.

On the other hand, China has observed the Global AI Governance Initiative, offering an open, inclusive and fair approach to the development, security and governance of emerging AI technologies and services, showing its strong commitment to safeguarding the best interest of the international community.

The US' unbalanced foreign policy, prejudiced social preferences, protective economic priorities and above all self-centric diplomatic conduct are pushing it toward eventual isolation, while badly disturbing international economic and trading systems and rules-based global governance.

The US' decisions to withdraw from some vital UN organizations and programs are pushing it into a blind alley in an increasingly interconnected international system, and creating potential consequences particularly for joint efforts to combat epidemics, ensure human rights, financial assistance and community building around the globe.

Since we are living in a connected multilateral world heavily relying on mutual cooperation, the US should come out of its deep slumber and start cooperating with the international community to achieve win-win propositions for all. Otherwise its behavior would deliver nothing but complete embarrassment.

The author is president of Pak-China Corridor of Knowledge and executive director of the Islamabad-based Center for South Asia and International Studies. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Tesla arson probed



Police are investigating after several vehicles were set on fire at a Tesla service center on Tuesday in Las Vegas. AP

Fully foreign-owned hospital approved

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

DeltaHealth Hospital Shanghai has received approval from the Shanghai Municipal Health Commission to operate as a wholly foreign-owned hospital, making it the first of its kind in China to specialize in cardiovascular diseases.

It is also the first wholly foreign-owned hospital in Shanghai to be established since the country launched a pilot program in September, allowing foreign entities to set up hospitals independently in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, and four other cities as well as the island of Hainan.

The hospital, which began as a joint venture in 2016 and is located in Qingpu district, focuses on cardiology. It specializes in cardiovascular medicine, cardiovascular surgery, medical imaging and interventional therapy, thoracic surgery and oncology, and has been designated as a high-level social medical institution.

Swire Pacific, a Hong Kong-based international conglomerate, announced in May that it had completed a shareholding increase in DeltaHealth China, making it the sole owner of DeltaHealth Hospital Shanghai. It marked the first time the group had taken a majority stake in a company in the healthcare sector.

Though Hong Kong is a part of China, operating under the nation's "one country, two systems" policy, investments from the special administrative region on the mainland are considered to be of a foreign nature.

In September, the Ministry of Commerce and two other national-level authorities announced a pilot program to encourage more foreign investment in the healthcare sector, with eight cities and the island of Hainan selected to test wholly foreign-owned hospitals.

Experts said the move signals China's commitment to further opening up its market in key sectors related to public welfare. They expect the initiative to attract foreign investment, promote high-quality development in medical services, and better meet the growing demand for personalized healthcare among both local and expatriate residents.

In January, Shanghai announced plans to encourage wholly foreign-owned hospitals in key economic zones, biopharmaceutical industry clusters and downtown districts with high concentrations of expatriates. Each of these areas can host up to two foreign-owned hospitals. The key economic zones include the free trade zone, the Lin-gang Special Area, the Hongqiao business district and the eastern hub international business cooperation zone.

The initiative allows such hospi-

tals to hire expatriate physicians and healthcare professionals from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. It also stipulates that at least half of the hospital's management and medical staff must be from the Chinese mainland.

"These wholly foreign-owned hospitals are expected to introduce state-of-the-art medical technologies, equipment and service concepts at an international level, diversify service offerings, and contribute to the upgrading of the medical industry," said Jin Chunlin, director of the Shanghai Institute of Medical Science and Technology Information.

Parkway Shanghai, part of IHH Healthcare, one of the world's largest private healthcare networks, celebrated its 20th anniversary in China in December. The company said it remains confident in China's market potential and announced plans to open a new flagship ambulatory care center in downtown Shanghai this year. This follows the launch of Parkway Shanghai Hospital in 2023, an 84,400-square-meter facility built with an investment of over 1.61 billion yuan (\$222 million).

Prem Kumar Nair, group chief executive officer of IHH Healthcare, said the company is optimistic about new opportunities in China's healthcare sector given the government's ongoing efforts to liberalize foreign investment in the industry.

Ties: Africa's actual needs taken seriously

From page 1

Namibia's first female president-elect, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, is scheduled to be sworn in on Friday. Peng Qinghua, vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, will attend the inauguration ceremony as the special envoy of President Xi Jinping.

Zhao Weiping, China's ambassador to Namibia, said in an interview with China Daily that "the Chinese side has consistently attached great importance to developing China-Namibia relations, and has actively promoted friendly exchanges and practical cooperation in a wide range of fields."

He said the next five years will be a window for rapid social and economic development in Namibia, and it will also be "an important time with new opportunities for China-Namibia trade and economic cooperation."

Chinese enterprises have continuously invested in lithium and gold mines, copper smelting and wind power generation in Namibia, expanding cooperation in the mineral energy sector. China's investments in Namibia's Husab and Rossing uranium mining projects have created 6,000 high-paying jobs, according to Zhao.

Namibia has further embraced collaboration with China in aerospace research, hosting a space tracking, telemetry and command station in Swakopmund — the first of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere.

With Namibia expected to commence oil and gas production around 2030 and potentially become Africa's fifth-largest oil producer, Zhao said there are promising opportunities for bilateral cooperation in this sector as well.

"We believe that the two countries will further explore cooperative potential in the energy and mineral fields, achieving complementary advantages and mutual benefits," he added.

Beyond industry and infrastructure, China's engagement in Namibia extends to agriculture and education, ensuring that cooperation reaches people at all levels.

Johanna Kudumo, a Namibian farmer from the Kavango East region, participated in a four-day training on sustainable horticulture under a South-South Cooperation project between China and Namibia in February. She praised the hands-on approach of the program.

"I have been farming for years, but this training has taught me new ways to improve my yields. Learning about pest control and compost making was particularly valuable. I feel more confident in applying these techniques in my farm," Kudumo said.

Another priority for bilateral cooperation is enhancing educational infrastructure. Official statistics show that more than 4,000 new classrooms need to be built in Namibia to meet the demand for primary, secondary and high schools, and China has so far helped establish eight schools in the African country.

"In the future, we will continue to closely follow the development needs of Namibia and carry out more high-quality projects benefiting local people," Zhao said.

Meanwhile, analysts have noted that the cooperation between the two nations could set an example for enhanced collaboration between China and Africa.

Zhou Yuyuan, deputy director of the Center for West Asian and African Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, emphasized that China tailors its cooperation with African countries based on their actual needs and development goals, which he said is a key advantage of China-Africa collaboration.

Kaiyamo, the Namibian envoy, has commended the 10 partnership action plans unveiled by President Xi for advancing Africa's modernization during the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in Beijing in September.

"FOCAC has grown from strength to strength," Kaiyamo said, highlighting China's role in knowledge-sharing and its steadfast support for Africa's development.

"We (China and Africa) are now on the same page. We all need good water in Africa. We all need connections. We need to educate our people. We need the extension of our products," he said, adding that China's action plans address these fundamental needs, making them essential for Namibia and Africa.

Contact the writers at
zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

China's tech
startup eyes
cheaper robots

Firm to open second factory in Shanghai, aims for annual capacity of 10,000 units

By MA SI
masi@chinadaily.com.cn

In a high-tech factory in Shanghai, engineers meticulously piece together humanoid robots, while rows of newly made machines await testing.

The factory, in Lin-gang Special Area, is the first in Shanghai to mass produce humanoid robots.

Though it has only been operational for less than a year, it has already produced more than 1,500 humanoid robots, according to AgiBot, the artificial intelligence and robotics startup that runs the factory.

The company plans to open a second factory in Shanghai this year, and is aiming for an annual capacity of 10,000 units.

"At scale, our robots will cost under 200,000 yuan (\$27,500) — less expensive than a family car," said Peng Zhihui, co-founder of AgiBot.

Initially targeting a monthly output of 100 units, the plant's production surged to more than 15 units daily due to soaring market demand.

As 2025 is widely anticipated to be the first year for the mass production of humanoid robots, Chinese companies such as AgiBot are scrambling to show their technological and manufacturing prowess.

On the list of 100 global humanoid robotics-related companies, which was recently released by United States investment bank Morgan Stanley, 37 are from China, including UBTECH and BYD. The China Electronics Society forecasts that China's humanoid robot market will reach 870 billion yuan by 2030.

Humanoid robotics is a perfect example of embodied AI, a phrase that was highlighted in China's 2025 Government Work Report. Embodied AI refers to AI integrated in physical hardware.

Qiao Hong, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said: "Humanoid robots are a particularly promising area. China has established a core technological foundation for the large-scale and cost-effective production of high-performance robotic systems."

AgiBot, for instance, credits Shanghai's advanced manufacturing ecosystem and the Yangtze River Delta's mature supply chain — particularly crossover components from the electric vehicle sector — for its rapid growth.

Zhang Shaozheng, general manager of manufacturing at AgiBot, said: "From an industrial chain perspective, we've leveraged synergies with the new energy sector, particularly in components like electric motors and gearboxes. It is precisely these mature supply chains that enabled us to produce humanoid robots at scale in such a short timeframe."



A man controls a robot from AgiBot, a Chinese technology company established in 2023 and based in Shanghai, during the Global Developer Conference in Shanghai on Feb 21. HECTOR RETAMAL / AFP

“

Humanoid robots are a particularly promising area. China has established a core technological foundation for the large-scale and cost-effective production of high-performance robotic systems.”

Qiao Hong, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences

But building a robot's body is just the first step. How to develop its "brain" is also crucial.

Last week, AgiBot launched an AI large language model, the GO-1, to accelerate the training of robots. The model enables robots to rapidly generalize new tasks with minimal training, significantly lowering the technical barriers for embodied AI applications, AgiBot said.

The GO-1 model leverages real-world human demonstrations and internet-sourced video data to enhance contextual understanding of human activities.

At AgiBot's robot training center in its Shanghai factory, 100 humanoid robots learn to pour tea, fold laundry and arrange tables in simulated everyday environments — from cafes to living rooms. These machines generate high-quality action datasets daily by imitating human behavior, which is crucial for training the GO-1 model.

Yao Maoqing, a partner of AgiBot and president of its embodied intelligence business unit, said: "Even a simple water-pouring action requires nearly 100 high-quality data samples for training. These datasets, collected from the 100 robots, are uploaded to the cloud computing platform for model iteration, eventually enabling universal task deployment."

Currently, repetitive industrial tasks remain the initial focus for the application of humanoid robots. Yao highlighted logistics as a prime example.

"While automated guided vehicles excel at transporting goods, tasks such as packaging variable-sized items demand real-time adjustments and error correction — a challenge perfectly suited for humanoid robots. AI control allows them to rethink strategies upon failure, much like humans," he said.

As technologies evolve, AgiBot envisions broader applications. "Humanoid robots' flexibility fills the gap between rigid automation and human labor," Yao said.

CHINA

Grass barriers



Workers plant grass grids at a sand control site that is part of the Three-North Shelterbelt Forest Program in Gaotai county in Zhangye, Gansu province, on Tuesday. Gaotai is located on the southern edge of the Badain Jaran Desert, China's third-largest desert. This year, the county plans to set green barriers on 1,800 hectares of sandy areas. CHENG LIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

New policy to ensure food quality and safety

Guideline urges stricter oversight from licensing to production and distribution

By YAN DONGJIE

yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

China has announced a new comprehensive guideline aimed at strengthening oversight across the entire food supply chain, from farms to consumer tables.

The policy, jointly issued by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, outlines stricter controls and enforcement measures to enhance public health protection and ensure food quality.

The new guideline emphasizes greater coordination between regulatory bodies and a focus on improving food safety at every stage of production, distribution and sale. A key component of the reforms includes the establishment of a traceability system for agricultural products, enabling better monitoring from farms to markets. This is intended to prevent unsafe products from entering the food supply while allowing authorities to respond quickly to any safety issues that might arise.

The policy also tightens regulations surrounding food production and business licensing. Producers and distributors will now face more stringent checks before receiving licenses, and compliance will be rigorously enforced at both the provincial and local levels.

Traditional food producers will be required to meet modern safety standards while preserving cultural practices.

In addition to improving food production standards, the policy addresses food storage and transportation. New safety protocols for warehouses and logistics companies aim to ensure that food is stored and transported under controlled conditions, preventing contamination or spoilage.

As online food sales continue to grow, the document emphasizes the responsibilities of e-commerce platforms and livestreaming hosts in selling food products online. It calls for "ensuring the accountability of online food sales entities and strengthening the collaborative governance of food safety issues in online sales" to improve regulation

of the emerging sector. Furthermore, it requires the establishment of a comprehensive regulatory mechanism for food service.

For imported food products, the policy introduces a risk management framework to ensure that all foreign foods entering China meet domestic safety standards. This includes additional oversight of food sold through cross-border e-commerce channels.

In January, data from the Ministry of Public Security showed that 12,000 cases of food safety crimes were solved last year.

Last week, a reporter from The Beijing News conducted undercover visits to several Yangmingyu Braised Chicken and Rice franchise stores in Henan province. They observed kitchens using spoiled mushrooms and processing overnight darkened beef with coloring agents for reuse. They also witnessed leftover food from customers being recycled and reprocessed.

This year's CCTV 3.15 Gala also exposed the issue of excessive phosphate levels in water-injected shrimp sold on various online platforms though advertisements for these shrimp frequently featured claims of "zero additives" and "zero moisture retention agents".

Tough action taken against data theft

By WANG QINGYUN

wangqingyun@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese police cracked more than 7,000 cases involving personal information security violations last year, the Ministry of Public Security said on Tuesday, urging strict legal compliance in handling such data.

Authorities took tough measures against such crimes last year, dismantling multiple platforms that traded personal data, the ministry said in a statement. It also disclosed 10 typical cases police solved in 2024, in which suspects obtained personal data through technical means, fraud or other methods.

In one case, a suspected criminal organization led by a person sur-

named Liu allegedly developed Trojan malware to steal data, according to the ministry. Members of the group would take jobs at companies offering training services and implant the malware in company computers to access client information, the ministry said.

In September, the police of Beijing's Haidian district arrested eight suspects and helped 17 companies remove the malware from their computers.

In another case, police in Changchun, Jilin province, dismantled a suspected criminal organization led by an individual surnamed Wang that allegedly faked business licenses to trick jobseekers into sending resumes, which were then sold to

telecommunications fraud gangs. In June, police arrested 27 suspects and seized more than 1,000 fake business licenses.

A separate case involved collusion between an alleged criminal group and employees in the courier industry. The organization has been accused of stealing personal information from delivery orders and selling it. Police in Zhangye, Gansu province, arrested 18 suspects.

The ministry urged companies and individuals handling personal information to comply with the law and enhance security measures. It also advised the public to store and use their personal data carefully and report suspected leaks to authorities.

Ne Zha fans encouraged to avoid buying unauthorized merchandise

By LI SHANGYI

lishangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

The blockbuster animated film *Ne Zha 2* has amassed more than \$2 billion worldwide, but its success has fueled a surge in unauthorized merchandise, raising concerns over copyright protection. Amid the rising demand for *Ne Zha*-themed items, China's top court has urged people to avoid buying unauthorized products.

The film's immense popularity among children has led to a trend of kindergarteners dressing up as *Ne Zha* — the rebellious, powerful deity child navigating the consequences of his destiny and fighting against new threats to protect his world — upon returning to school for the new semester. Vendors have capitalized on the craze, setting up stalls outside kindergartens in several Chinese cities to sell *Ne Zha*-inspired outfits and accessories.

"After watching the movie, my child has become a huge fan of *Ne Zha*," some parents wrote in online reviews of the items. Others added, "My kid loves the costume!"

A typical *Ne Zha* outfit includes a red vest with a lotus pattern, a lotus bellyband, drop-crotch pants and a yellow belt, along with replicas of the young hero's signature weapons — the silken threads of destiny, the rings of cosmic power and the fire-tipped spear.

"I am now fully focused on selling *Ne Zha*-themed items. The fire-tipped spear is the most popular among kids," said Chen Lei, a vendor from Xinyang, Henan province. Online marketplaces have also



Efforts should be made to encourage e-commerce platforms and other entities to establish relevant mechanisms to curb the circulation of pirated content at its source."

Liu Mingjie, deputy to the National People's Congress

jumped on the trend, with many *Ne Zha* costumes available on e-commerce platforms for between 30 and 50 yuan. A costume shop on Taobao has reportedly sold more than 10,000 sets. To attract buyers, some sellers incorporate elements from the movie, such as its logo and title, in their promotional posters.

Beyond costumes, a variety of derivative merchandise, including badges, plush toys and keychains featuring the film's main characters, is being sold both online and in physical stores. Some of these items are labeled as officially licensed.

Additionally, self-made *Ne Zha*-themed items such as postcards, stamps and miniature figurines have emerged. At a stationery fair held in Beijing in February, some vendors sold handmade *Ne Zha*-themed gifts and created custom

drawings of the movie characters for customers.

"Copyright infringement has emerged with unauthorized production and sale of *Ne Zha*-related merchandise," said Liu Mingjie, a National People's Congress deputy and chairman of Liaoning Huari New Materials Co.

"Efforts should be made to encourage e-commerce platforms and other entities to establish relevant mechanisms to curb the circulation of pirated content at its source," Liu added.

The Supreme People's Procuratorate has warned that producing or selling products featuring elements from *Ne Zha 2*, including character designs, storylines and settings, without proper authorization constitutes copyright infringement.

Furthermore, the trademarks of the *Ne Zha* movie series have been officially registered, meaning unauthorized use of these trademarks in merchandise also violates copyright laws.

As the popularity of *Ne Zha*-themed products remains high, the SPP urged consumers to avoid purchasing unauthorized items.

"Consumers should choose official channels and licensed distributors. If any infringement is discovered, they are encouraged to report it to relevant authorities to help safeguard the film's creative integrity and maintain a healthy industry ecosystem," the SPP stated in its official WeChat account.

However, self-made *Ne Zha* items for personal use or as gifts without commercial intent are not considered copyright violations, according to lawyers.

Animated blockbuster fuels openings for eager jobseekers with creative bent

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu

pengchao@chinadaily.com.cn

The animated blockbuster *Ne Zha 2* has fueled growth in China's digital cultural and creative industry, driving a surge in job openings for animation, visual effects and game design while attracting a wave of jobseekers, industry insiders say.

As of Saturday, the film, produced by Chengdu Coco Cartoon Co, has grossed more than 15 billion yuan (\$2.07 billion) at the global box office, making it the fifth highest-grossing film in history, according to movie ticketing platform Beacon.

Feng Mingjin, general manager of Chengdu Yunshang New Audiovisual Culture Technology Co, told Sichuan Daily on Sunday at the 2025 Chengdu spring job fair in Sichuan province that "*Ne Zha fever*" has significantly increased demand for talent in the digital cultural and creative sector.

His company offered a record 18 positions at this year's job fair, including film and animation screenwriters, 3D data modelers, video directors and graphic designers.

"The success of *Ne Zha 2* has injected new vitality into Chengdu's digital cultural and creative industry. In response, my company has adjusted its business strategies to seize emerging opportunities and gain new momentum," Feng said. "We aim to attract more talent for future business expansion."

Li Lan, a recruitment team leader at Chengdu Christian Technology Co, said the popularity of *Ne Zha 2* has drawn an unexpectedly large



Youths look for opportunities in the digital cultural and creative sector at a job fair in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Sunday.

WANG QIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

number of jobseekers to the company's booth, with long lines forming throughout the event.

The company, which contributed to some character designs in the film, offered 15 positions at the job fair, including roles for motion capture game animators, motion capture performers and director's assistants, he said.

"A significant number of applicants came because of the influence of *Ne Zha 2*, with many traveling from eastern coastal cities including Beijing, Shanghai and Xiamen in Fujian province," Li said.

