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CHINA DAILY

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Yunnan encouraged to open new ground

Xi urges province to turn broad prospects of flower industry into benefits for public

By CAO DESHENG in Beijing and LI YINGQING in Kunming

President Xi Jinping has urged Yunnan province to explore new prospects for high-quality development on the path toward Chinese modernization.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks during an inspection tour in the southwestern province on Wednesday and Thursday.

He also underlined the need for the province to leverage its unique geographical advantages to actively promote high-standard opening-up, in order to build itself into a hub linking the countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The two-day inspection tour took Xi to the cities of Lijiang and Kunming, with his attention focused on the local floral economy, cultural heritage protection and the development of ethnic minority areas. The visit follows his inspection tour in neighboring Guizhou province on Monday and Tuesday.

Xi visited the Lijiang Modern Flower Industry Park and the Old Town of Lijiang on Wednesday afternoon, learning about local efforts to develop specialty agriculture based on regional conditions as well as efforts to promote the cultural tourism industry.

In the flower industry park, Xi talked with villagers and technicians working there, learning about the flower varieties, market sales and their incomes.

The villagers told Xi that they earn over 4,000 yuan (\$550) each month, with their incomes exceeding 7,000 yuan during peak seasons. Flowers represent a truly joyful job, they added.

Xi said with delight: "Your endeavor is thriving and aligns with the development path of modern agriculture. May your lives be as beautiful as flowers."

Noting that the flower industry in Yunnan has broad prospects, he underlined the need to focus on the entire industry chain to make this



President Xi Jinping waves to local residents during his visit to the Old Town of Lijiang in Southwest China's Yunnan province on Wednesday afternoon. Xi also visited a flower industry park during the inspection tour. XIE HUANGCHI / XINHUA

"beautiful industry" become a "happy industry" that benefits local people.

While touring the Old Town of Lijiang, which boasts a history of more than 800 years, Xi emphasized that the cultural tourism industry should follow a path of sustainable and healthy development.

Walking along a stone-paved road, Xi occasionally paused to chat with the tourists. "The town's culture, scenery and folk traditions are truly captivating," Xi said, adding that the integration of culture and tourism has boosted the economy.

He asked local authorities to strike a balance between protection and development of heritage to make the Old Town of Lijiang shine with fresh brilliance.

Visiting the Mufu Mansion, once the residential and working site of

the Naxi rulers of Lijiang in ancient times that witnessed exchanges and integration among various ethnic groups in southwestern China, Xi called for passing on the fine traditional Chinese culture and guiding people of all ethnic groups to consciously foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

On Thursday morning, Xi heard a work report by Yunnan provincial authorities. He urged the province to advance industrial transformation and upgrading based on its actual conditions.

Yunnan should leverage technological innovation to expand resource-based industries, actively develop strategic emerging industries and future industries, and accelerate the development of specialty agriculture and cultural tourism, Xi said.

Efforts should be made to promote industries to grow in value, enterprises to improve efficiency, and people's wallets to get fuller, he said.

While emphasizing the need to promote opening-up, Xi underlined the need for the province to advance the construction of pilot free-trade zones with high quality and enhance the development of transportation, logistics, energy, digital information and other sectors.

Efforts should be made to expand economic, technological, talent, medical and cultural exchanges and cooperation with neighboring countries to make high-quality cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative tangible and accessible, he said.

Xi highlighted Yunnan's crucial role in ecological conservation, saying that the province must resolutely

follow the path of green development and build a solid ecological security barrier in Southwest China.

He urged Yunnan to improve the system of natural protected areas with national parks as the mainstay, strengthen ecosystem conservation and restoration, and continue efforts in combating desertification, soil erosion, and the comprehensive management of small watersheds.

Saying that Yunnan is home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, Xi emphasized the necessity to take vigorous actions to help the border areas develop and local residents become prosperous, and effectively uphold ethnic unity and ensure the stability of border areas.

Contact the writers at caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

WORLD WATCH By Saud Faisal Malik

Meetings put people's well-being in spotlight

China's policy agenda is anchored to the two sessions. The conclusion of the third session of the 14th National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, and the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory body, not only set national priorities for social and economic development, but also showcased China's governance that centers on people's well-being. The sessions are vibrant platforms for extensive policy deliberation and scientific decision-making, strengthening the whole-process people's democracy that is the hallmark of Chinese governance.

The just-concluded two sessions had China's whole-process people's democracy on full display. Among the defining characteristics was the emphasis on public participation. Instead of just discussing theoretical concepts, NPC deputies and CPPCC members offered recommendations based on the realities of Chinese society. The conversations, ranging from social policies and economic development to legislative changes, represented the opinions of people from various walks of life. In 2024 alone, more than 2,000 policies and initiatives addressing important reforms, development and livelihood issues were the result of more than 5,000 motions and suggestions made by NPC deputies and CPPCC members.

China's whole-process people's democracy ensures that citizens enjoy a wide range of rights prior to, during and after decision-making.

See Democracy, page 3

STUDENTS DITCH LIBRARIES FOR FUN, FOCUS OF THEME PARKS

Scholars find serenity, relief amid roller coaster rides, parades

By YU RAN in Shanghai For China Daily



An unexpected trend is sweeping China as students flock to Disneyland, Universal Studios and other theme parks not for the thrill of the rides, parades, or fairy-tale magic, but to find relaxing places to study.

Li Xishan, a PhD student at Beijing Medical University, spends most of her days buried in textbooks, research papers, and preparing for tough exams. The pressure is relentless, and the long hours in the library often leave her exhausted and mentally drained, she said.

"If I'm going to spend hours studying, why not do it some-

where more exciting? At least this way, I can take a break by watching a parade instead of staring at the same library walls," said Li, who has an annual pass to Universal Studios Beijing.

She quickly calculated that if she visited at least three times a year, the cost would be justified. And if she went more frequently, she could maximize the value of her pass while also giving herself much-needed breaks from the medical school campus.

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Peace group backs Global South voice on Ukraine

By HENG WEILI in New York hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

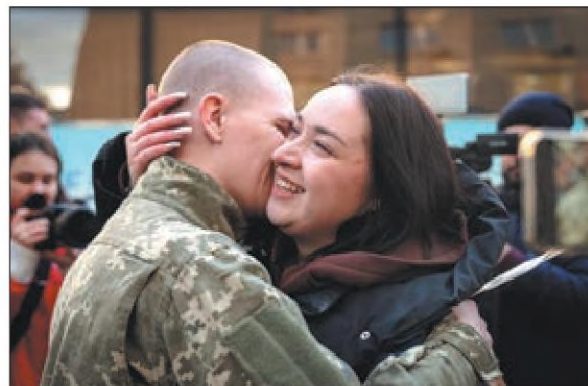
The Group of Friends for Peace had a "highly successful meeting" at the United Nations on Thursday at which the group called for Global South input on the conflict in Ukraine.

"Recognizing that there can be no settlement by military means only and that these deepen human suffering, from the very beginning, we have consistently advocated for an early peaceful resolution and the need to observe principles for de-escalation and the importance of non-expansion of the battlefield and non-intensification of fighting," said Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN, in a group statement.

"We firmly believe that only a negotiated political solution, including inclusive diplomacy and political means based on the UN Charter, can bring this conflict to an end."

Last September, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that Brazil, China, South Africa, Egypt, Indonesia, Türkiye and other countries, as partners of the Global South committed to the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, agreed to launch the Friends of Peace initiative on the Ukraine crisis at the platform of the United Nations.

The group said last year that the platform is not about taking sides in the conflict, engaging in bloc confrontation, or replacing existing platforms. It said it hopes to rely on the United Nations to bring together more Global



A Ukrainian serviceman hugs his fiancée after being released from captivity during a prisoner exchange between Russia and Ukraine in Chernihiv, Ukraine, on Wednesday. The two countries said on Wednesday that each side had released 175 prisoners in one of the largest exchanges since the conflict began. EFREM LUKATSKY / AP

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South countries and send more objective, balanced and rational voices, so as to accumulate conditions and create an atmosphere for a cease-fire, an end to hostilities and the resumption of peace talks.

The platform is open and welcomes the joining of more like-minded countries, in particular, Global South countries.

"Deeply troubled by the prolonged hostilities and the immense negative impacts they have caused, we were

among the first to call for an immediate and complete cease-fire — a call we firmly reiterate today," Fu said. "We believe that prioritizing peace and protecting innocent lives, particularly those of women and children, must remain at the forefront of all efforts."

Sérgio França Danese, Brazil's UN ambassador, said that "recent developments suggest that the conflict might be approaching a turning point, with the focus shifting from the battlefield to the negotiating table. We welcome this potential shift and see it as an opportunity to generate

new momentum toward ending the conflict.

"This could mark a critical step toward peace and pave the way for meaningful and sustainable progress," he said.

"We urge all parties and stakeholders to embrace this opportunity and engage constructively in peace talks. The shared goal must be to find a just and lasting solution — one that addresses mutual concerns of the parties to the conflict and leads to a peace agreement negotiated directly by and acceptable to them," Danese said.

"We believe that the UN can play a role in fostering such diplomatic efforts and in the implementation of any peace agreement."

Danese said that the group is worried about the risks and crises arising from the conflict, which has caused repercussions affecting many countries, including those in the Global South.

"Issues such as food and energy security, as well as humanitarian assistance should be integral to the peace process, and the voices of the Global South should be heard and heeded in supporting peace in the region," he said.

"As the situation continues to evolve rapidly, we, as members of the Group of Friends for Peace, are committed to maintaining close engagement with one another and with all relevant parties," Danese said.

INSIDE Alternative reality Global Views, page 13. Includes subscription rates for various regions and the ANN logo.

PAGE TWO



Theme parks such as Disneyland (picture) and Universal Studios have unexpectedly become study havens. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Li has developed a familiar routine. She arrives at the park early in the morning, before the crowds become overwhelming. Finding a quiet spot near Peet's Coffee shop, she sets out her study materials, orders a cup of coffee, and dives into her textbooks.

Surprisingly, the noise of happy families and excited children helps her concentrate, she said. "It's different from the silence of a library, as it's a kind of 'white noise' that keeps me from feeling too isolated," said Li.

After several hours of study, she has a well-deserved break. Sometimes, she takes a short stroll to stretch her legs, passing by roller-coasters and hearing the thrill-seekers scream in delight. Other times, she catches a street performance or sits by the lake, enjoying the view.

"Seeing other people have fun reminds me that life isn't just about exams and research," she said.