The company received more than 40 resumes in just one morning, with most applicants targeting positions as motion capture performers and director's assistants, he said.

A recent graduate surnamed Yang, who traveled from the Ningxia Hui autonomous region to

attend the fair, said he is particularly interested in jobs related to gaming and animation.

"Chengdu is a very livable city with thriving industries, and I hope to secure a job and settle down here," he said.

Peng Yixiao, another recent graduate from Shanghai Ocean University, said he is prioritizing jobs in game design and animation.

"Chengdu is home to many emerging game companies, with a particularly strong focus on action games, which creates many opportunities for jobseekers," he said.

According to this year's Chengdu Talent White Paper, the city's eight key industrial parks in the digital cultural and creative sector have created more than 70 new high-demand talent categories in fields such as gaming, animation, film and television, music and digital publishing.

Measures facilitate approval of 48 first-in-class innovative drugs

By WANG XIAOYU

wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

China approved 48 first-in-class innovative drugs, as well as a significant number of medications for pediatric and rare diseases, thanks to measures aimed at enhancing review efficiency and accelerating patient access to novel therapies, according to a report released on Tuesday by the National Medical Products Administration.

The 48 innovative drugs cover nearly 20 therapeutic areas, includ-

ing oncology, neurological disorders and anti-infective medicines, the report said. The number was the highest in the past five years, compared with 40 in 2023 and 21 in 2022.

Among them, 17 received market approval through a priority review pathway, 11 gained conditional market approval and 13 were included in breakthrough therapy programs during clinical trials, according to the report from the administration's drug evaluation center.

"The center is guided by clinical value and has implemented various

measures to enhance review efficiency and expedite approval of new and effective drugs, so as to provide patients with a broader range of medication options," the report said.

In addition, China approved 106 pediatric medicines, and 35 medications were granted expanded pediatric indications, which is expected to help alleviate the shortage of pediatric medication options, the report said.

Furthermore, 55 rare disease medicines were authorized for market last year.

To speed up drug approvals, the administration has set up four accelerated pathways, Yuan Lijia, an official at the center, said in an interview with China Central Television.

These pathways include the priority review program, which targets medicines in urgent need or those that treat major infectious diseases and rare diseases, as well as upgraded new drugs, pediatric medications and innovative vaccines.

Through the program, the standard review time limit of 200 work-

ing days is shortened to 130. For medicines that meet urgent clinical demands and have been approved overseas, the time limit is further reduced to 70 days.

"In 2024, the administration completed 110 drug approval applications covering 74 different categories under the priority review pathway, marking a year-on-year increase of 29 percent," Yuan said.

Since China updated its drug registration and administrative rules in 2020, 496 drug approval applications have been placed under the

priority review program, with 42.54 percent treating cancer.

Last year also saw China approving lecanemab for Alzheimer's disease, an antibody treatment believed to be the world's first to slow progression of the memory-robbing disease in its early stages. China was the third country to grant approval for the treatment, following the United States and Japan.

As the population continues to age rapidly, the administration said it has drafted technical evaluation standards for Alzheimer's disease treatment products. In the past two years, it has approved clinical trials for eight innovative drugs that could potentially treat the disease.

CHINA

Allure of anime sparks youthful passion

Comic books, collectibles, cosplay attract consumption across generations

By LI SHANGYI
lishangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

Shuishui, 36, who asked to be identified by the name she uses in online communities, quit her stable office job six years ago to pursue a career in the anime, comics and games (ACG) industry. Today, she works as a freelancer and occasionally serves as a part-time shop assistant at an anime merchandise store in Beijing.

"As a child, I had few friends at school, and I often felt frustrated. But when I was reading a comic book one day, a classmate started talking to me about it," she recalled. "We became friends, and ACG became my escape."

In recent years, anime merchandise stores have sprouted up in major Chinese cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou in Guangdong province. These stores sell everything from badges and keychains to posters and cards, catering to the ever-growing demand for ACG-related goods.

From shop assistants and store owners to passionate collectors, the anime merchandise market is a place where the life stories of different generations converge. For many, it represents both a renaissance of ACG culture and a shared sense of belonging with the ACG community.

Shuishui began her career as an accountant at a State-owned company, a job with a stable income, symbolically called an "iron rice bowl" job in China. Her friends praised her for excelling in various office roles, whether organizing files or handling accounting tasks.

"They called me an ideal office worker," she said. "But I'm also an idealist. I realized I hadn't found the job I truly wanted."

When a position opened at a company known for creating delicate dolls and collaborating with ACG intellectual properties, Shuishui seized the opportunity without hesitation.

According to a 2024 report by data analysis platform QuestMobile on China's ACG industry, it boasts a consumer base of over 500 million people, creating a solid foundation for consumer demand. Notably, the ACG fan base spans nearly four generations, ranging from those who grew up in the 1980s to fans born in the 2010s, closely aligning with the country's primary consumer demographic.

To outsiders, the surge in anime merchandise might seem like a recent phenomenon.

Shuishui, sitting behind the check-out counter at the store, wearing a straight-cut school-style fringe and glasses, reflected that she grew up reading comic books and watching anime.

The connection with ACG transported Shuishui to a world of joy. "I have little interest in accessories or cosmetics. I save my money for dolls and ACG-related goods," she said.

For her generation, ACG was part of their formative years, with iconic series like *Sailor Moon* and *Detective Conan* still popular today.

However, because ACG was considered a subculture back then, Shuishui's parents didn't support her in her pursuit of drawing, either as a hobby or a major during her school years, a decision she now regrets.

Although her real life often felt distant from the ACG world, the spirit and values fostered by the stories happening in the pages or on screen



Clockwise from top: Shoppers browse items on sale at an ACG store in Shanghai on Feb 28. Shuishui at her ACG store in Beijing. ACG-themed badges and cards attract shoppers at a store in Shanghai's Nanjing Road. Chen Jiaxin at her store in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

shaped her romanticized worldview.

"I've always lived in a beautiful imaginary world," she said. "I see the real world through the lens of that idealism."

Despite the risks of leaving a stable job, Shuishui followed her passion and resolutely entered the field she had been craving. Fortunately, her husband, also an anime fan, supported her decision.

"I'm drawn to the simplicity of relationships in the ACG community," she said. "I've made many friends here who share my passions."

When the doll company stopped collaborating with her favorite IPs, Shuishui's enthusiasm for the work waned. She eventually joined an anime merchandise store and started managing her own ACG merchandise club, where she oversees both design and sales.

With over two decades of immersion in the anime world and six years of professional experience, Shuishui has become a highly skilled industry insider.

"I helped my previous company increase revenue by millions of yuan and built a loyal customer base of 4,000 fans," she said. "Now, I'm eager to apply these skills in my current role as a club manager."

She has also observed changes in consumer preferences. "Earlier, fans preferred buying expensive figures and statues, but now smaller items like badges and cards are more popular. They're cheaper, easier to display and more affordable."

At the store, Shuishui warmly greets customers who buy blind boxes — a type of packaging that keeps its

Fact box: The rise of ACG merchandise

The growing popularity of anime, comic and game merchandise is an emerging consumption phenomenon in China, with shopping malls increasingly dedicating spaces to stores selling products based on popular ACG intellectual properties.

Two-dimensional culture: In China, ACG fans often refer to the culture as "two-dimensional," representing a distinct community, lifestyle and market.

Market scale and fan base: The scale of the ACG industry in China has expanded significantly in recent years, growing from 18.9 billion yuan (\$2.6 billion) in 2016 to 221.9 billion yuan in 2023. As of 2023, the ACG community in China had over 500 million followers, with Generation Z, those born

between around 1995 and 2010, forming the largest demographic. A report on the ACG industry revealed that 46 percent of ACG fans are students, while 35 percent are white-collar workers.

Merchandise types: ACG-related merchandise includes badges, posters, cards, keyrings, plastic stands and dolls, typically featuring graphics from popular animations and games. Prices for these items range from 10 yuan to several hundred yuan. Some ACG products, such as badges and cards, are sold in blind boxes, where customers only discover the contents after opening the packaging. The scarcity of certain graphics often leads to price surges in the second-hand market.

LI SHANGYI

contents a mystery until opened — of badges and postcards. She refers to the customers as "teachers," a respectful term in the ACG community. "The title fosters a sense of belonging to the community," she explained.

Leaving behind her "iron rice bowl" job at a State-owned company wasn't easy, and Shuishui sometimes longs for financial stability. "I feel anxious about finances at times," she admitted. "But I have also realized that living a happy life is what truly matters."

"I've set high targets to support myself through the club's revenue,

and my focus now is to make the club a success," she added.

This kind of internal struggle between stability and enthusiasm is also shared by Chen Jiaxin, a 25-year-old who recently took the plunge into the ACG business world to realize her long-held dream.

A dedicated fan since middle school, Chen began collecting merchandise from various IPs, ranging from Japanese animations to Chinese online games. She recently opened a store specializing in ACG-related products.

Before pursuing her business venture, Chen worked at an overseas education agency, managing a portfolio of 120 students planning to study abroad. "The job was stressful, especially during the pandemic," she said.

"Nightmares always haunted me during that time. Parents would scold me for not helping their children go abroad," she recalled. "I gained 10 kilograms in the first six months from stress eating."

The tipping point for opening her store came when she saw a friend also struggle with work stress. "I told her that I could create a job for her. Now, we run the store together," Chen said.

Chen has a particular fondness for virtual idol anime characters such as Hatsune Miku, a virtual singer with green ponytails, and a Japanese animation about a girl band striving to perform in a world where music is banned.

Her passion for anime merchandise led her to pursue her undergraduate degree in Japan, where she continued collecting items. "I filled two spare rooms with merchandise, which led me to the idea of selling it," she explained.

Today, various toys and collectibles grace the shelves of her store.

Chen invested some 150,000 yuan (\$20,700) to open her store, and revenue has so far exceeded expectations. "I initially estimated monthly earnings of around 3,000 yuan, but we're now averaging between 10,000 and 20,000 yuan," she said. The recent winter vacation also helped increase sales.

Her store, One Grain Within Three Bites, is located in a shopping center

in Beijing, offering a range of merchandise, both from her own collection and imported items.

However, despite a promising start, Chen remains cautious about the future. "I've noticed the peak of the ACG market in China has passed and prices for products are falling," she said. "To succeed, the uniqueness of products is key to attracting consumers."

Chen, who describes her business as "generating electricity for love," a phrase often used by ACG fans to express their passion for collecting merchandise and look down on monetary investment, hopes to stabilize her store's operations in the coming months.

"I have made a worst-case plan, which is to find another job if needed, but for now, I think I can sustain this business for two or three years," she said.

"I'm not naturally an optimistic person, but when I see my favorite anime characters overcoming difficulties, it inspires me to do the same," Chen said.

On commercial streets lined with ACG stores, it's common to see junior high school students dressed in anime costumes. Buying anime merchandise, "or eating grains" as they call it, has become a popular trend among teens.

Zhang Zi, a 15-year-old high school student from Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, is a frequent visitor to anime merchandise stores. For Zi, ACG merchandise is more than just collectibles — it represents a sense of companionship and belonging.

"When I feel overwhelmed by study pressure or setbacks, seeing my favorite anime character brings me happiness," she said.

Zi's journey into the world of ACG began when she encountered Hatsune Miku during a middle school computer class. "The more I learned about her, the more I wanted to collect her merchandise, like badges and plastic stands," she recalled. "When my classmates saw my collection, they thought it was interesting, and soon, they joined me."

For Zi, the process of collecting merchandise offers a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, providing emotional value. "It's not just about the items themselves, but what they represent," she said.

Zi has also made new friends outside of school, bonding with other ACG fans. She noted that these friendships, spanning different age groups, have made her life more enjoyable. "Before I joined the community, I didn't understand the jargon, and I felt disconnected," Zi said. "But once I learned the terms, I felt a sense of belonging to the community because we speak the same language."

Like many fandoms, the ACG community has its own set of jargon, such as *guzi*, a homophone of "goods" meaning grain in Chinese, and *baji*, a homophone of "badge". Thanks to introductory videos of these terms, Zi gradually became familiar with the culture.

Without knowledge of ACG-specific jargon, shopping at an anime merchandise store can be challenging for outsiders, as price tags and labels often incorporate it.

Zi is always eager to share her knowledge with others. "I don't see a gap between us and outsiders," she said. "I am willing to explain it to them."

As the trend of buying ACG merchandise continues, there's an ongoing debate within the community about whether purchasing goods is a necessary way to show genuine affection for an IP.

"I don't think buying merchandise should feel like a burden," Zi said. "I buy it simply because I like it."



Left: Customers purchase goods related to the popular animated movie *Ne Zha 2* at a shop in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, on Feb 26. WANG JIANKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY Middle: Cosplay lovers gather at an anime-themed shopping mall in Zhengzhou, Henan province, in July. ZUO DONGCHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: An ACG-themed store attracts customers in Beijing's popular Wangfujing shopping area in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Shanxi promotes rich traditional culture

Province is home to largest number of ancient buildings in China



Visitors pack the Xiaoxitian scenic area in Xixian county, Shanxi province, in October. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

By ZHU XINGXIN and CHEN LIANG

In recent years, as the preservation and promotion of China's rich traditional culture have advanced steadily, public interest in ancient architecture has been increasing.

During this year's two sessions — the annual gatherings of the country's top legislature and political advisory body, which concluded last week in Beijing — many representatives from across the country discussed the deep integration of culture and tourism and offered suggestions to drive high-quality economic development through the preservation and promotion of historical treasures.

On March 6, at the open group meeting of the Shanxi delegation during the third session of the 14th National People's Congress, Tang Dengjie, an NPC deputy and Party secretary of Shanxi, shared a story.

"Last year, leveraging the popularity of the video game *Black Myth: Wukong*, we launched the 'Follow Wukong to Tour Shanxi' campaign, which significantly boosted our cultural tourism sector," he said.

"People say Shanxi has been blessed with a 'downpour of prosperity,' and I believe we've received it well."

Tang said that the success of the campaign strengthened the government's resolve to transform cultural tourism into a pillar industry and a source of happiness for the people.

Shanxi, home to the largest number of ancient buildings in China, boasts 28,027 ancient structures. Among them are three wooden structures from the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), and the world's tallest wooden pagoda, the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda, which was built in 1056. Of the 36 scenes in *Black Myth:*



Tourists visit the wall of Pingyao Ancient City in Shanxi.

Wukong, 27 are in Shanxi, mainly featuring the province's grottoes, temples, ancient buildings, sculptures and murals. It represents only 5 percent of Shanxi's 531 nationally protected cultural relics, highlighting the province's rich cultural resources.

Discussing how Shanxi plans to develop new quality productive forces, Tang said that the province is fully leveraging its cultural tourism market advantages, vigorously expanding new "culture plus tourism" industries and products.

During this year's Spring Festival, Shanxi's innovative approach to tourism resulted in a total tourism expenditure of 31.7 billion yuan (\$4.4 billion), a 30 percent increase from the same period of the previous year.

In Huangcheng village in Yangcheng county, rural tourism has become a new leading industry.

The village was the birthplace of Chen Tingjing, a prominent minister during the Qing Dynasty (1644–

1911). He was not only a teacher of Emperor Kangxi but also the chief editor of the *Kangxi Dictionary*, a Chinese dictionary published in 1716 and considered from the time of its publishing until the early 20th century to be the most authoritative reference for written Chinese characters.

Today, Chen's residence, known as the House of the Huangcheng Chancellor, a well-protected architectural complex from the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties, is celebrated as "the first mansion of northern China." It attracts numerous domestic and international tourists with its unique charm and historical heritage.

Chen Xiaoshuan, an NPC deputy and head of Huangcheng village, said, "This Spring Festival, we introduced many intangible cultural heritage performances and village fairs to meet the diverse tourism consumption needs."

Last year, he said, the House of the Huangcheng Chancellor Group

received 2 million visitors, generating over 100 million yuan in direct tourism revenue. The village has also embraced modern technology, using big data and artificial intelligence to enhance the tourist experience with smart guides and online booking.

The increasing interest among young people in historical sites has spurred a movement for the preservation of ancient buildings, said Hang Kan, an NPC deputy and director of Yungang Research Institute, which administers the Yungang Grottoes, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site in Datong city. He said the grottoes have seen nearly 4.5 million visitors since 2024.

The Yungang Grottoes have been undergoing digital preservation since 2001, with two-thirds of the caves already digitally recorded.

Hang said that using augmented reality to bring the grottoes to life allows visitors to experience their grandeur virtually.

The popular activity of "high-fiving" the Giant Buddha statue from a distance has become a must-do for young visitors.

The Shanxi delegation proposed the creation of a Demonstration Zone for the Inheritance and Transformation of Chinese Excellent Culture, aiming to enhance the international influence of Shanxi's world heritage sites such as the Yungang Grottoes, Pingyao Ancient City and Mount Wutai.

The initiative seeks to establish Shanxi as a global cultural exchange center, making the province a showcase for the harmonious integration of China's excellent traditional culture and modern achievements.

Contact the writers at zhuxingxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Blueberry growers find markets across globe

KUNMING — While blueberry bushes in most parts of China are just beginning to bloom, early-ripening varieties in southwestern Yunnan province are already being harvested.

Farmers are currently working to pick and pack the fresh berries, which swiftly make their way to markets across China and beyond. Native to North America, blueberries have found a second home in China. Last year, the country's blueberry cultivation area surpassed 73,000 hectares, yielding around 500,000 metric tons of berries, making China one of the fastest-growing blueberry producers in the world. Yunnan, with its ideal climate and extended growing season, has emerged as a leading production hub, contributing about 30 percent of the national output.

Thanks to its unique geographical conditions, abundant sunlight and significant temperature variations between day and night, Yunnan offers an optimal environment for blueberry cultivation.

The province is home to 46 wild blueberry varieties — more than half of China's total, making it one of the best production areas worldwide.

The city of Mengzi in Honghe Hani and Yi autonomous prefecture is home to over 2,300 hectares of greenhouse space for blueberries, generating over 3 billion yuan (\$418 million) in annual revenue and improving incomes and livelihoods for more than 20,000 local farmers.

Last year, Min Hongwei set up a 12-hectare blueberry plantation in Mile, another city in Honghe. "During peak harvest season, our workforce jumps to over 150 people, most

of whom are local villagers. They can earn at least 150 yuan per day, and some make as much as 300 yuan," he said.

Yunnan's blueberry boom has attracted over 100 domestic and international companies to Honghe, creating jobs for more than 100,000 people.

According to the province's agricultural department, Yunnan's blueberry cultivation area reached 16,660 hectares last year, producing 171,000 tons with an estimated industry value of 17 billion yuan.

While Chinese blueberries were initially grown for domestic consumption, they are now making their mark on the international stage. Chen Canling, sales manager of Anmei, an agriculture and technology company, said the company successfully entered the Malaysian market this year.

"To meet export standards, we've implemented precision management throughout the supply chain from harvesting techniques to packaging and international logistics," Chen said. "Our goal is to export 300 tons of blueberries this year."

Wang Rui, chairman of Fengji, an agricultural development company, said, "Every four days, we airfreight two tons of blueberries to Dubai." He added that customers in Dubai can enjoy fresh blueberries from Yunnan in about 40 hours.

"Since China first exported home-grown blueberries to Russia in 2020, they have reached more than 10 countries and regions," said Li Yadong, a professor at Jilin Agricultural University.

XINHUA



A farmer harvests blueberries in a greenhouse of a fruit company in Mengzi, Yunnan province, on Feb 28. XUE YINGYING / XINHUA

Patrolling robot dogs keep Beijing E-town secure

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

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

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

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

Each robotic dog weighs approximately 65 kilograms and is adaptable to extreme environments such as heavy rain and high temperatures. It features a multi-spectral camera and searchlights on its head, while the back of these robotic dogs allows for rapid fitting with specialized equipment such as explosion-proof gear and gas detectors, enabling it to handle a variety of tasks with remarkable flexibility.

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

The robotic dogs are tasked with meticulous ground inspections, while unmanned vehicles handle supply deliveries and data transmis-

sion, working together to establish a highly efficient operational model, Beijing E-Town said.

This new-generation intelligent patrol system leverages advanced AI algorithms and big data analysis to detect abnormal situations, fire hazards and other risks in real time. Through a 5G network, the system can instantly alert the command center, ensuring swift responses to emergencies.

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

Beijing E-Town has also indicated that the robotic dogs will help ensure the security of an upcoming half-marathon next month, which will see robotic and human athletes competing along the same route. Among China's rapidly expanding array of AI-driven innovations, robotic dogs make frequent appearances in the public spotlight.

In December, Chinese robotics firm Unitree Technology's video of an agile wheel-legged robot dog took the internet by storm. It shows the robotic dog executing impressive stunts like spinning around, performing side flips and leaping from heights.

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

XINHUA

Humanoid robot craze sparks surge in rentals

HANGZHOU — In a mesmerizing display at a recent show in Hangzhou, eastern China's leading tech hub, a dozen humanoid robots twisted and twirled in perfect sync, their joints clattering to the rhythm of joyful music as they captivated the audience and drew waves of cheers.

The spectacle reflects a growing trend, with businesses and individuals increasingly renting humanoid robots for performances, exhibitions, and livestreams to grab public attention.

These robots shot to fame earlier this year when a fleet from Unitree, a Chinese robotics startup, mesmerized audiences with a synchronized dance in colorful jackets at the Spring Festival Gala, one of China's most-watched broadcasts. The overwhelming public attention and ensuing robot craze have since turned them into a sought-after commodity in the rental market.

"Orders for Unitree's G1 humanoid robot rentals have been surging since early February, with bookings already lined up through late March," said Gao Lai, who has been engaged in the robot rental business for over a decade. His company provided the rented robots for

the show in Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province.

"The daily rental price for a humanoid robot ranges from 8,000 to 15,000 yuan (\$1,115 to 2,091). With the booming demand, we anticipate our earnings to rise by 80 percent this year," Gao added.

In terms of presale, Unitree's G1 model starts at 99,000 yuan, while the H1 model has a starting price of 650,000 yuan.

Industry insiders said that the growing demand for robots in business events, exhibitions and shows is fueling the expansion of the robot rental market, which holds great potential.

On Xianyu, one of China's largest second-hand goods trading platforms, renting a Unitree robot can cost thousands of yuan, often covering transportation, machine adjustments and on-site support.

In Hangzhou's Yuhang district, where the recent show took place, local authorities plan to host more robot shows and tutorial sessions in rural areas by renting robots.

"Dancing with robots grabs attention, and we hope to partner with companies to introduce AI to rural communities," said Zhang Jingcan, a district official.

"The concept of humanoid robots is nothing new. Since the first one was developed in Japan in the 1960s, they've been a focal point of global competition," said Xiong Rong, a professor at Zhejiang University and head of Zhejiang Humanoid Robot Innovation Center.

"Powered by AI, our robots are making progress faster than I anticipated," said Wang Xingxing, CEO of Unitree Robotics. "We've upgraded the software algorithms in our humanoid robots to make them more agile and improve their dancing skills."

However, some uncertainties exist when applying humanoid robots in more complicated scenarios at home or in businesses that require more flexible and diverse human-robot interactions.

"Humanoid robots will reach new heights by the end of this year, and if all goes well, we could see them deployed in some service or industrial sectors next year or the year after," said Wang. "However, home-use models might see slower adoption due to higher security requirements."

Emphasizing the importance of security in robot applications,

XINHUA

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

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

WARMHEARTED GESTURE

China-Bangladesh ties open a new chapter as the first batch of Dhaka patients arrive in Kunming for medical treatment

The first batch of Bangladeshi patients reached Southwest China's Kunming, Yunnan province, for medical treatment on March 10, marking a new chapter in bilateral ties between China and Bangladesh.

The development came as the nations are celebrating the golden jubilee of friendship, The Daily Star said.

The delegation comprised 14 patients, three of whom were children with congenital heart disease, along with their attendants, five doctors, and five travel agency representatives.

The patients will undergo medical checkups and receive treatment at designated hospitals, while the doctors and travel agents will assess hospital facilities, accommodation, and travel arrangements.

During a trip to China earlier this year, Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain proposed the strengthening of bilateral ties in public health, requesting China to facilitate medical treatment for Bangladeshi patients, among other proposals.

To accommodate Bangladeshi patients, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen said during a news conference that the visa process will be expedited as soon as possible to ensure there is no delay in treatment.

Bangladesh Ambassador to China Nazmul Islam said this visit opened a new chapter in the ever-growing friendship between the two nations. "As we gather in the beautiful city of Kunming, we not only celebrate an important initiative in health cooperation but also commemorate a historic milestone — the 50th anniversary of the Bangladesh-China diplomatic relations.

"Our relationship, rooted in history, has evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership encompassing political, economic, trade, defense, culture, and now, this new cooperation in the health sector.

"Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1975, our countries

have worked closely on a range of initiatives, overcoming challenges and embracing new opportunities. China has been a steadfast partner in Bangladesh's journey toward development, supporting our infrastructure projects and our industrialization efforts."

He added, "As we celebrate this special anniversary, we take a significant step toward enhancing people-to-people relationships through healthcare cooperation. The launch of this cooperation is a landmark achievement that will not only benefit the people of Bangladesh but also strengthen the bonds of friendship between our two nations.

"Through this initiative, Bangladeshi patients will have access to world-class medical facilities in China, receiving specialized treatment and care. This pilot initiative will lay the foundation for a structured, long-term healthcare cooperation program between our two countries."

Nazmul also said this visit presents an invaluable opportunity for medical professionals to engage in a meaningful knowledge exchange.

"The participation of Bangladeshi doctors in this initiative will enable them to gain exposure to China's advanced medical practices, innovative methodologies, and cutting-edge research," he said.

After the reception, the patients were taken to their designated hospitals — some for checkups, some for treatment.

Three of the patients — Al Fuad Ahmed Sajid, 10; Yeamin Ibne Ripon, 8, and Partha Das, 18 months old — were admitted to the pediatric ward of Fuwai Hospital under the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences. All three of them have holes in their hearts.

Fuwai Hospital is one of the most advanced hospitals specializing in cardiovascular diseases in China. With state-of-the-art machinery and technology, it has earned itself a triple A, first-class hospital status.

Speaking to The Daily Star on



A Bangladeshi patient gets treatment at the Fuwai Cardiovascular Hospital of Yunnan on March 10. Bangladeshi delegation of 14 patients, three of whom were children with congenital heart disease, arrive in Kunming, Yunnan province, on March 10. NAZIBA BASHIR / THE DAILY STAR

“This pilot initiative will lay the foundation for a structured, long-term healthcare cooperation program between our two countries.”

Nazmul Islam, Bangladesh Ambassador to China

March 11, Sajid's mother, Mosamat Selina Akhter, said, "We came all the way from Kishoreganj (a district in Dhaka) under this initiative. Earlier, Sajid was admitted to the National Heart Foundation in Bangladesh. After we came here, we were pleasantly surprised by the behavior of the doctors and other staffers and also their facilities. We are very hopeful about his treatment."

Partha's mother, Suchanda Rani Das, had similar hopes after coming to the hospital.

Mohammad Ripon Khan, father of Yeamin, said, "So far, everything

has been going well. The only problem we face is the language barrier. The doctors do not understand us, and we do not understand them. But thankfully, we have someone who helps us with translation and interpretation."

After admission, they spend around a day or two doing relevant tests on the patient to check which areas need focus. After that, they discuss with specialists, most of the time from Beijing, and set a date for the surgery, which takes around two to three hours.

Once the surgery is over, the child

is sent to the pediatric ICU for initial recovery, which only takes a couple of days. The child is then sent back to the ward for observation for a few days, and once the doctors think the patient is fit enough for physical activity, they are sent back. The whole process doesn't take more than a week, said Sokhon, a translator for Cambodian patients.

The Fuwai Cardiovascular Hospital of Yunnan province sees around 24 to 30 foreign pediatric patients among 300,000 patients each year.

THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

S. Korea to host APEC summit with focus on AI

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit 2025 hosted by South Korea will place artificial intelligence and demographic shifts at the forefront of the agenda for discussion — topics that have never before taken the spotlight at the regional economic forum.

Yoon Seong-mee, chair of the 2025 APEC Senior Officials' Meeting, emphasized the urgency and significance of prioritizing cooperation on AI technologies and responding to population changes such as low birthrates and aging societies.

"Especially, AI and demographic structure are topics that have never been addressed at the APEC, while the previous APEC has covered a wide range of issues such as trade liberalization, labor and education," Yoon said.

Yoon made the remarks during a news conference following the first Senior Officials' Meeting, held from Feb 24 to March 9 in the city of Gyeongju, North Gyeongsang Province. The APEC summit, scheduled to be held in the same city from late October to early November under the theme "Building a Sustainable Tomorrow," will mark South Korea's first time hosting the event in 20 years, since it was last held in Busan in 2005.

"There are no fields unrelated to AI. Therefore, AI is a critically important issue with a massive impact, influencing our future across all sectors worldwide. The same applies to the issue of demographic structure," Yoon said, add-



Delegates to the first APEC senior officials' meeting enter the conference hall in Gyeongju, North Gyeongsang Province, South Korea, on Feb 24. YONHAP

ing all APEC members will be affected by demographic changes in the long term, despite the varying speeds at which they encounter such challenges.

"I believe that the fact of proactively selecting these globally significant issues, which require serious consideration on an international scale, and introducing them into the APEC discussion framework already represents a major contribution on our part as host of the APEC summit," Yoon said.

The first meeting of senior officials marked the official beginning of the APEC-related schedule leading up to the summit and served as the very first opportunity to introduce Gyeongju to the official delegations of APEC members in advance, according to Yoon.

The meeting drew around 2,000 participants, including representatives from 21 APEC members as well as the APEC Secretariat, according to the Foreign Ministry of South Korea.

Yoon and Lee Ji-yoon, an APEC senior official as well as the deputy director general of international economic affairs at South Korea's Foreign Ministry, held bilateral meetings with delegations, according to the Foreign Ministry.

During the briefing, Eduardo

Pedrosa, executive director of the APEC Secretariat, brushed off any worries when asked about whether concerns were raised over potential impacts of the political turbulence in South Korea for the summit.

"APEC meetings have been held under similarly changing political situations, but the APEC work has continued throughout the years. So, I think most stakeholders and experts are pretty confident that this work will go ahead," Pedrosa said at the news conference.

Pedrosa also pointed out that one of the issues brought up during this meeting was the "need to respond to new challenges that emerged from the evolving trade environment," reiterating, "We are in an evolving trade environment."

Pedrosa, however, refrained from providing a direct answer when asked by The Korea Herald whether there were concerns about a shift toward protectionism, which contradicts APEC's vision of free and open trade as the United States has imposed blanket tariffs, and whether the issue would be addressed at the APEC summit.

THE KOREA HERALD, SOUTH KOREA

Malaysian states ban cigarettes' open display

From April 1, tobacco products can no longer be openly displayed at shops in several states in Malaysia.

Instead, they must be kept hidden from view in closed cabinets.

The move is in line with the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (Act 852), which prohibits point-of-sale display of smoking products at eateries and retail stores.

The Act, enforced on Oct 1, covers regulations on registration, sale, packaging, labeling, and prohibition of smoking in public places.

The Act also includes a display ban on all tobacco and vape products in retail outlets.

Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Selangor are ready to enforce the ban effective April 1 after having informed shops about the move earlier.

Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif said Kuala Lumpur's health department will begin enforcement upon the expiration of the grace period.

"Since Act 852 came into effect, the health department has visited retail shops selling cigarettes and tobacco products. They have provided explanations and announcements to the sellers, such as at convenience stores," she said.

Selangor youth, sports and entrepreneurship committee chairman

Mohd Najwan Halimi said the state is likely to follow suit.

Describing it as the right move, he said the matter is part of Tuesday's state executive councilors' meeting agenda.

"This is a good move, and I think we should consider implementing it in Selangor as well," he said.

Penang health committee chairman Daniel Gooi Zi Sen said the state health department will monitor stalls to ensure they don't display smoking products at retail outlets.

"Individuals can be fined from 500 Malaysian ringgit (\$113) up to 30,000 ringgit, while organizations may be slapped with up to 300,000 ringgit in fines, or jailed," he said.

Enforcement officers will also target products disguised as toys or sold via vending machines and online platforms.

"Retailers can only use designated signboards to show the availability of cigarettes or vaping products and the prices.

"Certain specialized stores are allowed to display smoking products, but must prominently feature warning signs," he said.

Act 852 was gazetted last October but the Ministry of Health of Malaysia provided a grace period until April 1 before full enforcement.

Gooi said Penang's health department has also conducted advocacy sessions for traders and businesses from last October until January.

Tan Chiew Beng, 41, a sundry shop owner, said he is prepared to comply with the new regulations.

He supported the no-smoking advocacy, adding cigarette sales may drop due to reduced visibility. He sells 20 to 30 packs of cigarettes a week, earning a small profit of 1 ringgit per pack, but acknowledged the financial and health burdens of cigarettes on lower-income consumers.

"I'll only sell upon customers' request," he said.

The Consumers' Association of Penang is urging authorities to ensure there are no further delays in enforcing Act 852.

Its senior education officer and anti-smoking activist NV Subbarow said action must be taken against violators, as enough time has already been given.

"This enforcement protects non-smokers and prevents unnecessary promotion while still allowing smokers to buy their products.

"Minors who have not been exposed to smoking will also be less likely to develop the unhealthy habit," he added.

THE STAR, MALAYSIA



Lighting a fire

Hiburi shinji ceremony at Aso Shrine in Aso, Kumamoto, Japan, on March 16. The ceremony takes place annually to wish a good rice harvest by swinging flaming long ropes in the air. REZAN SOLEH / AFP

BUSINESS

MORE NEWS WHENEVER YOU WANT IT · CHINADAILY.COM.CN/BUSINESS

Home appliance makers sharpen edge with AI

By EAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

As the ever-increasing power of artificial intelligence spearheads a new wave of technological innovation and industrial revolution, Chinese home appliance manufacturers are accelerating the use of the cutting-edge technology and integrating AI startup DeepSeek's large language models into products and services.

Experts say that AI is not only playing an increasingly pivotal role in boosting productivity and reshaping the competition landscape in the household appliance sector, but is also driving the transformation and upgrading of traditional manufacturing.

This year's Government Work Report stated that under the AI Plus initiative, the nation will work to effectively combine digital technologies with its manufacturing and market strengths, support the extensive application of large-scale AI models, and vigorously develop new-generation intelligent terminals and smart manufacturing equipment.

952.3 billion yuan

expected market size of China's smart home industry this year

Sichuan Changhong Electronics Holding Group Co Ltd has adopted DeepSeek's AI models and applied the AI technology into areas such as manufacturing, operations and products.

"We are pushing forward the integration of AI with data and speeding up the industrial use of AI," said Liu Jiang, chairman of Changhong, adding that the company is leveraging AI to inspect the quality of machines and components to facilitate the automation and intelligent upgrading of equipment and improve the efficiency of production lines.

Changhong has also unveiled plans to establish 66 AI-powered intelligent factories worldwide, and has rolled out AI televisions equipped with LLMs that support multimodal interaction functions including voice, gesture and expressions.

Gree Electric Appliances, a major Chinese home appliance manufacturer in Zuhai, Guangdong province, has embedded its own proprietary model frameworks into DeepSeek R1 and plans to build an industry-specific AI model based on DeepSeek.

Dong Mingzhu, chairwoman of Gree, said the company will bolster the deeper integration of

image and voice recognition and other AI technologies with home appliance products, and expects the application of AI in air conditioners to contribute to energy conservation.

According to research firm iResearch, the market size of China's smart home industry is expected to rise to 952.3 billion yuan (\$131.65 billion) in 2025, while the overall penetration rate of AI technology in smart home devices is expected to exceed 50 percent between 2022 and the end of 2025.

Zhou Yunjie, chairman of home appliance giant Haier Group, said AI models tailored for the smart home domain represent key infrastructure supporting the transformation of the traditional home appliance sector and could give rise to in-home service robots, creating new growth drivers for the global consumer electronics industry.

The company has promoted the application of AI in a wide range of fields like smart living and industrial internet, while its self-developed vertical models have access to DeepSeek.

Hisense said its Xinghai large model has a deep integration with DeepSeek, and with enhanced deep thinking and reasoning abilities, its smart TVs could better understand user demands and provide them with a more natural interaction experience.

According to market research company CCID Consulting, China's AI industry will make big strides in the next 10 to 15 years, with its market size expected to reach 1.73 trillion yuan by 2035, accounting for 30.6 percent of the world's total.

"The meteoric rise of AI technologies will offer better human-machine interaction capacities, and speed up the digital and intelligent transformation of China's home appliance industry," said Liu Fei, research director of the consumer electronics department at Beijing-based market consultancy All View Cloud.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, stressed the need for enterprises to improve computing power by establishing high-performance computing centers and elevating algorithm design to boost the utilization efficiency of computing power.

More efforts should be made to step up research and development investment in AI, especially in core technologies in key fields, establish a data security and privacy protection system, and strengthen the training of high-caliber AI talent, said Zhong Zheng, vice-president of Midea Group.

PRIVATE ECONOMY



An employee works on a machine tool assembly line in Chongqing on Feb 22. WANG QUANCHAO / XINHUA

Key programs to boost machine tool makers

Expected rapid growth brought by stimulus to spur domestic demand

By ZHU WENQIAN and ZHONG NAN

The expansion of the scope of large-scale equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade-in programs this year is expected to boost demand for machine tools, thanks to the rapid and effective implementation of the policies, the China Machine Tool and Tool Builders' Association said.

The rapid growth of sectors such as new energy vehicles, aerospace, shipbuilding, electrical appliances and artificial intelligence in China has also created new demand for the machine tool industry, according to the association.

"We are cautiously optimistic about the market demand for metal processing machine tools in China this year, and the overall operation of the machine tool industry is expected to be relatively stable," said Wang Xu, vice-chairman of the association.

"In particular, demand for metal processing machine tools is forecasted to continue its slight growth trend, but the differentiation between enterprises will become more apparent. Abrasive and grinding tool industries will still experience a period of demand contraction and structural adjustment," Wang said.

With the technological progress of China's machine tool industry in recent years, its level of technology and quality stability has significantly improved. While exports have been increasing on a yearly basis, the pace of import

substitution is also accelerating, the association said.

In particular, export growth has played an important supporting role in driving the overall growth of the sector. Last year, the overall export growth rate of the machine tool industry increased by 2.8 percentage points compared to the growth rate of the previous year, data from the association showed.

Specifically, exports of metal cutting, metal forming, wood-working machine tools, as well as cutting tools and measuring instruments grew. Exports of metal forming machine tools and woodworking machine tools recorded double-digit growth, the association said.

"China has deepened global partnerships to mitigate overseas business risks and consolidate trade ties in the past few years. Some of the sectors where Chinese companies are making substantive steps in going overseas include machinery and equipment, parts and components, robotics and automobiles," said Edward Tse, founder and CEO of Gao Feng Advisory Co, a strategy and management consulting firm with roots in China.

As global manufacturing sectors move toward high-end, intelligent and green development, many industry players have actively integrated themselves into the global industrial and supply chains through various forms.