By mid-afternoon, she settles into another spot, often near the Hogwarts Castle, located in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter section of the park, where she can spread out her notes and review case studies.

Friends and classmates often ask her why she doesn't just study in the library or a coffee shop.

"The library makes me feel trapped, and cafes get expensive if I sit there all day," she said. "But here, I can study, take breaks, and even get a bit of exercise — all for the price of an annual pass."

Her study habits have inspired some of her classmates to join her. Together, they formed an informal study group, meeting at different spots in the park, and motivating each other.

Alone in a crowd

Most of those who study in theme parks have annual student passes. An annual student pass for Universal Studios is 988 yuan (\$136), and for Disneyland 1,399 yuan.

Ye Shuyan, a 20-year-old medical student at Shanghai University, likes to study at Disneyland.

She lives off-campus, and struggles to concentrate when she studies in her apartment, which she said is filled with distractions. With an annual pass and Disneyland's proximity to her university, Ye has combined her love of the theme park with her study routines.

"Disneyland provides the perfect balance of fun and focus," she said, adding she can study or review material while taking breaks in the park and enjoying the sights and sounds.

Ye typically spends her afternoons and evenings studying in the quieter corners of Disneyland's restaurants or outdoor seating areas. These spots, often overlooked by visitors, offer peace and quiet and views of the park's serene surroundings.

"The ambience is so different from a typical study space. The colorful environment and playful decorations spark my creativity, and I feel at ease," said Ye, pointing out there are many food options available.

She added: "There are moments when I feel like taking a break and riding the rollercoaster or watching a parade, but I set goals for myself first. I don't allow myself to play until I've completed my study goals for the day. It keeps me on track," she said.

The growing trend of studying in unconventional spaces reflects the changing needs of students, who are increasingly seeking environments that promote creativity, relaxation, and focus. Disneyland's festive atmosphere offers a welcome respite from the pressures of academic life, allowing students to recharge before diving back into their studies.

However, Ye said that Disneyland isn't for everyone and it represents a new way of thinking about study environments.

The park's blend of leisure and focus allows her to take breaks without feeling guilty and to approach her studies with a more positive attitude, she said.

Feed your head

Her approach is shared by Zhao Xinyue, who, while waiting in line one day, saw someone memorizing words from an iPad. From then on, she too began using Disneyland as her study spot, visiting the park five to six times a month.

Studies: Novel learning sanctuaries thrive



Above left: A woman reads in a park in Kunming, Yunnan province. LI JIAXIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE. Above right: A student studies in a restaurant at Disneyland in Shanghai. KONG HUI LI / FOR CHINA DAILY. Below: A delivery worker studies on her break. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



be full of distractions, but Xu sees it differently.

"Doing the hardest tasks in the 'happiest place' actually offsets some of the stress," she explains. The uplifting atmosphere, combined with Disneyland's energetic music, helps her stay motivated and focused.

Rather than feeling torn between work and play, she finds the contrast amusing and effective, and it transforms work from a burden into something enjoyable.

Occasionally, spontaneous performances by roaming musicians catch her attention. However, as these are not scheduled events — she allows herself a break to enjoy them before returning to work.

Xu said she has noticed others working or studying in the park, but hasn't interacted much with them. However, she believes the growing trend of studying or working in Disneyland reflects a deeper societal shift.

"Work and academic pressure have become overwhelming for many people. Having a space to unwind, even briefly, is essential," said Xu, who looks at it as a self-imposed method of motivation.

Xiao Ruan, a 25-year-old third-year architecture graduate student in Beijing, sees studying in a park not as a trend or a romantic notion, but simply as a practical choice.

"My dorm felt too cramped, and I didn't want to go to the library. Plus, I have a bit of a performer's personality — I focus better when there are people around," said Xiao.

She started going to parks when she began working on her thesis, drawn by the open spaces and, importantly, the sunlight. While some may picture her at well-known spots like Ditan Park or Shougang Park, she is just as likely to be found at a quiet green spot near her apartment. "I don't go often, only when the sun is out. I just like soaking up the warmth," she said.

Xiao's routine is simple: she finds a sunlit bench by a lake in a park, opens her laptop, and gets to work.

"Under the open sky, with a gentle breeze and the rustling of leaves around me, even the most daunting thesis work feels a little more manageable," said Xiao, who doesn't struggle with distractions. If she gets tired, she just takes a walk, enjoys the fresh air, and heads home, she said.

Beyond parks, she has tried other unconventional study spots, including high-speed trains, airports, and even airplanes, though parks always remain her top choice for studying.

"The time is shorter, and I don't always feel relaxed, but my efficiency is much higher. Still, when the sun is shining and the deadlines are looming, nothing quite compares to a quiet bench, a warm breeze, and a laptop under the open sky," said Xiao.

Compromise solution

The phenomenon of studying in unconventional places reflects the difficult situation faced by contemporary youth who are torn between the pressure to succeed and the desire for joy.

In a Chinese-style education system where "playing recklessly" is seen as a luxury, young people struggle with a paradox: indulging too much feels irresponsible, yet traditional learning feels suffocating. By choosing to study in a theme park, they seek a compromise — a way to balance academic expectations with entertainment.

This reflects the spirit of young adventurers who challenge conventions — not driven by results, but by a desire to explore.

"Choosing to study in the most chaotic environment while engaging in the most focused activity is an act of defiance against orthodox norms. Yet, like any adventure fraught with risks, this unconventional learning method may ultimately prove unsustainable," said Yu Hai, a sociology professor at Fudan University.

Yu added that the initial sense of freedom may eventually give way to guilt as academic pressures mount, revealing that, despite their attempts to break free, young people remain tethered to the very expectations they seek to escape.

"Studying at joyful places like Disneyland is more than just an experiment in efficiency — it is an unintentional act of rebellion, a search for new possibilities in a world that so often presents only rigid choices," said Yu.

TOP NEWS

New IP rules set to advance opening-up

Regulation will offer support for domestic enterprises going global, expert says

By CAO YIN
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China's continuous efforts in handling foreign-related intellectual property disputes will serve as a robust backbone for domestic enterprises going global and constitute an important guarantee to advance the country's high-level opening-up, experts said.

They made the remarks after the State Council, China's Cabinet, on Wednesday unveiled an 18-article regulation on resolving IP disputes related to foreign matters. The regulation will take effect on May 1.

"This is China's first administrative document that systematically standardizes the handling of foreign-related IP disputes, which is of great guiding significance," said Liu Bin, an IP lawyer at Beijing Zhong Wen Law Firm.

He praised the regulation for strengthening overseas IP information inquiry and warning services, and said that disputes should be resolved through various channels such as mediation and arbitration.

Liu also welcomed the provisions that encourage law firms to improve the efficiency of IP services and support the establishment of overseas IP dispute funds by domestic enterprises, adding that "these measures will help our innovators reduce the cost of cross-border IP rights protection".

Wang Zhenkun, a partner of Shanghai YaoWang Law Offices, said the new regulation "will accelerate the layout of Chinese IP legal service institutions around the world, thereby helping domestic enterprises connect with international rules more effectively and enhancing China's say in global IP governance".

He noted that the regulation will also be conducive to safeguarding national security and development interests, because it states that if foreign countries use

IP disputes as a pretext to constrain or suppress China, or impose discriminatory and restrictive measures on Chinese citizens or organizations, central government departments can take countermeasures.

"Foreign-related IP services are one of the core businesses of our law firm," Wang said. "We not only have a deep understanding of the technical background and commercial demands of domestic enterprises, but can also draw on the resources of overseas cooperation platforms to avoid strategic mistakes caused by cultural or judicial differences."

"We have helped Chinese technology and manufacturing enterprises collect evidence in patent and trademark disputes in Europe, providing them with litigation strategies," he said.

"We have also cooperated with our overseas partners to keep track of local IP laws in real time, in order to proactively adjust IP application plans and reduce potential dispute risks for domestic companies expanding abroad," he added.

The law firm at which Liu is an IP lawyer has also established long-term and stable cooperation with foreign legal service institutions in various countries and regions, such as Germany, France and Switzerland.

"We formulate compliance plans for domestic enterprises in fields such as technology exports and cross-border data transfer, with legal services provided. In this way, they can avoid infringing on the IP rights of foreign entities and reduce the losses they may suffer from overseas IP disputes," Liu said.

Both Liu and Wang suggested that China should step up work on IP talent education, and pledged to work with the authorities in providing legal training for and introducing IP laws to enterprises going global by sharing experiences and practices through case studies.

Fresh strikes



A Houthi soldier checks for damage on Thursday in Yemen's capital Sanaa, after US airstrikes left nine people — seven women and two children — injured. The attack marked the second wave of US airstrikes in the area since Saturday. MOHAMMED HUWAIS / AFP

Japan's long-range missile deployment raises concerns

By CAI HONG
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Japan is considering deployment of long-range missiles on the southwestern island of Kyushu, signaling what analysts warn is a shift from a defensive to a more offensive military strategy.

The move is part of Japan's broader efforts to acquire "counterstrike capabilities" to target enemy positions in an emergency, according to a Kyodo News report.

The deployment is expected to begin at the end of the 2025 fiscal year. The missiles may be stationed at the Ground Self-Defense Force's surface-to-ship missile regiment garrisons in Yuifu, Oita Prefecture and the city of Kumamoto, Kyodo News citing Japanese government sources said.

On Sunday, Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki met with Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi to oppose the deployment of long-range missiles in his prefecture.

The missiles are an upgraded version of the GSDF's Type-12 land-to-ship guided missile, with an extended range of 1,000 kilometers. This range places the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and coastal regions of China within striking distance.

Rupert Schulenburg, assistant editor of The Military Balance, an annual assessment of global military capabilities published by the Washington-based think tank International Institute for Strategic Studies, wrote that the upgraded Type-12 system could significantly enhance Japan's coastal defense and maritime attack capabilities. However,

he pointed out that it is just one of several stand-off missile systems Japan is acquiring.

Kyushu's geographical position makes it strategically significant, given its proximity to the Chinese mainland and Taiwan.

"Once missile deployments are completed, Japan will have greater military leverage in the region, potentially affecting China's national security interests. From a geopolitical perspective, Kyushu is a key location within the 'first island chain,' serving as an important stronghold for the United States in its strategy in the Western Pacific," said Liu Qingbin, a former professor at Yokohama National University's Institute of Advanced Studies.

Located at the westernmost end of Japan's main islands, Kyushu faces both the Korean Peninsula and China across the sea. Analysts said that missile deployments there could impact security dynamics in the Korean Peninsula and give Japan greater ability to intervene in regional conflicts.

Japan's GSDF already operates Type-12 systems at multiple locations in the Ryukyu Islands. The most recent deployment occurred on Okinawa's main island in March 2024, following earlier placements on Ishigaki Island in 2023, Miyako Island in 2020, and Amami Oshima in 2019, according to Liu.

The scholar pointed out that as early as 2020, Japan expressed its intent to strengthen its offensive capabilities, specifically its ability to conduct preemptive strikes. Expanding its arsenal of long-range cruise missiles, he argued, is a key

way to achieve this goal. With a range of 1,000 kilometers, the upgraded Type-12 system provides Japan with medium-to-long-range strike capabilities.

"Japan has been seeking to move beyond its policy of 'exclusive defense,' advocating for the removal of restrictions on 'collective self-defense,'" Liu noted. "This shift aims to equip Japan's Self-Defense Forces with both offensive and defensive capabilities, particularly preemptive strike capabilities."

In January, Japan's Ministry of Defense released a notice on the progress of its "stand-off defense capability" project, publicly revealing for the first time the development of a new ballistic missile. Dubbed the High-Speed Glide Missile for Island Defense, the weapon is primarily intended for "remote island defense."

According to Chinese military reports, this represents another major step in Japan's transition from a defensive to an offensive military strategy.

Japan officially incorporated the High-Speed Glide Missile for Island Defense into its fiscal year 2018 defense budget and later divided the project into two variants: an early deployment model for rapid operational readiness and an enhanced performance model with advanced technical specifications. The recently disclosed missile belongs to the early deployment model, with a range of 500 to 900 kilometers. It underwent four test launches in 2024 at the Pacific Missile Test Center in California and is expected to enter mass production by the end of this year. The GSDF is

scheduled to receive the missiles between 2026 and 2027.

Japan's new Defense Buildup Program outlines plans to establish two regiment-level battalions equipped with the High-Speed Glide Missile for Island Defense. The chosen deployment sites—Kyushu Island and Hokkaido—suggest that large portions of East Asia's coastal regions could be within the missile's strike range.

The enhanced performance model is slated for deployment around 2030, with plans for three additional battalions. Japan is also developing an extended-range version of the missile, projected to exceed 3,000 kilometers in range.

In response to Japan's missile development, Chinese Ministry of National Defense spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said at a press conference last week that Japan is accelerating its military expansion, a move he described as dangerous and contrary to regional stability. He urged Japan to learn from history and exercise caution in its military strategy, emphasizing that Tokyo should focus on fostering trust with its Asian neighbors through concrete actions.

With US backing, Japan recently accelerated the development and acquisition of various long-range strike weapons. Many analysts argued that Japan's new ballistic missile program surpasses the country's traditionally "exclusively defensive" posture, marking a shift toward more offensive capabilities.

"This warrants close attention and vigilance from neighboring countries," Chinese military reports said.

Season of lights



People visit the atrium of Klovicevi Dvori Gallery on Wednesday for this year's Festival of Lights, which will run through Sunday in Zagreb, Croatia. The festival celebrates art, technology, and the arrival of spring. SANDRA SIMUNOVIC / NEWS.COM

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Democracy: Governance integrated with public needs

From page 1

These rights include the liberty to participate, voice their opinions, be informed, and supervise government actions.

In contrast to conventional democratic models that mostly depend on elections, this approach guarantees that democratic values are deeply embedded in all phases of administration, from the creation of policies to their execution and assessment.

Such a mode of democratic decision-making goes from the grassroots to the policy circles.

The grassroots legislative contact stations, which act as direct avenues for public input, are a prime example of the responsiveness of this democratic system.

This bottom-up approach is further reflected in the diverse composition of NPC deputies. The election of migrant workers as deputies in 2018, for example, highlighted how all strata of society are represented, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives in national decision-making. Additionally, the CPPCC National Committee organizes fact-finding missions where members

of the advisory body visit local enterprises and projects, gathering firsthand insights into how policies are being implemented and what improvements are needed.

China's economic resilience is a testament to the effectiveness of this inclusive governance model. China is to sustain its robust growth of GDP at around 5 percent this year after achieving the expected rate last year, despite international uncertainties and a sluggish global economy. This achievement is mostly ascribed to China's ability to adjust policy in response to shifting economic situations.

Moreover, the centralized and unified leadership of the Communist Party of China ensures that decisions are made efficiently, without unnecessary delays due to lack of consensus. This mechanism makes it possible to make timely policy changes in accordance with shifting social conditions and public needs, for example lowering the cost of basic medications, enhancing social security, and implementing focused initiatives to stimulate the economy.

The two sessions put public

accountability to work. They demonstrate how China's whole-process people's democracy successfully integrates governance with public needs. This system not only ensures stability but also fosters continuous development. The feedback cycle of "reflecting-listening-consulting-implementing" creates a governance structure that is both adaptive and accountable.

The sessions primarily focus on livelihood issues. The expansion of high-quality medical resources in central and western China, urban renewal, employment and elder care were among the topics of debate this year. A joint press conference was held by key ministries to address these issues, and announcements such as the expansion of elder care services, the "Skills Illuminate the Future" training initiative, and the nationwide renewal plan for residential communities built before 2000 demonstrate the country's focus of agenda on people's well-being.

In effect, both the NPC and CPPCC play crucial roles in shaping China's long-term strategy and driving forward sustainable deve-

lopment. Their motions and suggestions provide the country with essential references for decision-making, ensuring effective governance and forward-looking decisions. Through their oversight mechanisms, these bodies push forward and refine economic policies, keeping them targeted and impactful.

In a world grappling with uncertainty, China's model of participatory, responsive and inclusive governance offers a compelling alternative. The two sessions reaffirm that people-centered development is not just a political philosophy, but the driving force behind the country's sustained progress and modernization. The annual gatherings serve as a reminder that democracy, when designed to continuously meet people's needs and deeply integrated into governance, can be both effective and transformative.

The author is founder and CEO of The Daily CPEC, a media platform in Islamabad, Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Tribunal set for overseas trade disputes

Urumqi court to support IP rights and foreign-related commercial affairs

By MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi and CUI JIA in Beijing

A tribunal specializing in foreign-related commercial disputes was established on Thursday in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, to support the region's high-level opening-up and promote the high-quality development of the Silk Road Economic Belt, court officials said.

The tribunal, located in the Urumqi area of the China (Xinjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone, is the first and only specialized foreign-related judicial institution in Xinjiang. It aims to provide an optimal venue for international commercial dispute resolution, said Luo Zhiyong, deputy chief judge of the Supreme People's Court's 6th Circuit Court, which oversees major administrative, civil and commercial cases in northwest China, including Xinjiang.

"The tribunal plays an important role in optimizing Xinjiang's business environment and improving the region's international competitiveness," Luo said. "By handling foreign-related cases well, the court will demonstrate Xinjiang's openness, inclusiveness and confidence on the international stage."

Dixat Sayim, president of the High People's Court of Xinjiang, said the tribunal will support the high-quality development of the Xinjiang pilot free trade zone, which was established in November and includes three key areas: Urumqi, Kashgar and Horgos. It is the first free trade zone in China's northwestern border region.

"It aims to protect the legitimate rights and interests of various

market entities equally under the law and promote fair, efficient and convenient resolutions for international civil and commercial disputes," Dilxat said. "It will also provide convenient, efficient, intelligent and precise foreign-related judicial services for Chinese and foreign entities."

The tribunal plans to establish mechanisms for case exchanges and inquiries with other countries. It also aims to strengthen cooperation with universities and research institutions to deepen theoretical studies on counter-sanctions and anti-long-arm jurisdiction, he said.

To support the tribunal's operations, Urumqi's courts have integrated domestic commercial trial functions related to high-level opening-up, such as foreign-related commercial affairs and intellectual property rights. They have also accelerated the development of a team of foreign-related judges with expertise in international rules and foreign legal practices, Dilxat said.

The tribunal is part of the Silk Road Economic Belt Legal Service District, which was established in Urumqi on Nov 17 last year. Similar legal service districts have been set up in Fujian and Shaanxi provinces to support the Belt and Road Initiative.

By the end of January, more than 1,425 cases involving foreign-related commercial affairs, intellectual property rights, contracts, sales and loans had been concluded in the legal service district in Xinjiang, according to a white paper on the district's operations released on Thursday.

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Sleep well



A teacher and students participate in a sleep-related game at a kindergarten in Huaibei, Anhui province, on Thursday. The game was aimed at guiding the children to develop healthy sleeping habits ahead of World Sleep Day, which falls on Friday.

WAN SHANCHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Digital cat promotes eco-friendly items

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu pengchao@chinadaily.com.cn

A digital cat in a village in Chongzhou, Sichuan province, has become a local star promoter since it started working just over a week ago.

Named Meow Buddy, the AI-powered agent resides in a 3D holographic pod at a newly opened shop in Zhuyi village in Daoming township.

Zhao Mingxiao, who oversees the store, said the digital cat's primary task is to share knowledge about sustainable development and promote sustainable lifestyles and products through dialogue and interaction with consumers.

"Beyond our expectations, the shop received wide attention, with sales hitting 5,700 yuan (\$787.20) on its opening day," Zhao said.

The shop, jointly established by Zhao's team which operates Meow Buddy, and Zhuyi village, with technical support from an AI company in Chengdu, Sichuan province, aim

to leverage AI-driven scenarios to promote sustainable products, Zhao said.

She said the shop exclusively sells eco-friendly products, including plastic-free tissue made of bamboo pulp, handmade yak butter soap and jasmine hand oil.

The products are sustainable brands created by young entrepreneurs in cities such as Chengdu, Shanghai, and Shenzhen in Guangdong province. Several popular items have repeatedly sold out due to high demand, Zhao said.

The shop also features an AI sugar painting machine. By scanning a QR code, children can create their favorite designs with AI assistance, including images of Ne Zha, the protagonist of the animated film *Ne Zha 2*.

Liao Qifan, Party secretary of the village, said the digital cat has become a key draw for tourists visiting the village.

"Children can't help but run over to chat with the cat as soon as they see it," she said. "It tells them about

Food and flowers



Tourists enjoy hotpot in a blooming rapeseed flower field in Dangtuo village in Xinyu, Jiangxi province, on Thursday. The unique hotpot service is part of the village's efforts to explore a new form of agricultural tourism that combines rapeseed flower viewing with flower field hotpot experiences in the spring, using flowers as a medium to promote the flourishing development of its local tourism market. ZHAO CHUNLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Fudan University opens research center for Lancang-Mekong youth

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

The Research Center for Lancang-Mekong Youth Astronomical Sciences was inaugurated on Tuesday at Fudan University in Shanghai as the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism enters a new decade.