For many domestic private enterprises, while actively

expanding their export business, they are also expanding their overseas footprint by establishing service organizations, and building assembly and production factories.

Suzhou Sanguang Science and Technology Co Ltd, a Suzhou, Jiangsu province-based company, launched its customer experience center in Vietnam in July last year, underlining its intent to leverage the international market.

In October, HSG Laser, a Guangdong-province based company that focuses on the research and development of metal forming equipment, launched its exhibition hall in Busan, South Korea.

Meanwhile, in October, HGLASER, a Wuhan, Hubei province-based firm and a major provider of laser equipment and intelligent manufacturing solutions, launched its subsidiary in Hungary, which helped the company to expand business in Central and Eastern Europe and the entire European market, it said.

Late last year, Zhuzhou Cemented Carbide Cutting Tools Co Ltd, a company based in Zhuzhou, Hunan province that makes tool holders, solid carbide drilling tools and end mills, set up a joint technical service station in Bangkok, Thailand.

The association plans to organize the 19th China International Machine Tool Show in Beijing from April 21 to 26, the largest machine tool industry expo globally, where future technological development trends of the global machine tool industry will be showcased.

Contact the writers at zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Shandong scores investment windfall

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
zhaoruixue@chinadaily.com.cn

Shandong province has recorded the start of more than 1,000 construction projects and investments with a combined investment tag of 1 trillion yuan (\$138.2 billion), signaling the benefits of efforts aimed at supporting innovative development by various enterprises and job creation.

Among these initiatives, which kicked off in late February, there are 635 private investment projects, with a total project value of 554 billion yuan.

"These projects boast a robust industrial structure, primarily focusing on emerging sectors like robotics, next-generation information technology, high-end equipment, new energy storage, new materials, and computers, which will play a crucial role in accelerating the development of new quality productive forces in Shandong," said Sun Laibin, deputy director of the Shandong Development and Reform Commission.

Projects underway include an investment by Weifang Hengcai Digital Photo Materials Co Ltd for the production of industrial flaw detection film and tri-acetyl cellulose (TAC) optical film, renowned for its ability to enhance visual quality and provide protection across various industries.

"This project plans to invest 1 billion yuan in the new TAC optical film project, creating job opportunities for over 1,000 people," said Gong Xinyan, chairman of Weifang Hengcai.

"In recent years, the company has enjoyed preferential policies provided by local governments, such as tax exemptions, financial support and land use," said Gong, adding that government assistance in key areas such as recruitment has helped the company overcome its talent sourcing challenges.

Robust policy backing and strategic support have played a crucial role in helping enterprises like Weifang Hengcai pursue growth opportunities and drive innovative development.

The company has developed a new type of digital medical imaging film — medical thermal imaging film — which is not only environmentally friendly and recyclable, but integrates film and self-printing capabilities. This innovation allows patients immediate access to diagnostic results, saving both time and costs, according to Gong.

"The medical thermal imaging film has been widely recognized in the market, with 70 percent of our products exported to countries and regions such as the United States and Southeast Asia," said Gong, adding that current orders are stable, and the income is steadily increasing.



A Haier humanoid robot is displayed during the Appliance & Electronics World Expo in Shanghai in March 2024. CHEN YUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Major e-commerce fair opens in Fujian

The 5th China Cross-Border E-Commerce Trade Fair opened in Fuzhou, Southeast China's Fujian province on Tuesday, attracting over 1,800 supply chain and service enterprises from around the globe. This year's event coincides with the 2025 China Cross-Border E-Commerce Conference, which focuses on the upgrade of the cross-border e-commerce industry and seeks pathways for Chinese companies to expand internationally.

Meitu sees surging revenue, profit

Chinese selfie-enhancing technology giant Meitu reported a 23.9 percent year-on-year surge in revenue for 2024, reaching 3.34 billion yuan (\$466 million). The company has achieved rapid net profit growth each year since 2019. It recorded an adjusted net profit attributable to shareholders of the parent company of 586 million yuan, up 59.2 percent year-on-year, according to the company.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Innovation, consumption key to growth

By WANG KEJU and OUYANG SHILIA

China is doubling down on technological innovation, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence and humanoid robots, to prop up economic vibrancy this year, hedge against escalating tariff threats from Washington, and counter sluggish domestic demand, senior economists said.

On top of the current consumption boosting-initiatives, policymakers could invest even more in consumer-centric stimulus measures and strengthen the social safety net, thus fostering a more enabling ecosystem where growing demand for high-tech products and services translates into stronger impetus for the country's innovation capabilities, they added.

"While the fiscal package — including the pro-consumption measures announced in the Government Work Report earlier this month — came as expected, what surprised us are the tech-focused initiatives," said Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

The world's second-largest econo-

my has vowed to "establish a mechanism to increase funding for industries of the future" and "support the application of large-scale AI models and development of next-generation intelligent terminals and smart manufacturing terminals", as laid out in the report.

China has put in place a multi-channel funding support plan, including a re-lending program, a State venture capital guidance fund and the upcoming "sci-tech board" in its bond market, for frontier sectors like AI, quantum computing and self-driving cars, Xing said.

These initiatives collectively would bring the total investment to nearly 1.5 trillion yuan (\$207.3 billion), Xing said, adding that, "For the tech sector, the 'animal spirit' is back."

In late February, Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group announced that it would invest more than 380 billion yuan in building cloud and AI hardware infrastructure in the next three years.

"The scale of the annual investment by Alibaba is equivalent to nearly 0.1 percent of China's GDP," said Yu Xiangrong, chief economist at Citigroup China.

The Alibaba investment plan and

the increased expenditure by other tech firms, combined with the ripple effects across upstream and downstream enterprises, could lead to an additional 500 billion yuan in AI-driven spending. This, in turn, is expected to contribute about 0.4 percentage point to China's GDP growth, Yu said.

That said, for the property and consumer sectors — where business sentiment still remains modest — a stronger consumer-centric stimulus and deeper social security reforms are also advisable to underpin a more broad-based recovery, economists said.

"We believe that the higher-tier city real estate market will be able to stabilize and halt its downward trajectory in the latter half of 2025," said Yu. "This would gradually diminish, and even reverse, the real estate sector's drag on the overall economy. Once the real estate market finds its footing, the adverse wealth effect that has prevailed over the past few years can be mitigated, which will be instrumental in restoring consumer confidence."

In addition, the augmented fiscal deficit has been expanded by around 2 trillion yuan, about one-fourth of

which will be consumption-related, including an expanded consumer trade-in program, wage hikes for civil servants and modest increases in social welfare spending, Xing said.

"China is trying something new — a more proactive fiscal policy with a greater focus on consumption — in order to reflate the economy. But it is not enough," Xing added.

Going forward, policymakers could deliver deeper social security reforms, such as easier access to public housing and healthcare for migrant workers, which will reduce people's precautionary saving habits and unleash huge consumption potential, Xing said.

"It's probably the central government's turn to try to fill the gap by either channeling dividends from State-owned capital to the social security system, or gradually shifting China's policy focus from supporting infrastructure to spending more on social welfare."

This will give people enough incentives to purchase high-tech products and services, and firms can sell their products at a better price. This in turn will be a more sustainable way of encouraging and promoting innovation in the country, Xing added.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

BUSINESS

Big oil going green at even faster pace

Major drillers increasing low-carbon utilization of fossil fuels to reduce CO₂

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's national oil companies are accelerating their transition toward cleaner energy practices, focusing on the efficient utilization of fossil fuels and the integration of oil, gas and renewable energy resources, said company executives and industry experts.

This strategic shift aligns with China's dual objectives of ensuring energy security and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060, they added.

During the two sessions — the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference — several NPC deputies proposed accelerating the low-carbon utilization of fossil fuels through coordinated policy support and technological advancements.

Dai Houliang, an NPC deputy who is also chairman of China National Petroleum Corp, called for policies supporting the large-scale development of unconventional resources such as shale gas and coal-bed methane (CBM).

CBM is a new type of unconventional natural resource that is widely distributed across coal-rich basins in China, such as Ordos, Sichuan and Junggar, with estimated reserves exceeding 40 trillion cubic meters.

By increasing the proportion of

“Fossil fuels are expected to serve as a safety net and a source of key materials during China's energy transition, with non-fossil fuels becoming the backbone of energy supply.”

Wu Mouyuan, vice-president of the Economics and Technology Research Institute under China National Petroleum Corp

natural gas in its energy consumption mix, China could reduce its reliance on more carbon-intensive fuels, thereby lowering overall carbon emissions, Dai said.

He also suggested scaling up the integration of oil and gas operations with new energy resources — such as solar and wind power — including initiatives supporting the direct supply of green electricity and promoting local consumption of renewable energy.

Research and development in new energy storage technologies are also advisable to enhance the



An image shows a solar and wind power station in Daqing, Heilongjiang province, in September. The station is part of Daqing Oilfield's efforts to ramp up green transition and achieve decarbonization goals. YANG WEI / XINHUA

flexibility of the power system, thus facilitating the transition toward accommodating a high proportion of renewable energy, he added.

The project, expected to generate 2.1 billion kilowatt-hours of clean electricity annually, will also ensure that CNPC's 1.2 million metric-ton-per-year ethylene project at the local petrochemical plant operates entirely on green electricity, alleviating local power shortages during

peak demand and improving the regional energy mix, it said.

Industry experts believe that while China is accelerating the construction of large-scale wind and photovoltaic power bases, particularly in arid regions, oil and gas are expected to maintain their share of the energy mix over the medium to long term, making it critical to avoid disruptions caused by the energy transition.

This, in turn, makes efficient utilization of fossil fuels and the integration of oil, gas and renewable energy resources even more necessary, they said.

Wu Mouyuan, vice-president of the Economics and Technology Research Institute under China National Petroleum Corp, said, "Fossil fuels are expected to serve as a safety net and a source of key materials during

China's energy transition, with non-fossil fuels becoming the backbone of energy supply."

While China's leadership in renewable energy has set the stage for a multifaceted energy structure by 2060, oil will remain indispensable for decades to come, Wu said.

Currently, oil and gas account for 18 percent and 9 percent, respectively, of the energy mix. By mid-century, renewables are expected to dominate, accounting for nearly 80 percent of the energy portfolio, according to figures released by the institute.

He added that China has been tapping into unconventional resources to expand its energy supply, with significant advancements in shale gas exploration and CBM extraction currently reshaping the country's resource landscape.

Untapped reserves, such as low-maturity shale oil and underground coal gasification, could unleash vast new potential in the coming decades, he said.

Dai also recommended elevating the refining and chemical sectors, with policies introduced to encourage enterprises to develop sustainable aviation fuels, biodiesel and bio-based chemicals.

"The refining and chemical industries are undergoing a transformation toward high-end, green and low-carbon development, and we should continue expanding the domestic production of high-end synthetic materials and specialty chemicals to increase the proportion of low-carbon and zero-carbon petrochemical products," he said.



Achieving balance in our lives

As we embrace nature's revitalizing energy, let's also absorb and appreciate the majesty that surrounds us and nurture our common desire to create an environment for the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

CHINA DAILY

Aerial view

A drone image shows the installation of a 181.48-metric-ton precast beam over an existing local railway in Nanjing, Jiangsu province on Tuesday, completing the main structure of the first phase of the Jianning West Road's Jiangbei avenue interchange project. China Railway Construction Corp's 24th bureau leads the cross-river project for facilitating urban traffic and boosting integrated development. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Year of vitality seen for real estate sector

By WANG YING in Shanghai
wang_ying@chinadaily.com.cn

Despite headwinds from a complex international environment and internal structural transformation, China's new quality productive forces and improved consumption are expected to inject vitality into the real estate sector, making 2025 a year of accumulating strength and generating energy, according to industry reports.

"Despite many challenges, the Chinese real estate market will be driven forward by effective domestic demand, consumption upgrades and technological progress," said Xie Chen, head of research at CBRE China, a commercial real estate services and investment firm.

"The incremental demand potential contained within new quality productive forces and consumption recovery are key to striking a balance between supply and demand," Xie said, citing a report by CBRE on the 2025 China real estate market outlook published on Feb 25.

According to the report, the residential market is projected to see an evident narrowing in housing sales decline, and first-tier cities are believed to take the lead in market stabilization.

The latest home price index, tracked by the China Index Academy, supports this projection.

In February, new homes were traded at an average price of 16,711 yuan (\$2,292) per square meter across the 100 major Chinese cities, up 0.11 percent on a monthly basis. The average price of new homes rose

2.73 percent year-on-year during the same period, according to analysis by the China Index Academy.

In the secondary market, prices of pre-owned homes traded in the 100 major cities averaged 14,071 yuan per sq m, down 0.42 percent month-on-month, the seventh month in a row of narrowing declines, it added.

As leasing supply and demand are still under progressive recovery, the CBRE report saw growing positive signals in the commercial real estate market, among which incremental office demand driven by consumption and new quality productive forces takes the lead.

Specifically, office demand in major Chinese cities is expected to improve slightly in 2025, with net absorption likely to increase by about 10 percent. Consumption and new quality productive forces will continue to serve as the two major forces in driving demand for office expansion, said the report.

Likewise, a report on the office market in 40 Chinese cities published by JLL on Feb 25 also took note of the emerging structural opportunities from new quality productive forces.

Although the office market in 40 major Chinese cities experienced a retreat in supply growth, rental rates bottomed out at an accelerated pace amid differentiated demand throughout 2024, and the positive signals in demand should be heeded, as these will create a growth momentum that may lead to a gradual recovery, the report said.

In the meantime, despite the

actual scale of incremental demand brought about by new office demand, new quality productive forces have already unleashed structural opportunities in vertical segments, the JLL report stated.

For example, there was rising demand from enterprises engaged in technological sectors represented by gaming and artificial intelligence last year in Beijing. Additionally, driven by new industries including AI and big data, nearly 40 percent of the office leasing transactions space was contributed by enterprises involved in internet technology industries in Shenzhen, Guangdong province throughout 2024.

Warehouse demand will remain stable as domestic consumption recovers while external demand slows. US tariffs will only have limited impact on cross-border e-commerce leasing demand. Tenants' focus on price and quality will continue to impact rents and uptake in first-tier city clusters, said the CBRE report.

The Chinese government's measures to boost consumption nationwide are expected to push up retail sales by 5 percent in 2025, and retailers are expected to expand business buoyed by recovering market sentiment and quality consumption. It is projected that vacancy rates will decline after supply tops out this year.

Commercial property transactions are expected to improve in 2025 as asset prices are becoming more attractive and interest rates are further lowered, the report added.

Q&A WITH CEO

Editor's Note: This year marks a critical milestone as China concludes its 14th Five-Year Plan. To help in assessing the success of the process, we have asked multinational executives to share with our readers their insights about their business achievements in the past few years and further expectations in the years to come.

Sustainable solutions to drive growth



Karen Yin
President, AkzoNobel China



Zhou Tao
China Region President,
dsm-firmenich



Chen Pu
Chief Asia Officer, Syensqo



Shen Kelei
Executive VP, and President for
China unit, Marelli

Q1 What's your view on this year's two sessions? Do you expect any specific policy measures for further deepening reforms and expanding high-standard opening-up? What more should China do to create a more enabling business environment for foreign investors?

YIN: We are confident in the continued development of the Chinese market, which continues to be one of AkzoNobel's most important strategic markets thanks to the country's reform and opening-up policies. We have witnessed significant opportunities emerging from China's economic development and we are excited about the prospects it holds for our business. We are working closely with some of China's top companies, which we believe will further strengthen our presence in the Chinese market and drive our business growth. We are optimistic that China's ongoing reforms will continue to create a more enabling business environment for foreign investors. This will not only benefit AkzoNobel, but also contribute to the overall development of the paints and coatings industry in China.

ZHOU: We are delighted to see the Chinese government's commitment and efforts in improving the business environment, including the continuous introduction of policies that support multinational and foreign investors, as well as the strengthening of intellectual property protections. We have forged a decade-long commitment to the Chinese mainland market through our innovative, science-backed solutions tailored to Chinese consumers' evolving needs. Our growth in China is deeply intertwined with the nation's development priorities. China's 2025 economic roadmap, prioritizing domestic consumption growth, innovation-driven modernization and institutional openness, presents expansive opportunities for dsm-firmenich in the nutrition, health and beauty sectors. These strategic priorities align with evolving consumer demands and supportive policies, positioning us to capitalize on long-term growth and innovation in these high-potential markets.

CHEN: Syensqo's history of operating in the Chinese mainland dates back more than 40 years. The company has benefited from the opening-up policies and economic growth of the country. With China remaining a growth engine of the world economy in 2025, we expect the two sessions will solidify the commitment to high-level opening-up of the country, endorse sustainable growth and intellectual property protection in order to create a more enabling business environment for foreign companies and foster deepening reforms of the country. We look forward to contributing to the development of China through local partnerships, collaborative innovations and more sustainable development.

SHEN: We highly commend the Chinese government's efforts in optimizing the business environment, particularly regarding transparency, intellectual property protections and fair competition. These initiatives have significantly bolstered confidence among foreign enterprises, providing Marelli and similar companies with a stable and predictable operating environment in China. Throughout our extensive operations in China, Marelli has consistently benefited from strong support from local governments, greatly facilitating our business growth. Specifically, we hope for streamlined regulatory processes, enhanced intellectual property protections and the introduction of additional incentives to encourage innovation in ESG (environmental, social and governance) practices and sustainable manufacturing. We wish to see enhanced policy support in the field of automotive intelligence technology, which will drive deep collaboration among industrial ecosystems.

Q2 "New quality productive forces" is widely seen as key to helping China achieve industrial upgrade and "high-quality development". How can your company help cultivate such forces in China?

YIN: We actively support China's industrial upgrade and high-quality development, and collaborate closely with our customers, suppliers and key stakeholders in driving this high-quality development. Our suppliers in China have started working with us to reduce carbon emissions, benefiting the entire supply chain. We are one of the first coatings companies to provide powder coating solutions for the EV industry in China. Our decorative paint solutions have been leading bio-based solutions to create a healthier living space. Therefore, AkzoNobel has a lot to offer new quality productive forces with our leading technology.

ZHOU: Sustainable development is integral to new quality productive forces. As a leading, innovation-focused consumer company in nutrition, health and beauty, sustainability lies at the heart of our development and business activities. From fragrances and food to micronutrients, we address the latest consumer needs and desires in a sustainable way. We are determined to keep increasing our positive impact and raising our standards in helping to tackle climate change and protect nature. Aligned with China's dual carbon goals, sustainability remains central to our strategy. In 2024, dsm-firmenich China achieved a 65 percent renewable electricity utilization rate. Earlier this year, our Chifeng plant secured a 25-year renewable energy agreement to accelerate green transition. As of now, six operational sites have signed five-year (2024-28) 100 percent renewable electricity purchase agreements.

CHEN: Syensqo's strategy is centered on creating advanced, sustainable solutions that help drive growth. The company's pursuit of sustainable development through innovation is highly in line with the new quality productive forces. Syensqo is investing 4 percent of its turnover in research and innovation. Many of the innovations in biotechnology and chemistry are offering fundamental solutions to develop materials that are lighter in weight, lower in carbon emissions and thus enable many critical sectors. We have set a target of 18 percent of sales from products that enable circularity by 2030 and are already at 16 percent. Achieving carbon neutrality and net zero requires a fundamental shift in supply chain management, focusing on sustainability. Now 100 percent of Syensqo's sites in China use renewable purchased energy and share best practices and technological advancements with our partners and suppliers in China, leading to faster and more impactful decarbonization.