Leveraging Fudan University's expertise in nuclear physics, astrophysics and other fields, the center aims to facilitate cross-border collaboration in astronomical sciences among China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

It marks the first partnership between a Chinese university and the Lancang-Mekong countries in astrophysics.

"Based on the university's strengths in physics, integrated circuits, atmospheric science, global governance and other disciplines, the center will expand the depth and breadth of astronomical sciences and space technology research through interdisciplinary integration, while fostering innovation communities and strengthening the regional open-cooperation ecosystem," said Jin Li, president of Fudan University.

He emphasized integrating the center's development with education reforms in related academic disciplines at the university to attract outstanding youth from Lancang-Mekong countries to engage in astronomical research, contributing to talent development and higher expertise levels in the region.

In September, the "Fudan No 1 Lancang-Mekong Future Satellite", developed by Fudan University

and the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, was launched and remains in orbit as planned.

Data from the satellite's solar observations and measurements of water and gas distribution in the Lancang-Mekong region will be shared among the six countries for joint research, offering valuable insights for climate governance and pollution control.

The initiative will also help cultivate young talent in astronomical sciences with an international perspective while enhancing the region's scientific and technological innovation capabilities, the university said.

Ma Yugang, director of the center and vice-president of Fudan University, outlined three key missions: deepening cross-border scientific cooperation, addressing fundamental scientific challenges and nurturing a regional innovation community.

The center's work will help narrow gaps in regional research capabilities through measures such as satellite data-sharing platforms and exchange programs for young scholars, Ma said.

"This year, through establishing a collaborative network with the joint efforts of Fudan University, Prince of Songkla University in Thailand, the National University of Laos and other institutions, the multinational scientific research team will advance research in satellite data analysis and space payload verification," Ma said.

"We will also promote the establishment of an astronomical science data-sharing platform to support research in the Lancang-Mekong region and beyond,

including Belt and Road Initiative countries, fostering a more open, inclusive and shared international research network," he added.

Also on Tuesday, the inaugural training camp of the Lancang-Mekong youth astronomical sciences research program began at Fudan University. Leading experts in astrophysics, global governance, atmospheric science and chip technology were invited to deliver academic lectures to around 30 young researchers from 10 universities in the six countries.

The four-day camp aims to enhance participants' academic literacy and comprehensive capabilities, helping drive astronomical studies at their respective institutions, said Wang Yinghao, deputy Party secretary of the School of International Relations and Public Affairs at Fudan University.

"Moreover, scientists from Fudan University will engage with the camp participants to explore collaboration opportunities in research projects and paper writing, with the goal of internationally publishing joint research results among the six countries in the future," he said.

Sriv Tharith, a camp participant and professor at the Royal University of Phnom Penh in Cambodia, said, "The training camp provides a platform for all fellows to gain new knowledge in astronomical sciences, an area where China is among the leading countries. It also allows us to share research ideas and explore international cooperation driven by science and technology innovation. I truly believe this will be a future direction of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation."

E-pass aids travelers from SARs, Taiwan who lose papers

By LI LEI in Hong Kong lilei@chinadailyhk.com

China's immigration authorities have said a temporary e-travel pass will be issued to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan residents if they lose their travel documents on the mainland to help them continue traveling by air and rail without delay.

The National Immigration Administration said the new pass, which came into effect on Thursday, can be applied for through its online service platform, 12367, and is valid for one week. Residents can apply for it up to twice a month. Previously, travelers who misplaced their documents had to obtain written confirmation from a local immigration office, often limited by office hours.

The NIA also announced that residents from these regions can now ask mainland immigration authorities to link their travel and residence permits, reducing the need for cross-verification when applying for bank cards or internet access.

An immigration official said the initiative is part of broader efforts to address the needs of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan residents through innovative solutions. The NIA has worked with more than 20 departments and enterprises, including the Ministry of Public Security, the People's Bank of China and China State Railway Group, to streamline immigration-related processes in transportation, finance and telecommunications.

Hong Kong lawmaker Starry Lee Wai-king expressed her gratitude to the central government and the NIA for mobility initiatives benefiting Hong Kong residents. Lee, a member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, suggested earlier this month that emergency e-passes, currently valid only on the mainland, should also be accepted at mainland-Hong Kong border checkpoints to facilitate smoother travel.

Kingsley Wong Kwok, chairman of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, welcomed the new policy, citing the growing travel needs of Hong Kong residents, who made nearly 82 million visits to the mainland last year.

"Many travelers have faced issues such as lost documents, with the federation receiving 170 requests for assistance related to lost travel passes," Wong said, adding that some residents were unable to apply for physical temporary permits outside office hours, leaving them stranded.

Wang Jia-cheng, a piano instructor from Taiwan living in Langfang, Hebei province, frequently travels to Beijing for lectures. He called the e-pass a positive development for travelers who misplace their documents, though he has never lost his mainland travel permit for Taiwan residents during his six years on the mainland.

Wang also emphasized the importance of digitalizing the travel permit, which requires renewal every five years — a process that can take from a week to a month and cause inconvenience, especially for high-speed rail travelers during the renewal period.

"I also hope the validity period of the mainland travel permit for Taiwan residents can be extended," he said.

Virginia Lou, a Macao resident who travels to Guangdong province nearly every two weeks, was among the first to use the 12367 app to navigate the e-pass application process. She recalled an exchange trip to Guangzhou a few years ago when a group member lost his travel permit and was unable to buy a train ticket, ultimately having to take a cab at a significant cost.

Lou said the e-pass is essential but noted areas for improvement in the application process. For example, applicants must provide a mainland mobile number to receive a verification code, which could be difficult for those without one.

"Additionally, the process asks for the expiration date of the physical permit, which can be difficult to verify without the document on hand," she said.



Visitors interact with an AI-powered digital cat at a newly opened shop in Zhuyi village, Chongzhou, Sichuan province, on Saturday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

al College of Art in the United Kingdom, chose to stay with the team after her internship, turning down other offers.

"Here, I can combine my interests with my work, turn ideas into reality and connect with more brands, which is of great meaning to me," said Zhang, who has

become a core member of the team.

Looking ahead, Zhao hopes to foster collaborations between new consumer brands and local industries to better promote distinctive eco-friendly items. She also plans to open a shop in the city to bring rural specialty products to urban areas.

CHINA

Dire conditions don't deter resolute soldiers

By WANG XIAOYU

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Climbing 1,377 steep steps — the equivalent of ascending some 70 floors in a standard office building — can exert considerable physical strain on most people.

Add to this biting gusts, thin air at an altitude exceeding 4,000 meters and a steep incline of over 70 degrees, and one can begin to grasp a fraction of the rigorous conditions that the border defense regiment in Bedel, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, deals with on a daily basis.

Their routine patrol entails scaling 1,377 steps to reach China's No 3 boundary marker with Kyrgyzstan in Xinjiang's Wushi county. The stairway is known as *tianti* in Mandarin, meaning sky ladder.

Simply reaching the base of the staircase is arduous for most of the year, as heavy snowfall renders sections of the rugged road from the troop's camp — strewn with gravel and surrounded by steep cliffs and valleys — impassable by vehicles.

Soldiers have to trudge through the deep snow on foot.

Recalling his initial journey to the boundary marker in January 2022, soldier Fu Yong recounted how his ears suffered severe blistering in the freezing temperatures.

"Our vehicle became immobile roughly two kilometers from the stairs due to heavy snowfall, forcing us to wade forward in waist-deep snow while carrying our patrol gear to reach just the first step," he said.

Lyu Mengfan, a soldier from Henan province, made his first visit to the boundary pillar in August of 2023.

"I was filled with excitement and couldn't resist sprinting ahead. By the time I neared the marker, my strength had waned, and a senior soldier had to assist me and pull me up for the final stretch," he said.

Upon reaching the summit, Lyu was stunned by the landscape.

"The endless expanse of rolling mountains cloaked in pristine white snow, bathed in golden sunlight at the peak left me in awe," he said.



Soldiers scale a total of 1,377 stairs on a "sky ladder" to China's No 3 boundary marker with Kyrgyzstan, which is perched on a mountain at an altitude of 4,200 meters above the sea level in Wushi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PHOTOS BY FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

"We strive to be part of a collective force embodying these values, inspiring fellow soldiers to uphold our spirit in safeguarding our land."

Lyu Mengfan, soldier from a border defense regiment in Bedel, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region

"One side of the marker represents my homeland, while the other side is a neighboring nation. It dawned on me the tangible significance of our duty as border soldiers," he added.

Through rigorous physical training and acclimatization to high altitudes, Lyu is now able to complete the 1,377 steps in about half an hour, a marked improvement from his initial attempt that took over an hour.

"Several veteran soldiers in our regiment have served here for more than a decade, akin to unyielding rocks safeguarding our country's border. Their unwavering dedication serves as a profound source of inspiration for us," he said.

The spirit of the border soldiers in Bedel is encapsulated in three principles: to endure like solid rock, to stand resilient like a pine tree, and to be as sharp as a sword. These principles are engraved on a stone wall at their military outpost.

Built in the 1990s to prevent mudslides, the 6-meter-tall, 36-meter-long wall bears the names of 143 soldiers who have exemplified the qualities of perseverance, resilience and sharpness through their dedicated contributions.

"Naturally, we all aspire to see our names etched on the wall before retiring from the unit. More importantly, we strive to be part of a collective force embodying these values, inspiring fellow soldiers to uphold our spirit in safeguarding our land," Lyu said.



A rider from the cavalry unit trains on a steeplechase in Baicheng, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in mid-January.

PHOTOS BY FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Cavalry guards stretch of rugged border area

China's only horse riding patrol division attracts new recruits in remote township in northwestern corner of Xinjiang

By WANG XIAOYU in Aksu, Xinjiang
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When Mareyam Ahmat attended her first equestrian show in her home county of Baicheng in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in August last year, she was captivated by its blend of strength and grace.

It only took a month to pass for the 20-year-old, who graduated with a degree in computer science in 2023, to make the bold decision to try out for the horse-riding border control cavalry that hosted the event.

The cavalry unit, the nation's only horse-riding cavalry, is located in Baicheng's Laohutai township and patrols a stretch of the border in northwestern Xinjiang with neighboring Kazakhstan. Horses are necessary for these patrols due to the rugged and extreme terrain that has an average altitude of 2,000 meters.

"I was hesitant at first because I was concerned about my physical fitness, but I made up my mind after learning that the cavalry also helps local herders during their seasonal migrations in the summer and winter. It's a job that is not only cool, but also quite meaningful," she said.

Established in 1956 to reinforce border patrols, the cavalry today takes on a variety of responsibilities, including providing emergency aid, spreading awareness about laws and government policies, and escorting herders during their seasonal migrations.

Comprising 120 members, with Mareyam one of 15 women among them, the cavalry use local Laohutai horses, a breed shorter in height and more robust than the famed and elegant Yili horses from the region.

Newcomers like Mareyam, who is a member of the Uygur ethnic group, are required to train in 10 disciplines of horsemanship, ranging from the basics like reining horses to walk, canter and trot, to more advanced techniques such as carrying an



Cavalry riders and local herders participate in a traditional goat fighting event in Baicheng in mid-January.

injured person on horseback or leaping over high obstacles.

For Mareyam, one of the most challenging disciplines is swordplay on horseback.

"It involves wielding a sword forcefully while riding a galloping horse," she said.

"Riding a horse already demands a ton of strength and good balance, and I need to further build my muscles and sharpen my mindset to master the skill."

Another challenge is standing while riding to observe and monitor the situation in the distance.

"At first, I could hardly straighten my legs and felt my core, arms and legs shaking violently when attempting the move," she said.

"When I felt frustrated during training, I turned to senior members of the cavalry, and a key piece of advice I received was to not be afraid and never give up."

Some disciplines require more than just strength and agility, they also involve developing a bond with the horse.

One such example is teaching the horse to lay down on command to hide from potential foes. "We start by gently touching and stroking the

horse's body, particularly its neck, to encourage it to lay down. I also use verbal cues," she said.

When the horse shows signs of laying down, Mareyam emphasized the importance of quickly removing the saddle to prevent harming the horse.

A trick is to tuck a cube of sugar in a pocket in advance and feed the horse as a reward when it successfully follows directions, she said.

Mikrayi Sidik, who is only four years older than Mareyam, is already a skilled rider and acts as a mentor for beginners like Mareyam.

Growing up in Laohutai township, Uygur Mikrayi learned horse riding from a very young age and used to ride a donkey to deliver food to relatives tending to herds on mountain grasslands.

"Where I grew up, horse riding is an essential skill for children and everyone takes pride in our ability to ride horses," she said.

Following in her father's footsteps, a well-known local veterinarian, Mikrayi studied veterinary medicine in college and sometimes accompanied her father on medical consultations.

"In 2015, my father was called out to treat one of the cavalry's injured

horses. He took me along and I got the opportunity to have a close look at the cavalry's training and drills for the first time," she said.

Mikrayi was instantly fascinated. "It felt like I was under a spell. I was leaning on the door frame, staring intently at the riders training in the field. My father had to yell at me to snap me out of it so that I could come inside and lend him a helping hand," she said.

When she expressed her desire to join the cavalry after graduating in 2020, both her father and the cavalry officials initially rejected her proposal.

"My father hoped that with a college degree, I would move to the city and find a more relaxed job," she said. "The cavalry turned me down at first because they hadn't recruited female members for a long time due to the physically demanding nature of the job," she said.

Nevertheless, Mikrayi's determination was so unwavering that she began practicing horse riding while working after graduation and grabbed every opportunity to visit the cavalry's training grounds to learn from them.

In time, her perseverance changed the mind of her father and her increasingly proficient equestrian skills impressed the cavalry members.

In August of 2022, she officially became a cavalry member and was recently appointed head of the cavalry's female unit.

Reflecting on her journey, Mikrayi admitted to moments of panic and tears under intense pressure.

There was one day when Mikrayi found herself unable to grip the reins no matter how hard she tried because her hands were frozen and numb in the heavy snowfall.

"At that moment, scenes of my friends of my age relaxing in their warm houses flashed through my mind. I questioned myself on why I had to shiver in the coldness and felt on the verge of crying," she said.

"But I soon collected myself, reminding myself that it was not easy for me to join the cavalry and realize my dream of becoming a professional rider and protecting my home and country," she said.

As the only horse riding cavalry in China, it has become a bit of an attraction for tourism. The cavalry now puts on equestrian shows in Laohutai township for paying visitors.

The influx of tourists has led local officials to encourage residents to open shops, guesthouses, farm stays and yurts, creating jobs for more than 240 local people as a result. On average, their monthly income has risen by over 2,000 yuan (\$275), officials said.

Faraway outposts ensure safety close to home

As I lounged in the comfort of my well-heated home, a steaming cup of coffee by my side, putting the final touches on an article for my reporting assignment in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, I closed my eyes and attempted to summon memories of that icy, remote landscape on the nation's border.

Yet, it proved difficult. Turning to my mobile phone, I scrolled through images of desolate border patrol tracks, snow-



Wang Xiaoyu
Reporter's log

capped mountains and ancient glaciers casting a faint blue hue reminiscent of jade.

However, pictures still fell short of capturing the deep freeze and the isolating essence of the terrain. For urban dwellers, particularly

those in a bustling metropolis like Beijing where I live and work, the vast frontiers of the nation represent a world far removed from our everyday existence.

Following my journey to Xinjiang in mid-January, I returned to the hustle and bustle of Beijing and then immersed myself in the warmth and joy of Spring Festival celebrations in my hometown in Jiangsu province.

Gradually, recollections of that frozen world began to fade. The significance and the challenges

faced by the guardians of China's expansive borders remain largely unknown to many. Even for reporters who have personally visited and interviewed them, the rapid pace of city life can swiftly overshadow the details of those memories.

Yet, their steadfast commitment to safeguarding the territory directly contributes to fortifying the sense of security we experience in our daily lives.

Some of the border patrol police officers, soldiers and cavalry members I encountered have

dedicated over a decade to their posts.

While their stories may not be widely circulated, they take pride in their roles and find continuous inspiration to persevere through hardships.

With the nation's socioeconomic progress, their living and working conditions have also gradually improved.

During my visit to a border patrol unit, I saw a new indoor facility providing a bright and warm space for soldiers to play basketball, work out, read books and play board games in their leisure time.

Family members of border police

officers are sometimes invited during Spring Festival and other special occasions, providing opportunities for them to gather and savor precious family moments.

Some border units have also established communication channels with primary and middle school students in coastal provinces so that they can share their experiences with the younger generation.

Even though they are stationed in faraway outposts, their invaluable contributions should never be forgotten.

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CHINA

Silk Road symphony to debut to capital audience

By CHEN LIANG
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On Friday evening, the symphony *Silk Road Across Hanhai* (*Endless Desert*) will make its debut at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing.

The symphony was created by brothers Zheng Junsheng and Zheng Junli and commissioned by the government of Hami city in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Led by famous young conductor Li Haoran and performed by the Beijing Symphony Orchestra, "the symphony aims to use the language of music to tell the story of Xinjiang within the grand context of the Belt and Road Initiative," Hu Dongming, vice-mayor of Hami city, said at a news conference on Wednesday in Beijing.

Hami is located at the eastern gateway of Xinjiang on the Silk Road Economic Belt and is surrounded by the Gobi Desert. It boasts a profound historical and cultural heritage, making it a hub of "hanhai culture," Hu said.

The roughly 70-minute symphony is presented in a suite format, consisting of five movements with a total of 15 musical pieces, said Zheng Junsheng. The composer said the first movement uses deep brass and string instruments to slowly depict the solitude of the desert and the rhythmic pulse of life, guiding the audience through history to revisit the legendary and vibrant land of *hanhai*.

The second movement portrays the fantastical landscapes and cultural splendor of the desert in Hami, "showcasing the vastness of *hanhai* and humanity's resilience and pursuit in the face of nature".

The third movement tries to showcase the brilliance and cultural fusion of the Silk Road, while the fourth depicts the modern *hanhai* landscape and vitality, extolling the spirit of the Silk Road from ancient times to the present, narrating humanity's pursuit of light and the collective dream of shaping the future.

The final movement portrays the grand vision of the Silk Road connecting the world and building a community of shared destiny through majestic music.

During the performance, the Hami government will set up a "Meet Hami" cultural market and photo exhibition outside the National Centre for the Performing

"The symphony aims to use the language of music to tell the story of Xinjiang within the grand context of the Belt and Road Initiative."

Hu Dongming, vice-mayor of Hami city, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region

Arts, fully showcasing Hami's diverse historical culture and rich tourism resources.

"With the strong support of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism, the National Centre for the Performing Arts and the Beijing Symphony Orchestra, the concert and promotion in this world-class arts venue will help showcase Hami's unique charm as an important node on the ancient Silk Road," Hu said.

It will help vividly display Xinjiang's image, stimulate artistic creation related to Xinjiang, tap into the cultural resources of the region and boost the local tourism industry, he added.

Hami, the only prefecture in Xinjiang that spans the Tianshan Mountains and neighboring Gansu province to the east, has been known as the "gateway to the western regions" since ancient times. The region boasts unique and diverse natural landscapes, with oases dotting the Gobi Desert to the south of the eastern Tianshan Mountains, and forests and grasslands sprawling across the northern slope of the mountain range.

The Hami Pterosaur-Yardang National Geopark, located on the ancient Silk Road, is one of the world's largest and most spectacular Yardang landform groupings, with the largest concentration of pterosaur fossils.

Last year, Hami received nearly 15 percent more tourists than in 2023, achieving tourism revenue of 13.2 billion yuan (\$1.83 billion).

Hami city is striving to transform itself into a cultural hub, with original works continuously emerging. The large-scale fusion stage drama *Zuo Gong Liu*, a 2024 National Art Fund-supported project, is also scheduled to be performed in Beijing in the near future.



The symphony *Silk Road Across Hanhai* is staged in Hami city, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Lu Lihua leads a *dage* performance at a junior high school in Nanjian Yi autonomous county, Yunnan province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Inheritor dances in dedication to preserving precious culture

NPC deputy promotes folk songs, rhythms of the Yi ethnic group in schools

By LI YINGQING in Kunming and DENG RUI

Lu Lihua, a provincial-level inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage "*dage*", a kind of Yi ethnic folk song and dance, and a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress from Southwest China's Yunnan province, has dedicated 14 years to the preservation and promotion of ethnic culture and rural revitalization.

Born in 1987 in Fengxing village, Nanjian Yi autonomous county in Dali Bai autonomous prefecture, Lu is a member of the Yi ethnic group. Growing up in this area known for its abundance of Yi ethnic culture, she learned a lot of traditional folk songs and dances from the elders during her childhood.