SHEN: Our efforts are driven by substantial investments in innovation-focused automotive technologies, particularly in intelligence, software-defined vehicle and sustainable practices. Innovation is central to Marelli's strategy and permeates our operations. We collaborate with customers and suppliers from the earliest design phases, leveraging cutting-edge digital tools such as digital twins and aligned strategic roadmaps, to foster joint innovation and deliver tangible business value. Our emphasis on design-led innovation allows us to provide personalized, and intuitive vehicle experiences, powered by advanced, flexible and cloud-connected technologies. With our "China for China; China for Global" strategy, Marelli consistently leverages local innovation capabilities to generate globally competitive automotive solutions, significantly contributing to the growth of China's high quality productive forces. Meanwhile, we have leveraged local strengths to extend these innovative productive forces to global markets.

Q3 DeepSeek has been a buzzword and surprised the world starting this year. AI technology has been deeply integrated with various industries around the world. What opportunities do you foresee for your business from AI technology? What's your view on China's ability to sustain innovation in breakthrough technologies in the coming years?

YIN: China's ability to drive innovation in breakthrough technologies is undeniable, and China is already one of the top players in AI worldwide. At AkzoNobel, innovation is part of our DNA in everyday work. Our China Startup Challenge attracted 210 proposals, leading to collaborations with four startups focused on AI-driven supply chains, recyclable packaging and digital transformation. We are already piloting AI solutions with local partners to enhance our supply chain efficiency. China's dynamic innovation ecosystem inspires us to explore groundbreaking technologies. AI, for example, holds immense potential for our business — ranging from optimizing smart manufacturing to developing sustainable products faster.

ZHOU: At dsm-firmenich, innovation is the cornerstone of our growth. Our innovation pipeline is driven by our eight cutting-edge science capabilities: chemical and process sciences; nutritional and food sciences; formulation and materials science; analytical sciences; artificial intelligence and data science; receptor biology and sensory sciences; microbiome; and biotechnology. China's continuous efforts to drive innovation will further enhance innovation capabilities across industries and the country continues to be an innovation and production hub in our global value chain. Building on a legacy of excellence and investment in science and research, we will continue to introduce exciting new innovations to the Chinese market across nutrition, health and beauty and work closely with our customers in China on what is essential for life, desirable for consumers and more sustainable for the planet.

CHEN: We launched Syensqo.ai within the first year after the establishment of the company following a spin-off. We see tremendous opportunities for using AI to advance innovation. AI enables engineers in the labs and in the plant to look at bigger and more complex scientific and mathematical problems, and to develop solutions which are more universal and have a bigger impact. At Syensqo, we have a digital plan that relies strongly on the adoption of artificial intelligence. It's absolutely clear to us that we need to have AI as a partner of our researchers. It will not be a replacement, but a partner of our researchers to identify innovative ideas. We also believe AI will play a significant role in mapping value chains and assessing vulnerabilities. We've seen more and more Chinese colleagues getting used to work with the help of AI, which is a new productive force.

SHEN: Artificial intelligence is reshaping the automotive industry. Marelli sees tremendous opportunities in vehicle intelligence, manufacturing efficiency and optimizing user experiences. Additionally, Marelli is globally promoting the MAYA generative AI platform and plans to implement Deep Learning AI projects, including product appearance inspections, manufacturing process optimization and production automation. These AI technologies are helping us improve manufacturing efficiency, reduce costs and strengthen quality control capabilities. China demonstrates robust capabilities in AI innovation, supported by government initiatives, extensive talent pools and a thriving AI industrial ecosystem. Marelli will leverage China's innovation strengths to collaboratively develop cutting-edge AI applications, driving the automotive industry toward an intelligent future.

Q4 Driving domestic consumption is one of the top priorities for China to spur economic growth this year. How do you see China's potential to drive a consumption-led impetus for the economy? How will that affect your company's profitability this year?

YIN: AkzoNobel is confident in the economic development of China and sees significant opportunities from the country's focus on driving domestic consumption. The recent consumption demand for high quality, sustainable, user-friendly and innovative solutions is highly recognized by our consumers and customers. For our decorative paint business, rising disposable incomes and a growing middle-income group are boosting demand for high-quality, trendy and green home products. For our coatings business, the increased investment in urban renewal and green infrastructure creates strong demand for our solutions in many areas, like the new energy sector, marine and aviation, wind power, consumer electronics and home appliances. China's domestic consumption growth will definitely boost AkzoNobel's business. This momentum, combined with our focus on sustainability and localization, will enhance profitability while supporting China's transition to a consumption-led economy.

ZHOU: We are highly encouraged by the government's proactive measures to stimulate domestic consumption and bolster consumer confidence, which are pivotal to sustaining China's economic momentum. The country's vast consumer base, coupled with increasing awareness of nutrition, health, beauty and quality of life, underscores its unparalleled potential to drive consumption-led growth. This trend aligns with our business focus to deliver innovative, science-backed solutions through our highly innovative portfolio of nutritional, natural and renewable ingredients. By leveraging our complementary science capabilities and technologies, we aim to pioneer high-quality products, reinforcing our role as a trusted partner in China's high-quality development journey. In 2024, thanks to the strategic plan executed, we delivered strongly improved financial results in all our businesses. Together with the ongoing good momentum in our end markets, this leads us to a positive full-year outlook for 2025.

CHEN: China has a robust supply chain and vast market potential. The shift toward a consumption-led economy represents new growth opportunities as the geopolitical shifts are accelerating a "local for local" strategy. The company's business will benefit from the initiatives to drive consumption-led impetus as we expect to see customers welcome more smarter solutions and products that are more natural and more sustainable.

SHEN: China's vast consumer base and rapidly growing middle-income group have shown strong purchasing interest in new energy vehicles, high-end smart cars and personalized mobility experiences. Furthermore, government policies, such as the promotion of intelligent connected cars, have further stimulated market demand. As Chinese consumer demand for high-tech, sustainable and personalized mobility solutions rises, the market presents significant growth potential. To seize this opportunity, we are strengthening our local R&D and manufacturing capabilities, developing cost-effective and innovative solutions to reduce weight, cost and environmental impact. Meanwhile, China has become a key innovation hub for our global business. Marelli Guangzhou, in Guangdong province, serving as Marelli's global display R&D and production center, leverages the advantages of a deeply vertical integrated supply chain and a robust overseas OEM (original equipment manufacturer) sales channel to enhance product competitiveness.

Q5 As China continues to pursue high-quality development along a Chinese path to modernization, what opportunities do you anticipate for your business as this process gains more traction? Will you increase investment in China in the coming years? How will you further expand your footprint in China?

YIN: As China advances its high-quality development and green modernization journey, AkzoNobel sees significant opportunities to align with the country's sustainability goals and growing demand for eco-friendly solutions. We will continue to invest in this important market, in which the manufacturing upgrade will always be a major part of it. As part of a 14 million euros (\$15.3 million) investment in 2024, we upgraded our Suzhou site to accelerate growth and double the plant's capacity for marine and protective coatings by the end of 2025. This includes accelerating Suzhou's transition to using 100 percent renewable electricity by the end of 2025. We will continue investing in localized production, renewable energy and sustainable solutions to drive growth while supporting China's transition to a low-carbon economy.

ZHOU: China's pursuit of modernization opens significant opportunities for dsm-firmenich in the nutrition, health and beauty sectors. Over the past year, we have intensified our localization strategy, strengthened partnerships with domestic players and fostered synergies across multiple sectors. We acquired full ownership of Artsci Biology Technologies Hangzhou Corporation last year, bolstering our leadership in China's dairy, beverage, bakery and confectionery markets through its nationwide distribution network. In 2025, dsm-firmenich will continue to expand our investments in China, focusing on increasing fragrance and perfume production capacity and enhancing operational facilities to better meet the growing demands of Chinese customers and the consumer market.

CHEN: As the Chinese chemicals market is projected to continue its rapid growth over the next eight-10 years, Syensqo sees opportunities in contributing to the high-quality development of China with green initiatives as a major driver. We will continue investing in clean energy infrastructure, research and development, which enables us to provide innovative sustainable solutions that help industries lower emissions through electrification, advanced connectivity, resource efficiency, improving quality of life and sustainable sourcing. We believe our business operations with a more focused strategy targeting local regions will bring us more opportunities and lead to faster and more impactful decarbonization along the Chinese path to modernization.

SHEN: As China accelerates its transition toward intelligent, electrified and sustainable mobility, we see immense potential to deepen our presence and expand our investments. With China being a key innovation hub, we are continuously strengthening our local R&D capabilities to develop cutting-edge solutions tailored to market needs, including smart lighting, intelligent thermal management, software-defined vehicle architecture and advanced interior solutions. To support this transformation, we are expanding our local manufacturing footprint to enhance agility, cost efficiency and sustainability. Marelli has established clear sustainability targets — achieving operational decarbonization by 2030 and supply chain decarbonization by 2045.

COMMENT

Editorials

A small but important step on road that could lead to the negotiation table

The recent 90-minute telephone conversation between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, described by Trump as "a great call", has upheld the cautious optimism that has emerged that an ending to the protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict may be finally forthcoming.

Despite the outcome of the talks falling short of achieving a broader 30-day ceasefire as hoped for, the talks still yielded a limited agreement — a pause in the two sides' military strikes against each other's energy facilities. This outcome, though modest, is a reminder that there is no quick-fix for the conflict, and patience, persistence and a collective commitment to peace are needed to get the two sides to lay down their arms.

The roots of the conflict are complicated and deeply entrenched, stemming from historical, geopolitical, and security complexities. As a Chinese proverb aptly states, it takes more than one cold day to freeze three feet of ice; similarly, ice that thick will not melt overnight.

Moscow's insistence on a full ceasefire being contingent on the West halting all military and intelligence support to Ukraine underscores the mutual distrust that has fueled the conflict.

Ukraine and its Western allies have rejected this demand, further complicating the path to peace. This impasse highlights a fundamental truth: No country should build its security on the insecurity of another.

Yet that does not mean the gains, though limited, that have been made in the phone call between the US and Russian leaders in an effort to resolve the conflict are meaningless. Since different stakeholders to the crisis have different interests and appeals, it is natural that some see the efforts to resolve the crisis so far as a glass half empty, some see it a glass half full.

So it is high time the parties put aside their self interests, and demonstrate more strategic vision, flexibility and wisdom to focus on a common interest they unquestionably share with each other on the conflict and put in efforts to help end it as soon as possible. As long as they bear that in mind, they have every reason to work together to create the necessary conditions for that to happen through consultations, rather than an imagined victory on the battlefield.

China has consistently advocated for a political settlement to the Ukraine crisis through dialogue and negotiation. And since the conflict began, its stance has always been objective and impartial, and it has sought to play a constructive role in creating the conditions for consensus-building through dialogue and mediation.

It is deeply regrettable therefore that some Western countries are trying to scapegoat China for the ongoing conflict, falsely accusing the country of enabling Russia's military operations in Ukraine. The recent statement by G7 top diplomats, which baselessly claimed that China has supported "Russia's war machine" with "the transfer of dual-use materials", is a blatant attempt to shift responsibility for the conflict onto China.

Such accusations, rooted in a Cold War mentality, are not only counterproductive but also provocative. They divert attention from the urgent need for dialogue and coordination, and risk undermining the international community's collective efforts to achieve peace.

China firmly rejects these unfounded allegations. It remains committed to playing its due part in facilitating a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The international community should recognize that finger-pointing and smear campaigns will only hinder progress. Instead, all parties should focus on building trust, fostering dialogue, and creating an environment conducive to negotiations.

The common understanding reached in the Trump-Putin talks, though far from a breakthrough, still represents a step in the right direction. That both Ukraine and Russia have now indicated a willingness to end the conflict provides a glimmer of hope and momentum for continued peace efforts.

As Foreign Minister Wang Yi rightly noted, no one will emerge as a winner from this conflict, but all will gain from peace. It is imperative that all countries, especially major powers, set aside their differences and work together to bring the parties to the negotiation table.

The path to peace may be long and difficult, but with perseverance, dialogue, and a shared commitment to reaching the negotiation table, a resolution is within reach. As Wang recently emphasized, "The negotiation table is where the conflict ends and peace starts."

Israel shows its broader aims outweigh peace

The large-scale predawn air strikes Israel launched across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday that killed over 400 Palestinians shattered the ceasefire that has been in place since January.

Tel Aviv justified the strikes by demanding that Hamas must release more hostages, and its requirement that Hamas should relinquish control of the Palestinian territory is simply absurd.

What Israel demanded are also the requirements of the United States, which its leader made public earlier this month in the form of an ultimatum, which Hamas rejected saying it will only free hostages in return for a lasting truce, and abandoning Gaza has never been a consideration.

After the first phase of the ceasefire expired on March 1, Israel announced on March 2 that it would stop providing humanitarian aid to Gaza and cut off Gaza's electricity supply on March 9, in a bid to try and provoke Hamas and blame it for ending the fragile truce.

Exhausting all means to pick fault with Hamas, Tel Aviv is doing nothing but trying to hinder the resumption of the second phase of truce talks. As agreed in the US-backed three-phase peace plan, it is Israel that should withdraw from Gaza in the second phase, not Hamas.

So by breaking the ceasefire, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is trying to avoid the trade-offs Israel has agreed to for the second phase and the thorny question of who will govern Gaza.

No wonder the White House criticized Hamas for the renewed fighting in Gaza. US National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes blamed the worsening situation on Hamas, saying the militant group "could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose refusal and war". But he stopped short of mentioning the fact that the ceasefire deal that the US helped broker did not require Hamas to release more hostages to extend the halt in fighting beyond its first phase.

Emboldened by the US, Netanyahu said the attack on Tuesday was "only the beginning" and that Israel would press ahead until it achieves all of its war aims, which include not only purportedly freeing all the hostages held by Hamas but also the elimination of the militant group.

Israel has in effect torn up the US-brokered three-phase peace agreement.

As before, each time Tel Aviv has taken the initiative to escalate the tensions, it is the Israeli leader's personal need to weather a domestic storm that has precipitated it. So it is this time, as Netanyahu faces mounting domestic pressure, with mass protests planned over his handling of the hostage crisis and his decision to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency.

His latest testimony in a long-running corruption trial was canceled after the Tuesday strikes, which may give Netanyahu a political boost, as a far-right party led by Itamar Ben-Gvir that had bolted the government over the ceasefire announced on Tuesday it was rejoining. So resuming the war has effectively helped Netanyahu shore up his coalition, which depends on far-right lawmakers who ultimately want to depopulate Gaza and build Jewish settlements there.

As Chinese ambassador to the United Nations Fu Cong stressed at a United Nations Security Council emergency meeting on Gaza on Tuesday, military means are not the way to end the conflict. Abuse of force is not the right way to rescue hostages. It may only put them in more danger. The wide protests in Israel should serve to remind Tel Aviv that the return of the hostages should be the focus of its attention.

China urges Israel to abandon its obsession with the use of force, immediately stop military operations in Gaza, and stop the collective punishment of Gaza civilians.

Now that a ceasefire agreement has been reached, as Fu said, it should be fully implemented with goodwill and sincerity. China calls on the parties concerned to fully and consistently implement the ceasefire agreement. The guarantors of the ceasefire agreement should play their due role in promoting the consistent implementation of the three-phase agreement, to ensure the ceasefire holds in Gaza.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Major countries obliged to work for a just world order

The telephone conversation Foreign Minister Wang Yi had with Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic adviser to the French president, at the latter's request, on Tuesday has proved to be a timely move to maintain stable Sino-French ties and push for a proper solution to key international issues.

China and France are both permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and also comprehensive strategic partners, which makes it especially important to strengthen their strategic discourse in 2025, the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and World War II. China upholds multilateralism, safeguards the authority of the United Nations and international law, and promotes global governance, while France supports multilateralism, respects international law and

values cooperation and solidarity.

Such common ground lays the foundation for the two countries to work together to resolve issues. China and Europe must resolve their economic and trade frictions through consultations. It is hoped France will work with China to send a positive signal of unity and cooperation. It is good to see that France opposes trade and tariff frictions, and is willing to work with China to resolve the issues through consultations. And France is committed to promoting the balanced and sustainable development of France-China and EU-China economic and trade relations, and upholding the international economic and trade system based on WTO rules.

In this way China and France are sending a positive message to the world that they are pushing for a proper solution to trade frictions

through talks and consultations.

From the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, China has advocated for resolving it through dialogue and negotiations. It has also emphasized that the process to achieve peace should respect the will of the parties involved, should not be imposed by third parties, and must not serve the interests of any single country.

It will be meaningful if France can strengthen collaboration with China and work together with China to help prompt a just, lasting and sustainable peace agreement on the crisis.

Just as Wang said in the telephone conversation, China and France cannot allow the world to revert to the law of the jungle. That's what China has been striving for, which should be supported by France and all nations that love peace and are working toward a just world order.

—ZHANG ZHOXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Upgrade consumption in era of new products

The central authorities recently introduced a new action plan to give consumption a boost.

The plan seeks to promote sustained income growth. The cost of raising children, education, healthcare and elderly care remain people's major concerns that must be addressed. In response, according to the plan, the country will establish childcare subsidy systems, enhance educational support, raise basic pensions and medical insurance subsidies for urban and rural residents, improve basic living assistance systems and strengthen industrial and employment development support.

There is great potential for demand in the service sector. Also, the market for big-ticket items such

as cars, housing and home appliances remains sizable. However, with advancements in new energy and artificial intelligence technologies, products such as cars and home appliances have seen significant improvements in green and smart features. Therefore, the action plan focuses on consumption upgrades.

The plan also seeks to accelerate the development of new technologies and products, such as autonomous driving, smart wearables, ultra-high-definition video, brain-computer interfaces, robotics and additive manufacturing.

It also urges the removing of unreasonable consumption restrictions and various market entry barriers.

The plan proposes a comprehen-

sive set of policies to support consumption. It emphasizes strengthening the coordination and linkage of consumption promotion policies, integrating fiscal, financial, industrial and investment policies with consumption policies to promote concerted efforts and form synergies, and building a more favorable policy system for consumption promotion.

It explicitly states that all regions and departments should place greater emphasis on boosting consumption, fulfill their responsibilities according to their duties, and strengthen coordination and linkage. These measures will help accelerate the effective implementation of policies aimed at revitalizing consumption.

—21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

What They Say

Meetings can help bring out best of three

Foreign Minister Wang Yi will attend the 11th China-Japan-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tokyo on Saturday. Wang and Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya will also cochair the Sixth China-Japan High-Level Economic Dialogue during his stay in Japan, according to a release of the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

It has been one and a half years since the previous trilateral ministers' meeting was held in Busan, the Republic of Korea, in November, 2023, and about six years since the high-level economic dialogue between China and Japan was last held in April 2019 in Beijing.

Both the ROK and Japan have seen tremendous changes in their domestic politics over the past two years, not to mention the past six, while the world has also experienced dramatic changes and rising uncertainties.

Over the past four years, the former US administration tried to drive a wedge between the two US allies and China as part of its regional strategy to contain China. Yet the return of the "America First" Donald Trump administration has prompted a rapid thawing of the relations

between China and its two neighbors, a process that commenced at the conclusion of the 2024 US presidential election.

The two countries have strong motives to repair ties with China, their major trading partner and market, as the high cost they paid for joining the former US administration's China-containment strategy proved to be unsustainable.

It is against this backdrop that the two meetings are to be convened, after a series of contacts and exchanges among the three neighbors on multiple bilateral and multilateral occasions over the past months, showing their joint hope that their relations can be put back on the right track for healthy development at an early date.

In the second meeting of a high-level consultation mechanism on people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and Japan in Beijing on Dec 25, cohosted by Wang and Iwaya, the two sides reached 10 important agreements to promote people-to-people exchanges and cultural, tourism and education cooperation.