In 2011, Lu quit her job as an actress of ethnic song and dance in Kunming, capital of Yunnan, and returned to Nanjian to join the local *tiaocai* art troupe, dedicating herself to the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage and grassroots cultural work.

Through her tireless efforts, Nanjian, known as the birthplace of two Yi ethnic cultural practices — *dage* and *tiaocai* — now thrives with over 300 folk dance troupes and more than 2,000 performers.

Dage is a traditional form of recreation where people form a circle around a fire and dance and sing in a rhythmic manner. *Tiaocai* is a food-serving style that combines



Lu (front) performs *tiao cai* customs at a community gathering in Nanjian.

dance, music, acrobatics and dining traditions. Both art forms were designated as national intangible cultural heritage projects in 2008.

"Both the *dage* and *tiao cai* customs serve to bolster social cohesion and foster communication and integration among communities," Lu said.

In 2023, she was elected as an NPC deputy. Since then, about half of the 11 proposals she has proposed focus on ethnic cultural protection and rural revitalization.

Last year, she called for the establishment of a major pilot project for the systematic protection and sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage at the national two sessions, aiming to promote the

deep integration of traditional craftsmanship inheritance and the cultural tourism industry.

Thanks to her initiative, the Nanjian Tiaocai 2008 Creative Park, spanning over 5,000 square meters, opened earlier this year. This project makes use of residential buildings, old homesteads and idle rural land to become a tourism resort. It promotes a range of businesses such as banquet reception, skill inheritance, study tours and sales of agricultural products.

By boosting economic benefits for communities and increasing local incomes, the project is expected to enhance vitalization of the county.

"Despite overall positive trends in the preservation of these intangible

cultural heritage projects, several challenges still exist," she said.

Lu noted issues such as insufficient funding, a scarcity of talent, limited market recognition, as well as the aging of the inheritors. Unstable incomes frequently prompt young practitioners who have acquired the art to switch their professions, posing a risk for the continuous transmission of the intangible cultural heritage.

To tackle those challenges, Lu has integrated the folk arts with various industries like catering, wedding services and tourism, which has created job opportunities for tens of thousands of locals directly or indirectly, she said.

Lu has also actively promoted the inclusion of intangible cultural heritage in the school curriculum in Nanjian. By introducing these valued traditions into education, she aims to inspire children to appreciate and protect their cultural heritage.

Lu said she will carry on the protection and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage by developing a better training mechanism for the inheritors and encouraging more young people to participate.

She will also work with enterprises and government departments to develop cultural projects and boost rural revitalization.

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Village keeps ancient paper-making tradition alive

KUNMING — In a small village in Yunnan province, a crystal-clear stream has been more than just a source of water for generations — it has been the lifeblood of an ancient paper-making tradition.

When she played in the stream as a child, local artisan Ai Ye liked to watch her village elders soak and wash the mulberry bark that would later be transformed into delicate sheets of handmade paper.

"We mimicked the adults when we played in the water," she said. "It was like a game. But gradually, I fell in love with the craft."

Unlike many of her peers who left the village to seek work in cities, Ai chose to stay and carry on the tradition. "Paper-making calms my mind," she said.

Mangtuan, a multi-ethnic village predominantly inhabited by the Dai people and located in the Gengma Dai and Va autonomous county, is renowned for its handmade paper. Of the 179 households in the village, over 60 are engaged in paper-making year round, with more than 100 participating during the off-season after the harvest.

Paper is one of the four great inventions of ancient China. When Ai was 13, she first learned about Cai Lun, the inventor of the paper-making process during the Eastern Han (25-220) dynasty. When Ai read a description of Cai's paper-making in her history textbook, she was immediately reminded of how the elderly people in her village would craft handmade paper.

After graduating from junior high school, Ai took up the mantle of older generations and returned to the village to practice paper-making, which she has continued for nearly 20 years.

The paper produced in the village is known as mulberry bark paper, made from bark taken from mulberry trees. From mid-April to September each year, villagers climb nearby mountains to cut the trees and strip their bark, carrying it back to dry and store, preparing what is needed for the next year's paper-making.

One sheet of paper takes three days to make. The process includes soaking, steaming, pulping, sheet-forming and drying.

"The paper does not require bleaching. As long as the sunshine is good and the water from the stream is clear, the paper will be white," Ai said.

Hundreds of years ago, Mangtuan was designated as the county's official paper-making village, and the paper made there was used to transcribe Buddhist scriptures, playing a vital role in preserving and disseminating religious texts.

In 2006, the Dai paper-making technique was included in the national intangible cultural heritage list, with Mangtuan being named one of two heritage sites. It was also the year that Ai returned to the village for paper-making.

Despite the presence of a large modern paper factory just 100 kilometers away, Mangtuan's traditional craft has not only survived, but thrived.

Taking the traditional white paper as a starting point, Ai made innovative use of fresh flowers and leaves, arranging them in patterns she designed. She also experimented with coloring the flowers, and researched techniques to prevent dehydration.

Tourists and tea merchants who bought paper to wrap their tea products grew fond of these new styles, and prices surged significantly.

In 2014, Ai founded a handmade art company, encouraging the village's paper-making households to join. Combining market demand, the company has developed over 20 cultural and creative products, including table lamps, notebooks and handbags. These products have been exported to Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar and Thailand. "We want our paper to enter people's daily lives and become part of everyday consumption," she said.

Last year, the village's paper production exceeded 3.9 million sheets, with an output value of over 7.8 million yuan (\$1.1 million), providing employment for more than 120 locals and increasing the local per capita income by over 30,000 yuan.

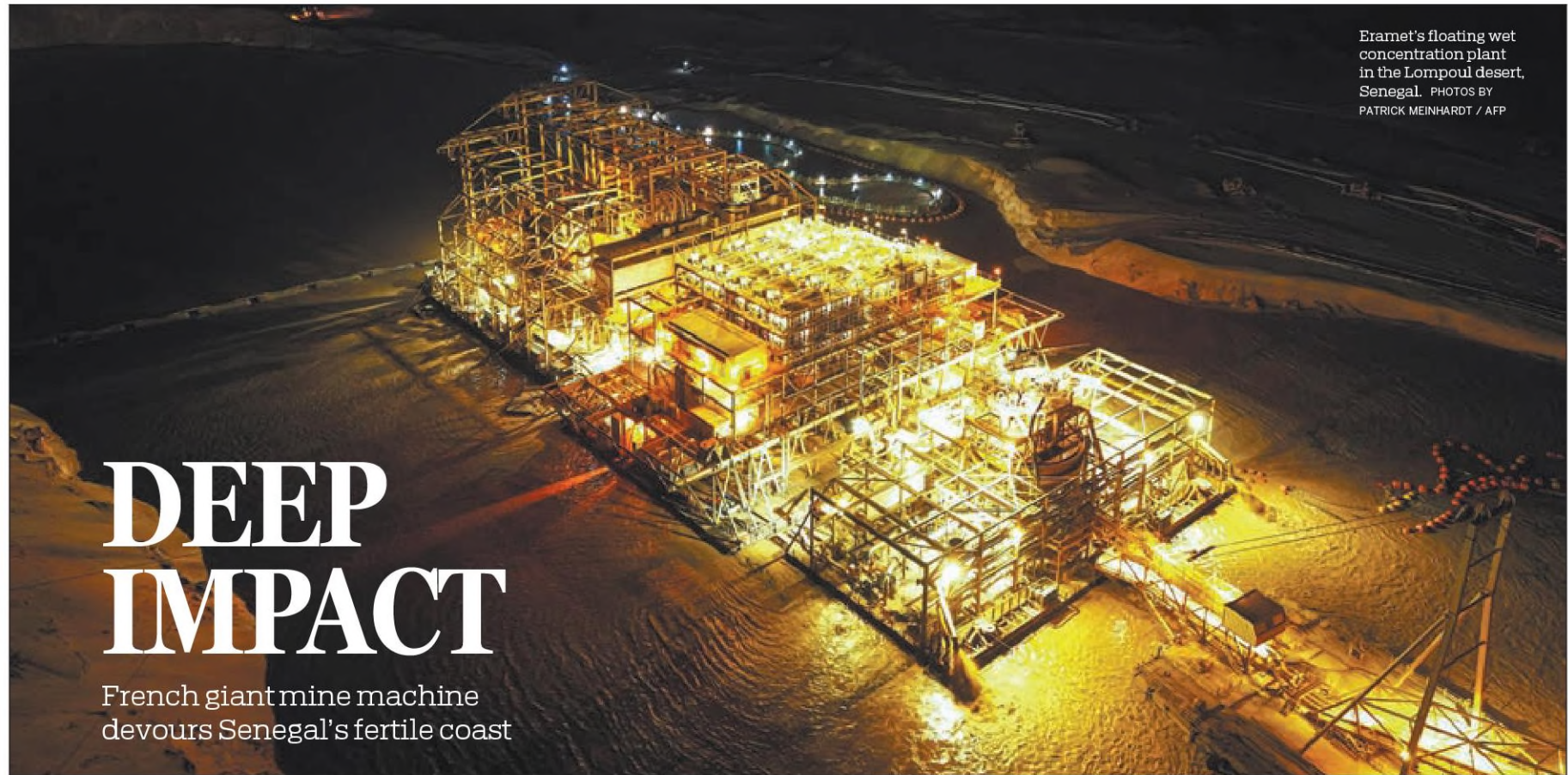
Ai said that paper, like people, has emotions. "If you treat it well, it will naturally not let you down."

XINHUA



From top: Ai Ye works on handmade paper products at her company in Mangtuan village, Gengma county in Yunnan province, on March 4. DING NING / XINHUA Villagers promote handmade paper products in Mangtuan on March 4. XINHUA

GLOBAL LENS



Eramet's floating wet concentration plant in the Lompoul desert, Senegal. PHOTOS BY PATRICK MEINHARDT / AFP

DEEP IMPACT

French giant mine machine devours Senegal's fertile coast

The jagged 23-kilometer-long scar that the gigantic rig has left for mining zircon — which is used in ceramics and the building industry — is so big that it is visible from space.

Amid a deafening din, the massive machine sucks up thousands of tons of mineral sands an hour, moving forward on an artificial lake created with water pumped from deep underground.

It is now tearing through the dunes of Lompoul — one of the smallest and most beautiful deserts in the world — a tourist hot spot by the endless beaches of Senegal's Atlantic coast.

Thousands of farmers and their families have been displaced over the past decade to make way for the colossal floating factory run by the French mining group Eramet.

It denies any wrongdoing, insists its operations are exemplary and even plans to step up the pace of mining.

But locals accuse it of destroying this rich but delicate ecosystem on the western edge of Africa's semiarid Sahel Region.

The project has brought "despair and disillusion," said Gora Gaye, the mayor of Diokoul Diawrigne district which takes in Lompoul.

Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye has also spoken out against extractive mining practices, saying some "local populations do not benefit." He doubled down earlier this month, demanding more transparency and oversight of "social and environmental impacts."

His government was elected last year promising a radical break with the past and to reclaim Senegal's sovereignty, particularly from the influence of former colonial power France.

Eramet Grande Cote, or EGC, Senegalese subsidiary of the Eramet, insisted it was a "responsible company" that has compensated locals "five times more" for the loss of their land than national guidelines, up to \$16,575 per hectare.

But what are they left with afterward, asked a hotelier who runs a desert eco-lodge of traditional tents in Lompoul, where until recently the only sounds were from seabirds and passing camels.

"The mine is moving forward: the fate of people once the mine has passed is no longer their problem," he said, the roar of the gigantic dredger 150 meters away almost drowning him out as it ate through the landscape.

Of Lompoul's seven tourist camps, six have accepted Eramet's money and have moved. The hotelier is holding out for "just" compensation for him and his 40 employees.

Losing land

Local communities also accuse the mine of destroying and "degrading the soil and the dunes" and threatening their water and food security.

Farmers say the compensation for the land is based on guidelines dating from the 1970s and does not make up for the irredeemable loss of revenue from their once-fertile fields.

The hollows between the dunes were oases, a rare ecosystem "which produced until recently 80 percent of the fresh vegetables eaten in Senegal," according to mayor Gaye.

Gaye said locals were initially optimistic about the mining.

But all they have gotten were "broken promises, intimidation, the destruction of our ecosystem and the catastrophic moving of villages. Economic development has gone backward," he added.

Gathered in the square of one of the new settlements at Foth, 120 km north of capital Dakar, Omar Keita and around two dozen other heads of families were quick to show their anger. "We want our land back and our village rebuilt so we can go back to how we were living before," Keita, 32, said.

He said he was not given a new home and showed where his wife and three children have lived for the past six years — a single room "loaned by my big brother", a mattress lying on the floor.

EGC's managing director Frederic Zanklan insisted that "every family was rehoused in relation to how they were when the count was made", adding that it was "nothing to do" with them if families had since grown.

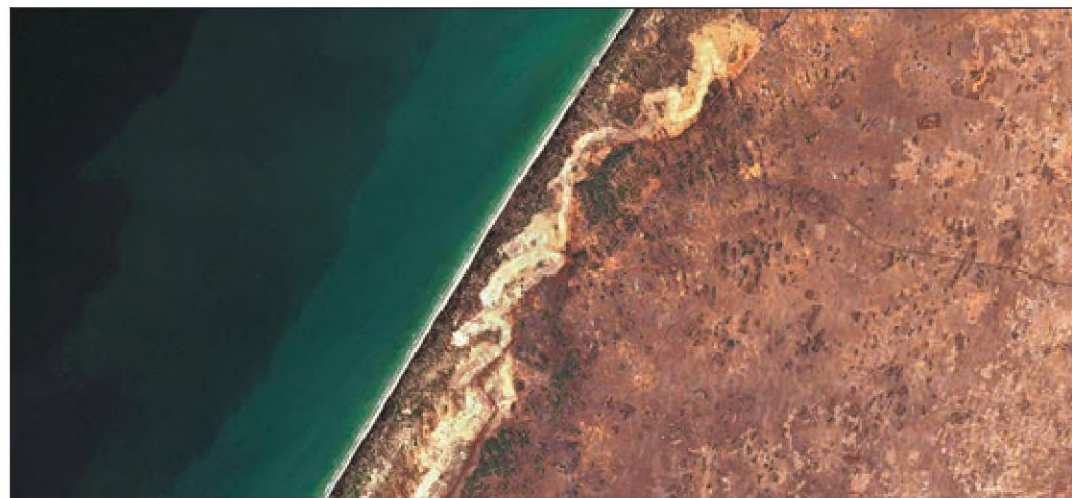
"Here I have to work in other people's fields," he said.

Ibrahima Ba, 60, was equally livid. "We have gone backward in every way," he said.

While still a farmer, today's harvests are nothing like what they were "in my village, the soil was very fertile, we had fresh water and we had no problems".

He called on President Faye and his prime minister to help them "because a foreign country is destroying the life of Senegalese citizens".

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



An aerial view of the Eramet mine on March 7. This "world's biggest mining dredger" has swallowed up the fertile coastal strip where most of Senegal's vegetables are grown.



A resident shows dirty water coming from one of the water points in the village of Foth, Senegal, on Feb 11.



Women carrying buckets and wood on their heads walk in the village of Foth, Senegal, on Feb 11.



Workers adjust dredging pipes at Eramet's floating wet concentration plant in Lompoul, Senegal, on Feb 12.



Workers approach the dredger by boat at the Eramet's floating wet concentration plant in Lompoul, Senegal, on Feb 12.



Workers fix a water pump inside the Eramet floating wet concentration plant in Lompoul, Senegal, on Feb 12.

WORLD

Israel restarts ground offensive

Renewed attacks in Gaza shatter calm, drawing criticism from intl community

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Israel began conducting "ground operations" in the northern Gaza Strip on Thursday following its latest round of attacks that have killed hundreds of people in the enclave, drawing condemnation from the international community which demanded that Israel end violence and return to talks.

A day after launching a new ground campaign in central Gaza, the Israeli military said on Thursday it had begun conducting ground operations in the north of the enclave, along the coastal route in the area of Beit Lahia.

The Israel Defense Forces, or IDF, said its troops aimed to "expand the security zone and to create a partial buffer between northern and southern Gaza."

The Israeli military also said as part of the ground activities, the troops expanded their control further to the center of the Netzarim Corridor.

The renewed offensive shattered a relative calm that had pervaded since the truce took hold in mid-January.

The first stage of the Gaza ceasefire, which largely halted more than 15 months of fighting, expired early this month amid deadlock over next steps.

Israel blames the new fighting on Hamas for refusing to accept revised ceasefire terms. Hamas, in turn, has accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of unilaterally upending the truce and putting hostages "at risk of an unknown fate."

Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas leader, said the ground operation and advance toward the Netzarim Corridor, cutting off northern Gaza from the south, will completely destroy the ceasefire agreement, the Palestinian Information Center reported.

Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif Al-Qanou said the group was working with negotiators to "spare our people from war permanently"; Al



Foreign staff members injured in an airstrike on a UN compound are transferred to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in central Gaza Strip, on Wednesday. LOUAY ABU KHOUSSA / AP

Jazeera reported on Thursday.

He also said Hamas remained committed to the original ceasefire framework agreed in January.

Tuesday's first day of resumed airstrikes killed more than 400 Palestinians, one of the deadliest days of the war. At least 510 Palestinians have been killed in the past three days, more than half of them women and children, Khalil Al-Deqran, the spokesman of the territory's health ministry told Reuters. Al Jazeera however, reported the death toll as 506.

During the latest bombardments, five staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA, have been killed in the past few days, the agency's Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said on Thursday.

Lazzarini said he feared the worst was yet to come as Israeli bombardments continue by land and sea, as well as an ongoing ground operation.

The Israeli military, however, said it did not strike a UN compound in Deir al-Balah, and called on media outlets "to act with caution regarding unverified reports."

Various Arab states have denounced Israel's latest aggression.

The Ministerial Committee assigned by the Joint-Arab Islamic Extraordinary Summit released a statement through the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday.

It denounced the raids launched by Israeli forces, particularly in areas populated by unarmed civilians.

It also criticized Israel's latest moves as "undermining the efforts to de-escalate tensions and achieving stability in the region."

On Wednesday, thousands of demonstrators rallied in Jerusalem, slamming Netanyahu's government over efforts to remove key security and judicial officials following the collapse of the Gaza ceasefire. They also demanded that the government secure the release of all hostages.

Gokhan Batu, an analyst on Israel studies at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Turkey, told China Daily that it is undeniable the ceasefire was accepted by Israel under pressure from the United States.

"By January, Netanyahu had no intention of agreeing to a ceasefire, as

the war's stated objectives remained unfulfilled. The hostages had not been recovered, and Hamas continued to govern Gaza," Batu said.

Although large-scale protests in Israel demanded action to secure the release of hostages, they failed to influence government policy, he noted.

"(US President Donald) Trump's pledge to end wars played a decisive role in this turn of events. However, this promise did not prevent the war from resuming — ironically, it was Trump's own support that facilitated its continuation. Now, in every proposed scenario for Gaza, Palestinians find themselves either as targets or as passive subjects," Batu added.

Effectively, he said, the situation has reverted to the pre-ceasefire status quo.

"The only notable change is the occupant of the White House. While Israel secured the release of around 30 hostages — a significant achievement — the fate of the remaining captives remains uncertain," said Batu.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

FRIENDS AFAR

Editor's note: China Daily presents the series Friends Afar to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

From architect to creator of urban oasis: Danish man's green journey across China

By YANG RAN
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In a world where career paths are often linear, Morten Holm, a 56-year-old Danish architect, exemplifies the dynamic "slash" lifestyle, seamlessly transitioning from architect to urban designer, and now operator of a nature school on a suburban farm. Yet, beneath these varied titles lies a singular goal: to create urban oases that harmonize city life with nature.

Holm's journey began in a small Danish town, a place apart from the bustling cities of China where he has spent over two decades. "It's hard to draw that path from the beginning," Holm reflected. "Everything I do is very much connected, allowing me to take advantage of everything I have learned and accumulated over time. It feels like one shift, and then you start something new."

His first visit to China was a business trip in 2001, which sparked a curiosity that would change his life. "Every morning, I would sneak out to explore the city before the meetings," he recalled. The vibrant streets, the bit chaotic yet lively hutongs, and the city's transformation captivated him.

Ten years later, Holm decided to move to China, selling his stake in his Danish architectural firm and setting up a new partnership in China "to understand and learn from or even be part of the country's rapid development."

Archiland, the design company Holm partnered with, now operates across several Chinese cities, focusing on sustainable architecture and urban design. Among the projects he has undertaken in China, the renovation of Beijing's Liangma River stands out as the most impressive one to him.