In his phone call with ROK Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, one day prior to the meeting with his Japanese coun-

terpart, Wang stressed that China is ready to work with the ROK to promote steady development of the China-ROK strategic partnership, and strengthen coordination with the ROK to jointly keep the global industry and supply chains stable and unimpeded. That was warmly echoed by Cho, who said that Seoul cherishes the current sound momentum of bilateral relations and remains

unchanged in its position of promoting the sustainable development of the ROK-China strategic partnership. So the intensive trilateral and bilateral exchanges among the three neighbors in the Japanese capital this weekend are expected to carry on the positive momentum, providing the three countries with an opportunity to speak in one voice on their shared commitment to win-win cooperation.

The sound development of China-Japan-ROK relations not only serves the common interests of the region, it can also help promote solidarity, cooperation and communication in the world to help counter the confrontation and estrangement that the US administration is trying to promulgate with the view to divide and rule.

—LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENT

Tomoo Marukawa

Raise incomes to boost consumption

China's GDP grew by 5 percent in 2024. On the surface, this figure seems appropriate, meeting the growth target set by the Chinese government. But most economists agree that the Chinese economy is facing some challenges, including plunging real estate sales and a lack of expected growth in domestic demand.

It is estimated that 2.2 percentage points of the 5 percent growth was contributed by final consumption, 1.3 percentage points by capital formation, and the remainder by net exports of goods and services. This means that without the contribution of net exports, the GDP growth rate would have been only 3.5 percent.

China's trade surplus in 2024 reached an unprecedented \$992 billion, triggering protectionist responses from the United States and the European Union. Hindered by high tariffs, China's exports are likely to divert to other regions, leading to potentially more trade frictions with other countries. To maintain healthy relations with its trade partners, it is imperative that China further boost domestic demand.

This point has been emphasized in several policy documents, including the communiqué issued by the Central Economic Work Conference in December 2024. Indeed, several policy initiatives to boost domestic demand were implemented in 2024.

The stimulus packages introduced that year were heavily focused on boosting investments. Of the 1 trillion yuan (\$138.26 billion) raised through the issuance of super long-term government bonds, 85 percent was allocated to major national projects and equipment upgrading.

Additionally, 3.9 trillion yuan raised through specialized bonds was invested in infrastructure and manufacturing.

More direct measures need to be taken to boost domestic consumption. For instance, 15 percent of the funds raised through super long-term bonds were used to subsidize the renewal of cars and household appliances. However, this policy primarily benefits households that already own such items.

To sustain equitable economic development, China needs policies that increase the income and consumption capacity of its relatively low-income population. A key target group should be migrant workers from rural areas who live and work in cities. Although they outnumber urban native workers, they are largely excluded from the program to improve living conditions in

urban areas.

Most of them live in low-cost housing, such as company dormitories, temporary shelters or so-called urban villages.

While millions of apartments remain unsold or unfinished in cities, hundreds of millions of migrant workers lack access to decent housing.

Even with falling apartment prices, homeownership remains out of reach for most migrant workers. If their unmet demand for housing were addressed, the current stagnation in real estate sales could be reversed, revitalizing the real estate market for at least another decade. Stable housing would also encourage migrant workers to purchase more durable consumer goods.

To unlock the potential demand for

housing among migrant workers, the first step would be to grant them permanent resident status in the cities where they live and work. Without stable residency and employment, they are unlikely to take on mortgages to buy apartments.

Also, the supply of affordable housing for migrant workers should be increased, with local governments playing a leading role in providing low-cost housing for them. Fully integrating migrant workers into the urban social insurance system would encourage them to purchase permanent housing and settle in cities.

The Chinese government could also consider introducing child benefits — payments distributed to par-

ents and guardians of children. Such programs have been implemented in many countries, including Japan. And given China's declining total fertility rate, which has dropped close to around 1.0 in recent years, this is the right time to implement such policies, for they encourage child-bearing.

A well-designed child benefit program could help address two major challenges China faces: the insufficient domestic demand and the declining fertility rate.

The author is a professor at the Institute of Social Science, the University of Tokyo.

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

Yang Guoliang and Zhao Tengyu

Tariffs only accelerate China's self-reliance in high-tech sector

In a perilous move to reshape international trade dynamics, the US administration has escalated tariffs on Chinese imports from 10 percent to 20 percent as of March 4, intensifying economic tensions between the world's two largest economies. This policy shift has prompted China to implement calculated retaliatory measures, including 10-15 percent tariffs on more than \$20 billion worth of US agricultural goods.

The US tariff policy is essentially a part of Trump's "America First" strategy, which, among other things, is aimed at containing China's technological advancement. The core goal of the US administration is to undermine China's competitiveness in key sectors and maintain the US' hegemony in high-tech, by raising trade barriers and restricting the flow of technology.

For instance, in the semiconductor sector, the US Department of Commerce added 140 Chinese entities to its export control list, restricting key chip components like high-bandwidth memory from being exported to China, in order to contain the advancement of China's semiconductor industry. In the renewable energy sector, the Office of the US Trade Representative raised the tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles (EVs) from 25 percent to 100 percent, in a bid to reduce China's market share in the US and create space for domestic EV industries, reflecting the US' fear of China's leading position in renewable energy technologies.

But China has not backed down in the face of the US' tariff wars and technological containment strategy. Instead, it has strengthened its industry chain by achieving "enterprise-driven innovation breakthroughs" and "increased investment in basic research", carving out a unique path for growth.

Chinese enterprises have taken the lead in technological innovation, acting as a "powerful engine" driving industrial upgrading. For example, in the semiconductor sector, the AI chips developed by Cambrian, given their outstanding performance, are widely used in autonomous driving, smart homes, healthcare, natural language processing, image recognition and other fields, pushing AI technology to the forefront and creating a synergistic effect in those sectors.

Chinese scientists have used it to complete the largest quantum simulation of fluid dynamics in the world, expediting the development of the quantum computing industry.

In the renewable energy sector, CATL's advanced battery technologies, used in EVs, energy storage systems, electric ships and electric planes, have accelerated the application of renewable energy technologies, driving collaborative growth in related industries such as battery materials research, recycling, and EV manufacturing. These breakthroughs in critical technologies have put Chinese companies at the heart of a self-reliant industry chain, significantly strengthening China's industrial competitiveness.

What's more, China has significantly increased investment in basic research, ensuring the steady progress of its technological innovation program. Last year, China's investment in basic research reached 249.7 billion yuan (\$34.52 billion), an increase of 10.5 percent, accounting for 6.91 percent of total R&D expenditure. China's vigorous investment in R&D and concerted efforts to commercialize research results propelled the country to 11th place in the 2024 Global Innovation Index.

For example, in the field of quantum computing, the "Origin Wukong" quantum computer has been operational with 72 domestically-produced superconducting quantum chips and the world's first quantum computing operating system, achieving multiple functional breakthroughs. Chinese scientists have used it to complete the largest quantum simulation of fluid dynamics in the world, expediting the development of the quantum computing industry.

In the field of brain-machine interfaces, Nankai University held the first trial in the world to remove an implanted brain-machine interface sensor via the blood vessels, confirming the safety and biocompatibility of the wireless device. This laid the foundation for clinical applications and is expected to drive innovation in the brain disease treatment and rehabilitation sector. These basic research breakthroughs have enhanced China's scientific and technological innovation capability, facilitating the emergence of new technologies and industries, and helping China secure an advantage in the global technology competition.

When the US government restricted the export of 14nm/16nm processing equipment to China, Chinese enterprises resorted to open-source innovation to find new paths. Earlier this year, DeepSeek gained immediate global attention, with its R1 version attracting more than 100 million users within just seven days of its launch. Its success is not only a testament to China's technological advancement but also demonstrates the strength of the country's industry chain.

From chip development to algorithm optimization, collaboration across China's AI industry chain has made the sector more resilient, enabling DeepSeek to achieve technological breakthroughs. This achievement not only showcases China's independent innovation strength but also highlights the tremendous power of industry chain collaboration.

China will continue to leverage its resilient industry chain and advance along the path of independent innovation, but remains committed to an open and cooperative approach, sharing its innovative achievements with global partners and contributing to global technological progress.

Yang Guoliang is a professor at the Institutes of Science and Development, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences; and Zhao Tengyu is an analyst at the China Telecom Research Institute. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Adnan Akfirat

Stronger Sino-Turkish ties to mutual benefit

China and Türkiye are key geopolitical players and advocates of a multipolar world, but the growth in bilateral trade has been driven by market forces rather than government-led initiatives.

Türkiye primarily imports semi-finished goods and raw materials from China, which it then processes and re-exports to other countries, indicating Türkiye's limited access to alternative suppliers. The country's principal exports to China include natural stones and minerals. But the relatively small scale of Turkish enterprises, along with the geographical distance between the two countries, hinders Turkish enterprises from establishing a prominent presence in China's market.

Market dynamics favor larger economic players, exacerbating the trade imbalance between the two countries. In 2023, for example, the trade volume between the two countries reached \$43.4 billion, yet the disparity remains stark: China accounts for 93 percent of the total, with Türkiye accounting for a meager 7 percent. Notably, Turkish products have yet to gain significant market recognition among China's affluent population.

Addressing this imbalance requires a comprehensive approach to managing economic relations. A closer look at Chinese investments in Türkiye, a key factor in correcting the trade gap, shows a worrying trend. China has substantially increased its invest-



China's recognition of Türkiye's strategic importance and bold initiatives could significantly advance mutual interest and global well-being.

ments in the Belt and Road countries, yet Türkiye's share remains minimal despite the country's official participation in the Belt and Road Initiative since 2014.

However, Chinese direct investment in Türkiye remains relatively small, largely due to the perception in the Chinese government of Ankara's inconsistency. The trade imbalance has led to the imposition of non-tariff barriers against Chinese goods, adding further uncertainty to bilateral relations.

Türkiye's economy is the largest and its military the most powerful in the Middle East. But despite Türkiye's economic policy and banking system being based on Western models, it

remains dependent on Eurasian countries for energy security and industrial intermediate goods.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Trade, in 2024, China and Russia were the largest and second-largest exporters to Türkiye, with Russia and China being the biggest and second-biggest trade partners respectively for Türkiye. The two countries accounted for \$100 billion of Türkiye's total trade volume of about \$606 billion. In fact, Türkiye conducts one-sixth of its foreign trade with these two countries. As for Türkiye's primary export destinations, they include Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Italy and France. Türkiye's presence in these markets provides a strategic advantage for China.

What further augments Türkiye's economic significance is its geographical location at the confluence of Asia, Europe and Africa, bordered by seas on three sides.

By formally joining the Belt and Road Initiative in 2014, Türkiye aimed to extend its influence to the railway link between Asia and Europe. Türkiye joined hands with Iraq and Qatar to launch the "Development Road" project, in order to emphasize its "vital role" as an economic bridge between West Asia and Europe.

On the other hand, China's geographical distance from Europe and West Asia and its reliance on maritime routes pose a risk to its foreign trade, as do Western restrictions on China's

high-tech sector. Hence, China could leverage Türkiye as a production and distribution hub to overcome these challenges.

As a member of the EU Customs Union since 1996, even without full European Union membership, Türkiye offers a key advantage: Chinese products manufactured in Türkiye can enter the EU's markets with zero customs duty. Products manufactured in Türkiye can evade EU and US restrictions, enabling their smooth delivery to Europe and the Middle East, including North Africa, from Türkiye's free zones.

Significantly, there is no market conflict or political rivalry between China and Türkiye. Both countries are striving to help build an egalitarian, rules-based multipolar world. And deeper economic cooperation based on mutual benefit would allow Türkiye to take a firmer stance against the West, which has been putting increasing pressure on China on the economic and other fronts.

Türkiye's role in fostering a multipolar world, exemplified by its potential BRICS membership, is critical. China's recognition of Türkiye's strategic importance and bold initiatives could significantly advance mutual interest and global well-being.

The author is chairman of the Turkish-Chinese Business Development and Friendship Association.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

BRICS
VIEWS

Editor's note: As global governance undergoes profound changes, the role of the BRICS Plus mechanism in fostering a more equitable and inclusive international order has become increasingly significant. To explore its impact, the challenges it faces, and its future prospects, China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily, is launching the BRICS Views column, bringing together scholars, policymakers and industry leaders for in-depth discussions on issues of concern to the grouping.

ENDALKACHEW SIME

In search of financial autonomy

The 'BRICS Plus' countries are laying the groundwork for a more balanced global financial system

The "BRICS Plus" grouping — Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia — has emerged as a pivotal actor in the global movement toward de-dollarization. This strategic shift seeks to reduce dependence on the US dollar in international trade, investments and monetary reserves. Far

from being an antagonistic move against the United States, it represents a pragmatic effort by the BRICS nations to assert financial autonomy and protect their economies from external shocks.

The US dollar accounted for about 58 percent of global foreign currency reserves and 88 percent of the daily foreign exchange market turnover as of 2023. However, this dominance creates vulnerabilities for countries whose economies are closely tied to its performance.

The New Development Bank, established in 2015 with an initial capital of \$50 billion, represents a concrete institutional response to the dollar dominance. By 2023, the NDB had approved over \$30 billion in funding for infrastructure and sustainable development projects across BRICS nations, with approximately 30 percent of these funds disbursed in non-dollar currencies. Further, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, a \$100 billion financial safety net established in 2014, provides liquidity support in non-dollar currencies during financial crises. This mechanism helps BRICS nations mitigate the risks associated with dollar volatility and potential capital flight.

Bilateral trade settlements have

seen significant shifts away from the dollar. For instance, the share of the US dollar in Russia-China bilateral trade settlement plummeted from nearly 90 percent in 2015 to 46 percent in the first half of 2020, while the use of local currencies in India-Russia bilateral trade surged from 6 percent to 30 percent between 2014 and 2019. Similarly, the renminbi's usage in South African trade grew by 65 percent in 2016 alone. These changes reflect a deliberate strategy to reduce exposure to dollar fluctuations and enhance trade stability.

BRICS nations have also developed alternative payment systems to bypass traditional US-dominated infrastructure. China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System and Russia's System for Transfer of Financial Messages offer alternatives to SWIFT, while India's Rupee-based trade settlement mechanism challenges the US dollar's dominance in regional trade. These systems enhance financial sovereignty by providing secure, independent channels for international transactions.

The five initial members collectively held over \$4.5 trillion in foreign exchange reserves in 2024. By diversifying these reserves into alternative currencies and assets — such as the euro, yen and gold — these BRICS countries aim to enhance financial stability. Gold reserves have seen particularly dramatic increases: Russia's gold reserves grew from 1,250 metric tons in July 2015 to over 2,350 tons by December 2023, while China's reported reserves increased from 1,658 tons in June 2015 to approximately 2,235 tons by December 2023.

Developing economies face significant risks when their financial systems are closely tied to the US



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

dollar. Changes in US interest rates, quantitative easing, or other monetary policies can trigger capital flows, currency volatility, and economic instability in dollar-dependent economies. By reducing dollar dependence, Global South nations can insulate themselves from these external shocks and maintain greater control over their domestic economic policies. US sanctions have become a powerful tool of economic coercion, particularly against countries such as Russia, Iran and Venezuela. De-dollarization efforts provide a mechanism for these nations to conduct international trade and finance outside the reach of US sanctions. For example, Russia has significantly reduced its dollar holdings, with

the share of US dollars in its international reserves falling from about 43 percent in March 2018 to around 10 percent by 2023. This strategic shift has allowed Russia to maintain economic activity despite Western sanctions.

Financial sovereignty represents a fundamental aspect of national independence. When countries rely heavily on the US dollar, they effectively cede control over key aspects of their monetary policy to the US Federal Reserve. De-dollarization enables nations to reclaim this autonomy, making monetary policy decisions based on domestic economic needs rather than external currency fluctuations. For developing economies, exchange rate volatility can undermine trade

competitiveness, increase debt servicing costs, and contribute to inflationary pressures. By conducting trade in local currencies or other stable currencies, BRICS nations can reduce these risks and create more predictable economic environments for businesses and consumers.

The current global financial architecture disproportionately benefits developed economies, particularly the US. By creating alternative financial institutions and mechanisms, BRICS nations contribute to a more multipolar system where multiple currencies and financial architectures coexist. This evolution could lead to greater fairness and representation for developing economies in global financial governance. Diversifying currency holdings and trade settlements helps nations build more resilient economies.

Despite these advances, challenges remain in establishing a fully integrated BRICS financial architecture. The heterogeneity of economic structures, political priorities, and developmental stages among member countries complicates coordination. Furthermore, the US dollar retains its dominance in global finance, and transitioning to alternative systems requires significant investment and institutional development. Some critics argue that de-dollarization could lead to increased transaction costs and complexity in global trade. Others express concerns about the potential for new dominant currencies to emerge, simply replacing the dollar with another hegemonic currency. However, BRICS' approach emphasizes a diversified strategy rather than replacing the dollar with a single alternative currency.

By creating alternative financial institutions and instruments,

BRICS nations are laying the groundwork for a more balanced global financial system. This shift could potentially reduce the effectiveness of the US' politically motivated unilateral sanctions, enhance financial sovereignty for developing economies, and promote greater stability in international monetary relations. As BRICS continues to expand its membership, the movement toward de-dollarization may gain additional momentum. The creation of a BRICS currency or expanded use of local currencies in trade could further challenge the established financial order. Additionally, technological innovations such as digital currencies and blockchain technology offer new avenues for global transactions without dollar intermediation.

De-dollarization represents not a threat to the global economic system but an opportunity to create a more resilient and equitable architecture that respects the sovereign economic interests of all nations. For the Global South, this movement is fundamentally about protecting domestic economies from external shocks, asserting financial autonomy, and participating in a more multipolar world order. The evolution toward a more diversified global financial system will likely be gradual but could ultimately lead to greater stability and fairness in international economic relations.

The author is a PhD student at Peking University, ex-state minister of planning and development of Ethiopia, and vice-chairman and Africa chapter president of the World Rural Tourism Council. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

MAO KEJI

To be taken with a pinch of salt

Popular narrative of India replacing China as a manufacturing hub falls short of the reality that the 'Make in India' initiative remains largely aspirational

Over the past decade, India's economic expansion under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been widely touted as a success story. Projections suggest that by 2027, India could surpass Germany and Japan to become the world's third-largest economy by GDP. Numerous analysts have been quick to position India as the next major hub for global industrial and supply chains, often portraying it as an alternative to China.

But, a deeper dive into India's economic data reveals a more nuanced picture. The country's growth over the past 10 years has been disproportionately driven by financial services, real estate and digital industries — while manufacturing, the sector that underpins sustainable industrial development, has steadily declined in its relative importance. The much-publicized "Make in India" initiative remains largely aspirational rather than a reflection of the economic realities on the ground.

This divergence between perception and performance underscores the need for a more measured view of India's economic prospects. While the country has made strides in infrastructure development, long-term structural risks remain — chief among them, a reliance on foreign capital and an escalating debt burden. Investors and policymakers alike should take a pragmatic approach: neither underestimating nor overestimating India's economic potential, but rather adjusting investment strategies and trade policies according to

what's really happening in the country.

The real drivers of India's economic expansion have been service-related sectors. India's economic growth has been largely fueled by services rather than industrial production. Between the third quarter of 2014 and the fourth quarter of 2024, the two largest contributors to GDP expansion were financial services, real estate and professional services, which accounted for 26.13 percent of growth. Trade, hotels, transport, communications and broadcasting contributed 23.56 percent. Together, these service-driven sectors made up nearly 50 percent of India's GDP growth, whereas manufacturing contributed just 14.21 percent.

This reliance on services has led to persistent weaknesses — job creation has lagged, exports remain sluggish, and the trade deficit continues to widen. Without a stronger manufacturing base, India risks missing the kind of economic take-off that helped East Asian economies sustain double-digit GDP growth during their peak development phases.

Despite the Modi administration's high-sounding rhetoric on industrial expansion, manufacturing's role in India's economy has actually diminished. Before Modi took office, manufacturing accounted for 16.26 percent of GDP. Under Modi, that figure dropped to 14.21 percent. Additionally, manufacturing's share of GDP has continued to decline, to 12.84 percent in 2023, the lowest level since 1960. Meanwhile, services have surged to a record 49.8 percent of GDP.

In contrast, other emerging economies with similar economic outlook have seen manufacturing gain ground. Bangladesh's manufactur-

ing share of GDP rose from 16.61 percent in 2014 to 22.34 percent in 2023. In Vietnam, it increased from 20.37 percent to 23.88 percent over the same period. These trends suggest that while India has aggressively promoted its brand of manufacturing potential abroad, the sector remains comparatively weak.

Western policymakers and the Modi administration alike have positioned India as a ready replacement to China in global supply chains. However, trade data challenge this assumption.

Since the onset of United States-China trade tensions in 2017, China's share of US imports has declined by 8.49 percentage points. But India's share has only increased by 0.52 percentage points — from 2.08 percent to 2.6 percent. By contrast, Vietnam and China's Taiwan region have seen much stronger gains, increasing their share by 2.11 and 1.69 percentage points, respectively.

Although India's vast domestic market has attracted investment, high production costs continue to constrain its global competitiveness. Many foreign companies that have entered India are following the notion of "in India, for India", rather than "in India, for the world" — a dynamic that severely curtails its potential to compete with China in the global market.

Despite extensive promotional efforts portraying India as the next global manufacturing hub, the country remains fundamentally service-driven, with manufacturing's share continuing to decline. Several long-standing structural issues hinder industrial growth, including low labor productivity and skills gaps, rigid land acquisition laws that constrain factory

expansion, strict labor policies that limit flexibility for employers. Moreover, a challenging business environment also deters foreign manufacturers.

These factors have not improved as much as expected under the Modi administration. As a result, foreign direct investment inflows into India's manufacturing sector have weakened. Between March and November 2024, net FDI inflows into manufacturing nosedived to just \$480 million, down from \$8.5 billion during the same period in 2023.

While total FDI inflows grew by 17.9 percent, much of this capital has been repatriated by investors rather than remaining within India. In contrast, Vietnam and Indonesia have continued to attract robust foreign investment into manufacturing, underscoring India's competitive shortcomings.

High growth rates mask debt and structural risks. India's rapid growth has been driven mostly by capital inflows and debt-financed infrastructure projects, raising concerns about sustainability.

Government debt levels are high, with total fiscal deficits covering both central and local governments averaging 10 percent of GDP — more than twice the emerging-market average. On average, interest payments alone consume 20 percent of government spending, threatening long-term fiscal stability. Meanwhile, overreliance on service industries such as IT and financial services makes India particularly vulnerable to external demand fluctuations and the artificial intelligence challenge, increasing the risk of economic volatility.

Modi's government has prioritized infrastructure, investing 43.5 trillion rupees (\$503.8 billion) from



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

2014 to 2023. This has helped reverse a decade-long decline in India's investment-to-GDP ratio, laying the groundwork for a more balanced economy that has been constantly dominated by consumption.

And India has certainly made strides in transportation, telecommunications and energy, improving business conditions and lowering logistics costs. However, the success of this infrastructure drive hinges on whether these investments yield sufficient economic returns. India's 10-year bond yields exceed 6.7 percent. If growth underperforms expectations, debt-funded infrastructure spending could become a liability rather than a catalyst for industrial expansion.

Investors and policymakers

should move beyond the hype in evaluating India's economic trajectory. A more data-driven approach should be employed to assess India's economic strength — one that goes beyond urban legends and promotional campaigns. A nuanced, data-backed approach will be critical in navigating India's evolving economic landscape — ensuring that investment decisions reflect reality rather than rhetoric.

The author is an associate researcher at the Department of International Cooperation under the National Development and Reform Commission of China. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLD

Germany OKs big increase in spending

BERLIN — Germany's parliament approved plans for a massive spending surge on Tuesday, throwing off decades of fiscal conservatism in hopes of reviving economic growth and scaling up military spending for a new era of European collective defense.

The approval in the Bundestag hands conservative leader Friedrich Merz a huge boost, giving the chancellor-in-waiting a windfall of hundreds of billions of euros to ramp up investment after two years of contraction in Europe's largest economy.

Germany and other European nations have been under pressure to shore up their defenses in the face of shifts in US policy, which European leaders fear could leave the continent exposed.

Merz's conservatives and Social Democrats, or SPD, who are in talks to form a centrist coalition after last month's election, want to create a 500 billion euro (\$546 billion) fund for infrastructure and to ease constitutionally enshrined borrowing rules to allow higher spending on defense.

"We have for at least a decade felt a false sense of security," Merz told lawmakers ahead of the vote.

"The decision we are taking today on defense readiness ... can be nothing less than the first major step toward a new European defense community," he said.

The legislation still has to go on Friday to the Bundesrat upper house but the main hurdle to passage there appeared to fall on Monday when the Bavarian Free Voters agreed to back the plans.

The conservatives and SPD wanted to pass the legislation through the outgoing parliament for fear it could be blocked by an enlarged contingent of far-right and far-left lawmakers in the next Bundestag starting March 25. Merz has justified the tight timetable with the rapidly changing geopolitical situation.

"In our view, this is a historic fiscal regime shift, arguably the largest since German reunification," said Robin Winkler, Chief German Economist at Deutsche Bank Research.

"It's excellent news because it sends a very clear message, very clear message also to Europe that Germany is determined to invest

massively in defense," said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

NATO chief Mark Rutte wrote on X that "this sends a powerful message of leadership and commitment to our shared security".

And French President Emmanuel Macron on a visit to Berlin congratulated Chancellor Olaf Scholz "on the historic vote of the Bundestag which is good news for Germany and good news for Europe".

The reforms mark a major rollback of the so-called debt brake imposed after the 2008 global financial crisis but have been criticized by many as outdated and putting Germany into a fiscal straitjacket.

Shift in policy

But critics, including within his own party, accuse Merz of "voter fraud" for promising spending restraint during the election campaign only to announce the shift in fiscal policy just days after winning.

"The politician's greatest asset is credibility," said Tino Chrupalla, co-leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, during the debate.

"With these embarrassing actions, Mr Merz, you have already completely squandered yours. The voters feel betrayed by you, and rightly so."

Before the vote, Bernd Baumann of the AfD accused Merz of ignoring the will of voters by seeking to push the vote through the outgoing parliament.

Lars Klingbeil of the SPD said that the new spending aimed to "maintain peace in Europe" but also "invest in advancing the economy and strengthening social cohesion" and therefore help counter "division and polarization".

Economists caution that further reforms are needed, for example, to cut bureaucracy, to ensure sustainable growth.

Fitch Ratings agency also warned on Tuesday that Germany's coveted AAA rating could come under pressure in the longer run if its vast spending effort is not offset by consolidation measures, or fails to produce a lasting improvement in economic growth.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

x.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

These materials are distributed by China Daily Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing, China. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

539 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900

San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-6288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

600 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K3

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is

published daily except weekends by China

Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New

York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at

New York, NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to

CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite

2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 - No. 1540



Rescue efforts

Emergency teams rescue a dog from a flooded area after heavy rains in Malaga, Spain, on Tuesday. With heavy rains hitting the country for a third week in a row, at least two people were reported missing and hundreds evacuated in the southern region of Andalusia, where several rivers had overflowed, or were at risk of doing so.

GREGORIO MARRERO / AP

Young innovators display skills at robotics event

By YANG GAO in Toronto
gaoyang@chinadailyusa.com

Young Chinese have joined more than 200 teams in a robotics competition in Canada, showcasing their country's growing dominance in robotics and artificial intelligence.

Among the standout competitors in the Federation of International Robot Sports Association event in Markham, Ontario, were Sophia Wang, 13, and Luca Wang, 16, two Chinese participants who demonstrated their technical expertise in different categories.

Sophia's team competed in DRC Explorer and Autonomous Driving, bringing two specialized robots.

"One robot transports objects to designated locations, while the other interprets traffic signs and navigates a path accordingly," Sophia said.

The process was not without challenges, she said.

"Programming errors were the biggest issue. Sometimes it takes hours to figure out exactly where the problem is."

For Luca, adapting to last-minute

rule changes posed the greatest challenge.

"We spent three months building our robot, but then the competition regulations changed, and we had to redo two months of work."

His team's robot was designed to transport objects precisely to specific destinations.

Despite the challenges, Luca said he saw the event, from March 15 to 16, as a defining moment in his robotics journey. "This is my last robotics competition before I graduate. For many of us, this is our final chance to compete together, so we were aiming for first place."

He plans to pursue a degree in engineering, and he credits the competition with strengthening his skills in problem-solving and programming.

"China has a long history of excellence in FIRA competitions," said Maria Sun, vice-chair of FIRA Canada.

China's influence on robotics continues to expand, she said, Northeastern University in Shenyang, Liaoning province, once the FIRA world champion, being a great example of this.

Chinese teams have been part of FIRA since 1996, and their participation continues to grow each year.

"FIRA is huge in China," Sun said. "Last year I visited China and built strong connections with FIRA's Chinese organizers. We have Chinese teams participating actively in both China and Canada."

This year five Chinese teams competed in Canada, with participants ranging in age from 5 to 18.

"Most of the Chinese competitors were in the 10 and 14 age groups; they arrived in Toronto from cities like Vancouver and Montreal, as well as from China."

Top competitors

"Chinese teams are strong in programming, engineering and hands-on robotics. They have always been among the top competitors, and we hope to see even more participation in the future."

FIRA Canada is rapidly cementing its place as a global robotics hub, attracting international teams and fostering local talent. Sun talked of the competition's role in advancing STEM education.

"FIRA directly promotes AI and

robotics education; it trains students in programming, mechanics and electronics while also strengthening teamwork and leadership."

The top three teams from the event will qualify for the FIRA RoboWorld Cup in Daegu, South Korea, in August.

Beyond competition, she said, the event serves as a platform for education and skill-building.

"FIRA is not just about winning, it's about inspiring the next generation of engineers. Many participants start from scratch, assembling circuit boards and designing their robots entirely by hand. Watching their focus and dedication is truly inspiring."

With AI and automation shaping the future, Sun said she believes events such as FIRA provide a crucial foundation for young engineers.

"This is the AI era, the robotics era. For students, competitions like this not only improve their skills but also help them gain entry into top universities and prepare for careers in technology and innovation. This is not just a competition. We are pioneers, and we represent technological innovation."

UK govt plan to slash spending on welfare slammed

By EARLE GALE in London
earle@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Politicians, charities, and human rights groups in the United Kingdom have slammed plans by the government to slash social welfare spending.

The cuts, which the government calls reforms, were outlined by Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Liz Kendall on Tuesday and include measures to get more people off benefits and back into work, and rule changes that will make it harder for people to qualify for sickness benefits in the first place.

Kendall said the country of 67 million people cannot afford to have 9.3 million working-age residents out of work and claiming benefits.

She said 2.8 million of the 9.3 million on benefits are on long-term sick leave, a total that is set to grow to more than 4 million if things stay on the current trajectory.

"This Labour government believes that an active state can transform people's lives," she told

lawmakers as she announced the planned changes.

The government hopes the changes unveiled this week will save the country 5 billion pounds (\$6.5 billion) a year by 2029-30.

The arm's-length Office for Budget Responsibility has said the UK spent 64.7 billion pounds on benefits in 2023-24, a total that would rise to 100.7 billion pounds a year in 2029-30 if eligibility rules are not changed. Arm's-length bodies are public agencies that deliver policies and services for the government, often with some degree of independence.

Critics response

Pat McFadden, a member of the government's Cabinet, told the BBC it could not "sit back and relax and pretend it's a progressive thing to watch, 2 million, then 3 million, then 4 million people go onto these benefits, many of them never working."

But critics responded by saying the government was planning to make the country's poorest people pay for its budgetary shortfalls, and



Britain's Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Helen Whately speaks on welfare reform in London on Tuesday. REUTERS

that the government should be collecting more tax from wealthy people, not making life difficult for the most vulnerable.

Shami Chakrabarti, a Labour Party member of the UK's second chamber, the House of Lords, said it is "wrong in principle" to cut benefits received by people with disabilities and illnesses.

Labour Party lawmaker Rachael Maskell added: "We need to ensure that people are getting the support that they need in order to be safe and independent."

Fellow Labour Party lawmaker Diane Abbott said the welfare system should be left alone and funded through a 2-percent wealth tax on people with assets of more than 10 million pounds.

And the charity Citizens Advice also criticized the plan, saying the government seemed to be "pulling the quick and easy lever" to take "money out of the system."

The Mirror newspaper quoted Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, as saying: "It is hard to conceive of a Labour government treating the most vulnerable members of society any worse ... cruelty is becoming a hallmark of this government. It is simply indefensible."

Despite the opposition, the proposed changes are sure to become law because the government has a massive parliamentary majority.

Young Indonesians take on the Mandarin challenge

JAKARTA — Around 20 years ago, Lu Fang landed in Indonesia from China to begin her career as a Mandarin teacher. Now, she is thrilled as more Indonesians love to learn the Chinese language and its culture.

Lu's journey to the Southeast Asian country began after a friend of hers in China told her about a private school in the Kelapa Gading area in North Jakarta, which was looking for a native Chinese teacher to give Mandarin lessons to preschool and elementary students.

"Since 2003, many private schools in Indonesia have started giving Mandar-

in lessons to their students. So, I decided to fly down to become the school's teacher. It's very exciting," said Lu, who hails from the Chinese city of Xi'an.

Lu, who still works at the school, found that more Indonesian children have been passionate about learning the language in the past eight years.

"Some students used to be afraid of learning it. Mandarin has four tones, and its characters, for them, are hard to write. Now, I see more students enjoying learning it. Perhaps, the internet has also helped them to learn Mandarin in many ways," she said.

Her students, including Annemarie Dealova, Siyu Huo and Liu Junji are able to speak Mandarin fluently. All of them began learning it at an early age.

Dealova, now 11, has been learning Mandarin since the age of 3. Learning Mandarin tones and pronunciations used to be challenging for her, but persistent practice has improved her skills.

"Learning Chinese characters was difficult at first. I had to memorize the characters and keep practicing a lot. Now I'm better at them," she said.

For 12-year-old Siyu and 10-year-old Liu, who are both of Chinese

descent, learning Mandarin was interesting, fun and easy. Learning the language was helpful as they enjoy visiting China for family vacations. Mandarin, they said, helps them to communicate and interact with the locals confidently.

Their school principal, Januati Halim, said her school offers Mandarin as a subject since it is one of the most spoken languages in the world.

Moreover, China's investment and trading in Indonesia continue to increase, highlighting the importance of Mandarin, which will contribute to the students' future, particularly

when they work at or with Chinese businesses or institutions, she said.

"The ability to speak Mandarin can help boost career prospects, offering benefits in employability, business opportunities, as well as cultural understanding," she said.

In September last year, the Chinese embassy in Indonesia, in collaboration with Istiqlal Mosque, the largest mosque in Southeast Asia, inaugurated a Chinese cultural space within the mosque complex. Named "China Space", it fosters bilateral cultural and educational exchanges, and cooperation between China and Indonesia.

The classroom not only offers Mandarin lessons and showcases traditional Chinese culture, such as

silk paintings, porcelain and panda dolls, but also demonstrates a number of Chinese technological achievements, represented by satellites and ship models, and miniature Jakarta-Bandung high-speed trains.

For over a decade, China has been Indonesia's largest trading partner and a significant source of foreign investment. The two countries will commemorate the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relations in April.

Both Halim and Lu expressed hope that the cooperation between the two countries would increase further, saying: "China and Indonesia should maintain their continued trust and support."

XINHUA

WORLDUS

Trump floats US take Ukraine power plants

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

US President Donald Trump, in a call on Wednesday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, suggested that the United States could take control of Ukraine's power plants to ensure their security in their discussion about a limited cease-fire between Kiev and Moscow.

Trump told Zelensky that the US could be "very helpful in running those plants with its electricity and utility expertise," according to a White House statement from Secretary of State Marco Rubio and national security adviser Mike Waltz.

Trump added that "American ownership of those plants could be the best protection for that infrastructure."

The power plant discussion included the Zaporizhzhia nuclear facility, Europe's largest, which is currently controlled by Russia, The New York Times reported.

"The question was exclusively about the station under temporary occupation," Zelensky said.

The two leaders also agreed on a partial cease-fire against energy facilities, according to the statement.

Technical teams will meet in Saudi Arabia in the coming days to discuss broadening the cease-fire to the Black Sea on the way to a full cease-fire. They agreed that could be the first step toward the end of the war and ensuring security.

Trump also briefed Zelensky on his conversation Tuesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Zelensky asked for additional air defense systems, particularly Patriot missile systems; Trump agreed to work with him to find what was available, particularly in Europe.

While there were signs of progress, Putin and Zelensky still have firm positions on certain issues.

According to the Kremlin, Putin made clear to Trump that there must be a halt to foreign military aid and intelligence-sharing as part of any deal.

But White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt on Wednesday said that US "intelligence sharing in terms of defense for Ukraine" would continue.

In a readout on Tuesday of the talk between Trump and Putin, Leavitt posted: "The leaders agreed that the movement to peace will begin with an energy and infrastructure cease-fire, as well as technical negotiations on implementation of a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea, full ceasefire and permanent peace."

Trump's call with Zelensky was about half as long as his call with Putin, in which the Russian president agreed to not target Ukraine's energy infrastructure but declined to back a full 30-day cease-fire.

"Even last night, after Putin's conversation with ... Trump, when Putin said that he was allegedly giving orders to stop strikes on Ukrainian energy, there were 150 drones launched overnight, including on energy facilities," Zelensky said at a news conference with Finnish President Alexander Stubb in Helsinki prior to his call with Trump.

Russia responded by saying it had halted its targeting of Ukraine's

energy facilities and accused Kiev of attacking equipment near one of its pipelines.

"Unfortunately, we see that for now there is no reciprocity on the part of the Kiev regime," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

The White House described the call between Trump and Putin as the first step in a "movement to peace."

But there was no indication that Putin backed away from his conditions for a prospective peace deal, which are fiercely opposed by Kiev.

Waltz said on social media that he and his Russian counterpart, Yuri Ushakov, agreed Wednesday that their teams would meet soon in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, "to focus on implementing and expanding the partial cease-fire President Trump secured from Russia."

The Russian Defense Ministry said its military had launched seven drones at power facilities related to the military-industrial complex in Ukraine's southern Mykolaiv region, but that it shot them down after receiving Putin's order to not hit energy infrastructure.

Moscow accused Ukraine of targeting its energy facility in the Krasnodar region bordering the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014, several hours after the Putin and Trump talks.

The ministry said that three drones targeted oil-transfer equipment that feeds the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, causing a fire and leading an oil tank to lose pressure.

"It is absolutely clear that we are talking about yet another provocation deliberately concocted by the Kiev regime, aimed at derailing the peace initiatives of the US president," the ministry said.

Russia said that its air defenses intercepted 57 Ukrainian drones over the Azov Sea and several Russian regions.

"If the Russians don't hit our facilities, we definitely won't hit theirs," Zelensky said.

"I don't think anybody should make any concessions in terms of helping Ukraine, but rather, assistance to Ukraine should be increased," Zelensky said. "This will be a signal that Ukraine is ready for any surprises from the Russians."

Trump has often complained about the cost of the conflict — the US has sent Ukraine more than \$180 billion in military and economic aid since the start of the war in February 2022.

Nigel Gould-Davies, senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said that it was "completely unsurprising" that Putin rejected the cease-fire, adding that it's "imprudent for him to tell President Trump that directly, since Trump has made ending the war a very, very high priority."

Zelensky said that one of the most difficult issues in future negotiations would be the issue of territorial concessions.

"For us, the red line is the recognition of the Ukrainian temporarily occupied territories as Russian," he said. "We will not go for it."

Agencies contributed to this story.

Dastardly act



People gather on top of debris of buildings at the scene of an explosion near the Presidential Palace, also known as Villa Somalia, in the Hamar Jajab district of Mogadishu, Somalia, on Tuesday. The Information Ministry called the attack a "cowardly act of desperation". The statement did not provide an official death toll. FEISAL OMAR / REUTERS

US move 'attempt to gain political capital'

Recent airstrikes on Houthis will only escalate regional tensions, experts say

By YANG RAN

yangran1@chinadaily.com.cn

The recent US airstrikes on the Houthi forces aim to align with Israel in targeting anti-Israeli groups in the Middle East and to deter Iran, experts said, adding that the Donald Trump administration is also using these intensified attacks to gain political capital.

However, experts warn these strikes may not achieve their intended outcomes and could instead escalate regional tensions.

Since Trump announced large-scale airstrikes on Houthi forces in Yemen on Saturday, US military operations in Yemen have continued for five days, targeting military sites and homes. US media describe this as the most significant military action since Trump's second term began.

According to a statement from the Houthi-run health authority on Sunday, the death toll from the US airstrikes over the past days has increased to 53, including five children and two women.

The US said the operation aims to secure Red Sea shipping lanes threatened by Houthi attacks. The Houthi group in Yemen has launched attacks against what it calls Israel-bound ships or those affiliated with Israel in and around the Red Sea since November 2023, demanding an end to its military actions in Gaza.

A pause in Houthi assaults followed a January cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. However, as negotiations for a second-phase Gaza cease-fire stalled and aid remained blocked, the Houthis announced on March 11 that they would resume attacks on "Israel-

linked" ships across the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden and Bab al-Mandab Strait until the crossings of the Gaza Strip are reopened and aid allowed in.

Shu Meng, an assistant professor at Shanghai International Studies University's Middle East Studies Institute, noted that Trump's military action against the Houthi forces was a calculated move, not a sudden decision. "March's instability in the Red Sea gave Trump a suitable excuse for military actions, as Houthi attacks on US and Israeli merchant ships have long disrupted international trade in the region," she said.

"Beyond protecting merchant ships, the US also has several deeper strategic goals, including reinforcing support for Israel, coordinating with Israel to reshape the Middle East and curbing Iran's influence. Also, targeting the Houthis serves as a warning to Iran."

Different approach

"Domestically, with the Houthis being active during Joe Biden's presidency, Trump wants to showcase a different approach, emphasizing his decisiveness to gain strategic and political advantages," Shu said.

Days after the US launched its extensive military operation against Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, Israel carried out deadly bombardments across the Gaza Strip early on Tuesday, killing almost a thousand people in two days.

Niu Xinchun, executive director of the China-Arab Research Institute of Ningxia University, pointed out that the US essentially executed a preemptive strike.

"The US and Israel coordinate

their actions, with the US handling the Houthis in the Red Sea, with Israel focusing on Gaza, a strategy in place for over a year," Niu explained. "The Red Sea and Gaza issues are closely interconnected. With conflict in Gaza and US actions against the Houthis, both regions are likely to remain in conflict for some time."

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the airstrikes would continue until Houthi attacks on US ships and drones cease. However, the Houthis responded on Wednesday by targeting the USS *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier in the Red Sea for the fourth time in the past 72 hours.

Experts warn the US strikes may not meet their objectives. Shu Meng noted that the Houthis have strong local support in Yemen. "Relying solely on military strikes, especially targeting leaders, is unlikely to be effective and could provoke more frequent retaliatory attacks on merchant ships, worsening the Red Sea situation."

Niu echoed this, noting that while the US aims to deliver "devastating strikes" to weaken the Houthis' military strength, history shows that airstrikes alone are insufficient. "Devastating strikes require both air and ground forces, but the US is unlikely to commit ground troops. Thus, even with prolonged strikes and expanded targets, achieving US objectives is unlikely."

Shu said the complex issues in the Red Sea region stem from intertwined problems that cannot be solved by military means alone. "The unilateral actions of the US and Israel lack broad international support, potentially exacerbating tensions and complicating the situation," she said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Washington urged to end blockade on Havana

By ZHOU JIN

zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

China has blasted the United States for making "forced labor" an excuse for suppressing dissidence, urging Washington to stop the blockade and sanctions on Cuba in any name.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning made the remarks on Wednesday after the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio last month announced the expansion of a visa restriction policy to target Cuban officials believed to be tied to a labor program that sends Cuban workers overseas, particularly healthcare workers.

The expanded restrictions target individuals and immediate family members of individuals believed to be responsible for the program, which Rubio described as "forced labor."

Caribbean Community foreign ministers expressed concerns over the decision in a meeting with US Special Envoy for Latin America Mauricio Claver-Carone earlier this month.

Several leaders of the Caribbean states criticized the US move, with several prime ministers declaring they would rather forfeit their access to US soil than compromise healthcare for their citizens.

'Perfect excuse'

"The so-called forced labor has been used as a perfect excuse and tool for Washington to pursue hegemony and attack dissenting views," Mao told a daily news conference.

Relevant measures of the US are an extension and escalation of its over 60 years of sanctions and blockade on Cuba, she said.

Mao cited Cuba's Director of the Central Medical Cooperation Unit Michael Cabrera Laza as saying that in the past 60 years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuba sent over 600,000 medical personnel to over 60 countries, provided medical services for over 230 million people, and performed over 17 million surgeries, which saved the lives of more than 12 million people.

Cuba's global medical missions and their services are welcomed by governments and people of Caribbean states, Mao said.

China opposes coercive diplomacy, the spokeswoman said, urging Washington to remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. The US should do more to improve its ties with Cuba and offer real assistance to the Caribbean states, she added.

Briefly

MEXICO

Capital city bans violent bullfighting

Mexico City lawmakers on Tuesday voted overwhelmingly to ban violent bullfighting, triggering outrage from aficionados and celebration from animal rights advocates. The legislation, approved by a 61-1 vote, prohibits the killing of bulls and the use of sharp objects that could injure the animals. It also sets time limits on how long bulls can be in the ring, all part of an initiative dubbed bullfighting without violence. The decision sparked angry protests from bullfighting supporters and matadors. Bullfighting has long been considered a tradition and a pastime in Latin America, but has come under criticism for animal cruelty because bulls are often killed at the end of the fight.

PAKISTAN

Leader calls for unity after surge in attacks

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called on Tuesday on the country's political leadership to unite in its resolve to combat militants with "the full force of the state" following a surge in deadly violence. Separatists in Balochistan last week hijacked a train and killed 26 hostages before security forces shot dead all 33 attackers in one of the worst bloodsheds in recent months that drew condemnation.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Trump releases JFK assassination files

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump released material related to the 1963 assassination of former president John F. Kennedy on Tuesday, seeking to honor his campaign promise to provide more transparency about the shock event in Texas.

An initial tranche of electronic copies of papers flooded into the National Archives website in the evening with a total of more than 80,000 expected to be published after the Justice Department lawyers spent hours scouring them.

The release is nonetheless likely to intrigue people who have long been fascinated with a dramatic period in history, with the assassination and with Kennedy himself.

Larry J. Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics and author of *The Kennedy Half Century*, said it will take time to fully review the records.

"We have a lot of work to do for a long time to come, and people just have to accept that," he said.

Many of the files reflected the work by investigators to learn more about assassin Lee Harvey Oswald's time in then Soviet Union and track his movements in the months leading up to Kennedy's assassination in Dallas on Nov 22, 1963.

An initial review of the papers did not show deviations from the central narrative.

Some of the documents from previous releases have offered details on the way intelligence services operated at the time, including CIA cables and memos discussing visits by Oswald to the Soviet Union and Cuban embassies during a trip to Mexico City just weeks before the assassination.

Trump's secretary of health and human services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr, the son of Robert Kennedy and nephew of John F. Kennedy, has said he believes the Central Intelligence Agency was involved in his uncle's death, an allegation the agency has described as baseless.

Fredrik Logevall, a Harvard his-

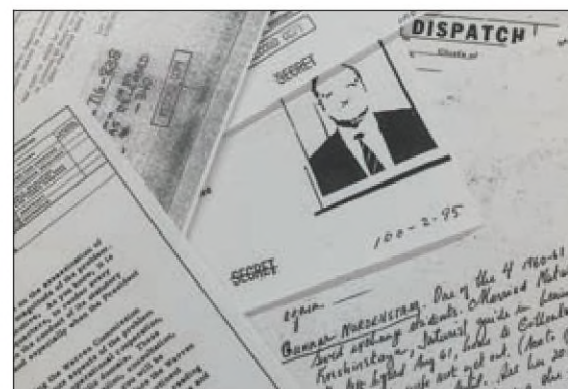
tory professor whose books include *JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century 1917-56*, said in an email the new documents may help fill in the picture.

"It's valuable to get all the documentation out, ideally in unredacted form. But I don't expect dramatic new revelations that alter in some fundamental way our grasp of the event," he said.

Trump signed an order shortly after taking office in January related to the release of documents, prompting the Federal Bureau of Investigation to find thousands of new documents.

In the scramble to comply with Trump's order, the US Justice Department ordered some of its lawyers who handle sensitive national security matters to urgently review records from the assassination, according to a Monday evening email seen by Reuters.

"President Trump is ushering in a new era of maximum transparency," Director of National Intelli-



Documents are displayed after they were released following an order from US President Donald Trump, in Washington DC, on Tuesday. MICHAEL KAPPELER/REUTERS

gence Tulsi Gabbard said in a post on X.

Alice L. George, a historian whose books, including *The Assassination of John F. Kennedy*, explore the modern US, said US people's curiosity about assassinations and questions about government transparency add "to a sense

that there must be important evidence hidden away in these files".

But she said government records were unlikely to resolve questions people still have. "I think there may continue to be more record releases," she said.

LIFE

Joining ingenuity with culture

Craftsman honored by Forbes China for transforming traditional architectural techniques into a phenomenon,
Yang Feiyue reports.

In the worst of times, Liu Wenhui couldn't afford the delivery fee for a package six years ago. Now, he stands proudly as one of Forbes China's top 100 outstanding craftsmen of 2024, having transformed his passion for ancient Chinese architecture into a cultural phenomenon.

In a spacious plant based in Hangzhou, the capital of East China's Zhejiang province, the air hums with saws and smells of fresh wood. Workers meticulously craft ancient-looking building components like *dougong* (interlocking wooden brackets). Each person has a specific role — selecting wood, making components, sanding, polishing, and assembling the mortise-and-tenon joints.

"We are busy producing a new array of mortise-and-tenon building blocks," says the man in his 40s.

By simplifying designs and using plastic instead of wood, they've reduced the manufacturing costs of making toys that customers buy to build an ancient structure.

The most affordable set is 98 yuan (\$13) and 2,000 units sold out in less than a month after launching in November 2024.

"The best way to preserve cultural heritage is to make it usable," explains the man from Fenyang in North China's Shanxi province.

"When people engage with it, it thrives," he adds.

One of the oldest and most revered woodworking techniques worldwide, mortise-and-tenon has a history of over 7,000 years. Originating in ancient China, this method relies on interlocking joints to connect pieces of wood without nails, glue or other fasteners.

The mortise is a cavity or hole carved into one piece of wood, while the tenon is a protruding tongue on another piece that fits snugly into the mortise. When joined, the pieces create a durable and often intricate structure.

This technique reached its zenith in traditional Chinese architecture, where it was used to construct everything from grand temples and palaces to humble homes and furniture. The most iconic examples of mortise-and-tenon craftsmanship can be seen in ancient Chinese buildings.

"For ancient architecture, if you don't build it right, it won't stand and look good," Liu says.

Pursuit of heritage

Exposed to the dense ancient temples and pagodas in his hometown since childhood, Liu has been predisposed to the charm of traditional Chinese architecture.

After completing his studies in fine arts at Taiyuan Normal University in Shanxi in 2004, he worked in design and engineering management at a company in Kunshan, Jiangsu province, for over a decade, eventually getting promoted to head of project management in Vietnam.

While gaining financial stability, Liu felt a sense of emptiness and a sporadic desire to pursue culture and art.

"Every day was a haze — the hum of machinery and the constant presence of construction workers — it was stifling," he recalls, adding that reality veered far from what he envisioned for himself.

In 2012, he quit his job and started



Above: An array of mortise-and-tenon scale models developed by Liu Wenhui. Below middle: Liu poses with a wooden hammer after a mortise-and-tenon class in Shanghai. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: The 1:20 scale model crafted by Liu's team of the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda in Shanxi province. Right: A *dougong* to scale.



The best way to preserve cultural heritage is to make it usable."

Liu Wenhui,
craftsman and developer of mortise-and-tenon toys

exploring opportunities for a different career.

He found inspiration at the end of the year when he visited a museum in Shanghai and was immediately drawn to a model of an ancient Chinese building.

"I thought of my roots," he says. "I realized that such beauty shouldn't be locked behind glass — it should be touched, interacted with, and enjoyed," he adds.

That was when he came up with the idea of mortise-and-tenon building blocks. Liu started digging into books on ancient buildings and visiting them to study their details.

He made countless visits to Foguang Temple on Shanxi's Mount Wutai, a Tang Dynasty (618-907) masterpiece of architecture, and photographed, measured and documented its details.

"The surveying and mapping took over a year," he says.

He had to precisely determine the

position and dimensions of every component of the traditional wooden brackets.

This precision allows him to balance the structure between the brackets, columns and beams.

Through various experiments, he built a 1:20 scale model of the eastern main hall of Foguang Temple, complete with interlocking *dougong* brackets, roof tiles and tiny beasts on the eaves.

"This is a way to pay tribute to the ancient craftsmen and their architectural artistry," he says.

To make the blocks, the trick is to dissect the mortise-and-tenon structure and maintain its external consistency when scaling it down.

"Transforming a 30-centimeter-thick column into a 1-centimeter version requires subtle design adjustments. The challenge lies in ensuring that these miniaturized components can still fit together seamlessly and be disassembled,

which is no easy feat. It tests the limits of manufacturing precision. My goal is to create a desktop toy that faithfully replicates the interior and exterior of the original structure," he says.

As a building toy, its playability — the flexibility of disassembling and reassembling the components of the *dougong* model — poses another challenge to Liu.

The more detachable the components, the stronger the model's playability and the more advanced the underlying technology must be.

"When we first created *dougong* building blocks, many parts couldn't be disassembled, and there were still many flaws," Liu says.

He eventually overcame the problem by consulting with artisans who built old-fashioned village houses.

Through trial and error, Liu produced dozens of sets of blocks in 2013, all of which were quickly snatched up online.

"It was encouraging," he says.

Inspired to innovate

In 2016, Liu enrolled in the China Academy of Art to pursue traditional Chinese landscape painting, which he feels represents the essence of Chinese art, to deepen his understanding of the aesthetic principles that underpin his craft.

However, his journey to further revive ancient mortise-and-tenon craftsmanship was far from smooth. Unlike industries such as porcelain or tea, which have enjoyed uninterrupted development and possess complete industrial chains, the ancient art of mortise-and-tenon had largely faded into obscurity in modern life.

The lack of a preexisting ecosystem meant Liu had no established suppliers, no reference points and no roadmap to follow.

When his mortise-and-tenon studio was established, Liu faced many

challenges ranging from construction deciphering to artistic design and model-making.

He even sold his house to fund his creative endeavors.

Initially, Liu relied on outsourcing his designs. However, the suppliers he approached struggled to meet his standards.

"The precision required for mortise-and-tenon joints is incredibly high," Liu says, adding that he knew he had to take control of the entire process.

While pursuing his studies at the academy, he established his production plant, investing heavily in equipment and training, hiring skilled craftsmen, and teaching them the intricacies of mortise-and-tenon construction.

However, Liu hit a bump in 2019 when he found his "heavy toys" could only reach limited clientele due to their higher costs.

It inspired him to innovate. By combining traditional craftsmanship with modern manufacturing techniques, he streamlined production while maintaining the integrity of the ancient art form.

"We reduced the number of parts needed for each structure, making it easier to assemble while preserving the design complexity," he explains.

Liu's perseverance paid off. What began as a small workshop has grown into a thriving business, expanding from 200 square meters to 2,000 sq m.

His products have found a strong market, with annual revenues peaking at 15 million yuan, a growth rate of 30 percent over the past two years.

Wang Yongxian, a cultural relics protection expert from Shanxi, says: "Liu has carried the cultural mission of bringing ancient Chinese architectural craftsmanship to life."

"The *dougong* and mortise-and-tenon structures are not only living specimens of traditional craftsmanship but also enduring spiritual symbols of Chinese civilization," Wang says. "As modern urbanites at home and abroad touch the intricate structures of mortise-and-tenon and appreciate the interplay of mechanics and aesthetics, this once-dormant art, long confined to ancient texts, is becoming a cultural calling card for Chinese civilization to the world."

To date, Liu has developed sets of blocks for more than 80 ancient buildings, including those from the Palace Museum in Beijing and pavilions around West Lake in Hangzhou. Years of experience have enabled Liu to make interior analysis of various ancient architectural structures by seeing their exterior without using pen, paper or computer.

"I need to check the information to verify and fine-tune my drafts before the 3D modeling and printing," he says.

Liu believes his recognition by Forbes China has opened new doors for international expansion.

"I hope to collaborate with global partners and bring mortise-and-tenon craftsmanship to the world," he says.

"This craft is not just about architecture. It's a symbol of Chinese ingenuity and culture."

Contact the writer at
yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

London Book Fair turns a page for Chinese publishers

LONDON — The London Book Fair, one of the world's premier publishing events, opened on March 11, highlighting China's publishing achievements, global collaborations, and growing influence in the industry.

Running through to March 13, the fair drew more than 30,000 publishing professionals and over 1,000 exhibitors worldwide.

"Book fairs like this and working with publishers globally, including those from China, are essential for sharing knowledge," says Martin Liu, chief operating officer and publisher at LID Publishing. His London-based company released the English edition of *The Power of Time*, a Chinese publication.

Liu notes that after the book's launch, he and his colleagues were

"amazed" by the diversity and world-class quality of books from China and emphasizes that Chinese publishers play a crucial role in bringing Chinese literature and ideas to global readers.

At the China booth, more than 50 Chinese publishers and book trade companies showcased over 4,000 high-quality publications. The three-day event featured approximately 40 activities, including book launches, copyright signings, and reader seminars, underscoring country's commitment to fostering international literary dialogues.

Yang Hao, author of *Diablo's Boys*, expressed excitement ahead of the launch of her book's English edition. "I have waited a long time for this translation and publication and I am extremely excited," she



The author (left) of a Chinese publication and Chinese titles (right) on display at the London Book Fair that ran on March 11-13. PHOTOS BY LI YING / XINHUA



said, adding that despite language differences, the book's essence remains intact. She also hopes that international readers appreciate the "different texture" of the translated version.

Amid the evolving global publishing landscape, Richard Charkin, former president of the International Publishers Association, says that the publishing industry has a responsibility to act as a "gatekeeper and purveyor" of quality information in an era where information reliability is increasingly challenged.

First launched in 1971, the book fair remains a key event for the literary world, with this year's theme being "Defining the Future of Creative Content."

XINHUA