Inspired by Copenhagen's urban revitalization projects, the local government in the Chaoyang district of Beijing held a competition for the renovation of the Liangma River, as Holm recalled. "And the design plan of our combined team with Nordiq informed the final adopted and executed plan."

Before the renovation, Liangma River was a neglected, inaccessible, and ecologically degraded area. "It was mostly for old people walking

their dogs," said Holm. "But Beijing only exists because of its ability to master its waterways through these canals. Yet, after thousands of years, these rivers have been forgotten. We basically just needed to revitalize these hidden corridors and make them accessible again."

For Holm, the renovation of the Liangma River was to create a "soft living space", boosting local businesses and enhancing residents' quality of life. "When urbanization reaches a certain level, it's not just about quantity — more routes and housing — but about making life in the city more livable, increasing the quality of life, and making people happier," he said.

Today, the Liangma River has become a beloved urban retreat, drawing comparisons to Paris' Seine River.

But Holm's vision extends beyond urban projects. In 2020, he and his wife transformed his in-laws' orchard into an organic farm and green school called FunFarmFam, inspired by Denmark's green education models.

Sustainable goals

"We offer courses for both schools and families in animal and food literacy and sustainable development goals," Holm said. "These courses allow children to connect with nature. Our curriculum goes beyond the classroom, creating a kind of school extension and serving as an urban oasis."

"Every weekend, we host family activities or special design thinking classes, encouraging students to solve real-life problems," he added. "The 'Green School' has become a beacon for urban families seeking a connection with nature."

Holm's work also reflects a broader trend in China toward sustainable development. "China has changed dramatically in the past 20 years. It's now a leader in new energy manufacturing and installation," he observed.

Holm sees parallels between China and Denmark, noting a shared pragmatic approach to development and the potential for collaboration. "Bilateral collaborations can be very fruitful in areas, including agriculture, circular economy, and urban livability," he said.



Morten Holm poses for a picture at his farm, the FunFarmFam, located in the suburbs of Beijing, last November. YANG RAN / CHINA DAILY

US happiness sinks as Finland again ranks 1st: Survey

HELSINKI — The United States fell to its lowest happiness ranking ever partly due to a rise in the number of people in the US eating their meals alone, an annual UN-sponsored report said on Thursday.

Finland ranked as the world's happiest country for the eighth straight year in the World Happiness Report, with locals and experts thanking its grand lakes and strong welfare system for boosting its mood.

The United States fell to 24th place, its lowest score since the report was first published in 2012, when it recorded its highest showing at number 11.

"The number of people dining alone in the United States has increased 53 percent over the past two decades," the authors said, noting that sharing meals "is strongly linked with well-being."

In 2023, roughly one in four US citizens reported eating all their

meals alone the previous day, the report said.

"The increasing number of people who eat alone is one reason for declining well-being in the United States," it said.

It also noted that the United States was one of few countries to see a rise in the so-called "deaths of despair", from suicide or substance abuse, at a time when such deaths are declining in a majority of countries.

The study was done in partnership with the analytics firm Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

The report surveyed people worldwide in 2022-2024, before US President Donald Trump's shake-up of national and global affairs since returning to the White House in January.

Nordic countries all stayed among the 10 happiest, with Denmark, Iceland and Sweden trailing Finland, which slightly extended its lead over runner-up Denmark.

The happiness ranking is based on a three-year average of individuals' self-assessed evaluations of life satisfaction, as well as GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity and corruption.

"It seems that Finnish people are relatively satisfied with their lives," Frank Martela, an assistant professor specializing in well-being and happiness research at Aalto University, told AFP.

Well-functioning society

It could largely be explained by Finns living in "quite a well-functioning society," he said.

He added that the Nordic countries also have relatively strong welfare systems, with parental leave, unemployment benefits and mostly universal healthcare — which also contribute to higher levels of well-being on average.

Jamie Sarja-Lambert, a professional video gamer who moved to Finland

from the United Kingdom, agreed.

"Seems like everyone is a lot more in touch with nature, going outside and socializing, more of a community," he told AFP.

This year, the authors of the happiness report said new evidence indicates that engaging in acts of generosity and believing in the kindness of others are "significant predictors of happiness, even more so than earning a higher salary."

They also noted that in general "people are too pessimistic about the kindness of their communities," and that "the return rate of lost wallets is much higher than people expect."

Nordic countries also "rank among the top places for expected and actual return of lost wallets."

Afghanistan, plagued by a humanitarian catastrophe since the Taliban regained control in 2020, once again ranked as the unhappiest country in the world.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Battling blizzard



A man shovels to clear the snow in front of a grocery store during a blizzard in Omaha, Nebraska, on Wednesday. CHRIS MACHIAN VIA AP

Court to rule on South Korea PM's impeachment next week

SEOUL — South Korea's Constitutional Court said on Thursday it will deliver a decision on Prime Minister Han Duck-soo's impeachment on March 24, after he was suspended as acting president last year.

The ruling on whether to oust Han or restore his position will be carefully watched as it comes ahead of a highly anticipated impeachment ruling by the same court on suspended President Yoon Suk-yeol.

The Constitutional Court has yet to announce a date for its ruling on whether to uphold Yoon's impeachment or restore his presidential powers.

Han was impeached as acting president by South Korea's parliament more than two months ago amid the country's worst political turmoil in decades.

Han took over as acting leader from Yoon, who was himself

impeached over his short-lived declaration of martial law last year.

Han had been in the position of acting president for less than two weeks and was impeached on Dec 27 after clashing with the opposition-led parliament by refusing to appoint three more justices to the Constitutional Court.

Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok assumed the position of acting president while the cases of Yoon and Han were considered by the Constitutional Court.

With police bracing for unrest ahead of an expected ruling on the fate of Yoon, opposition lawmakers called on Thursday for extra security after a Member of Parliament was hit in the face with an egg outside a court.

Opposition MP Back Hye-ryun was addressing reporters outside the court, urging justices to uphold Yoon's impeachment, when she was hit by

an egg on Thursday. Police later confirmed bananas were also thrown.

Police have not identified the attacker. But authorities have pointed to Yoon supporters, who were staging a protest in the area.

"In light of the gravity of the case, we have formed an investigation task force," the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency said in a statement.

Opposition lawmakers visited the National Police Agency, urging the police to reinforce security near the court.

Police plan to deploy "100 percent of available personnel" and are prepared to mobilize "all available equipment" on the day of the verdict to prevent clashes near the court, according to a police report seen by AFP on Thursday.

About 14,000 officers from 210 riot police units, more than half of the entire national riot police force,

will be stationed in the capital Seoul.

"Plainclothes officers will be positioned inside the Constitutional Court, while police special forces will remain on standby in surrounding areas," the report stated.

Police have restricted access to 22 rooftops near the court and the area has been designated a "no-fly zone" with authorities preparing "anti-drone equipment."

The country's acting police chief has said previously the area around the court will be designated "a protest-free zone."

In addition to the impeachment verdict, Yoon also faces a criminal trial on charges of insurrection for declaring martial law in December, making him the first sitting South Korean president to stand trial in a criminal case.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLD

Educational exchanges can improve ties: Expert

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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The US-China Higher Education Dialogue and other exchanges are crucial platforms for fostering understanding and cooperation amid geopolitical tensions, an expert says.

"The higher education relationship between the US and China continues to be strategically important to both countries," Denis Simon, a nonresident fellow at the Quincy Institute and a senior lecturer at Duke University's Asian Pacific Studies Institute, said in an interview with China Daily.

"China wants to educate its students in a more international setting. The United States needs to increase its understanding of China," he said.

Simon said the dialogue has been convened twice since September 2023, with a third meeting planned for Washington, DC, this year.

The last meeting in October 2024 in Beijing was very productive, Simon noted, adding that "the higher education relationship between the US and China continues to be strategically important to both countries."

He pointed to the drop in Chinese students studying in the US and what he called an alarmingly low number of US students in China.

According to the Open Doors report from the Institute of International Education, Chinese international student enrollment dropped by 4.2 percent to 277,398 during the 2023-24 academic year. Since the number of Chinese students studying in the US peaked at 370,000 in the 2018-19 academic year, it has dropped annually since.

He cited three things that were focused on in the Beijing meeting. One was "building up a brand, a global brand called 'study abroad in China'." The other two were promoting collaborative research and addressing policy issues.

The Washington meeting, according to Simon, will aim to address policy issues impacting educational exchange — such as visa challenges and reciprocity concerns.

Energized relationship

"We want to make sure that not only people understand the risk side of the bilateral education relationship, but most importantly that policymakers understand the upside, the success stories, the mutual benefits that have come to both countries from having a very highly energized education relationship," he asserted.

"Academic exchange and cooperation between the United States and China, already far more restricted than a decade ago, is likely to diminish further under a second Trump

presidency," wrote Kyle Jaros, an associate professor of global affairs at the University of Notre Dame, for the US-China Perception Monitor website in November 2024.

A group of House Republicans introduced a legislation on March 14 to deny visas to Chinese students — part of the focus on China as a national security threat.

A US House committee said its chairman sent a letter to six US universities on Wednesday, requesting detailed information about their Chinese national students.

John Moolenaar, chairman of the House Select Committee on China, accused China of "embedding" researchers in leading US institutions, "providing them direct exposure to sensitive technologies with dual-use military applications."

The US should stop overstretching the concept of national security, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Thursday, urging it to refrain from harming the rights of Chinese students.

Chinese students account for about a quarter of international students in the US, Mao said.

Dismissing Moolenaar's remarks, Mao said China-US educational cooperation has enhanced mutual understanding between people on both sides and facilitated the US economic prosperity and technological development.

Simon pointed to the positive impact of US education on Chinese professionals in various sectors and the contribution of Chinese students to the internationalization of US campuses.

In November 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced in San Francisco that China is ready to invite 50,000 US youngsters to China for exchange and study programs in five years. To implement the initiative, China has set up a YES program — the Young Envoys Scholarship.

Simon expressed support for China's initiative, citing the need for increased people-to-people engagement. He praised the YES program and expressed hope for the establishment of a US version of the China Education Association for International Exchange to facilitate program development.

"My only complaint is that the US side does not have a counterpart agency to act and coordinate to develop programming on the US side," he said. Simon suggested several organizations, including the Institute of International Education and the American Council on Education, as potential candidates.

Wang Qingyun in Beijing contributed to this story.



Off track

Train connections between Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and the rest of the country are disrupted after a freight train derailed at Kamalapur Railway Station, Dhaka, on Wednesday. The authorities managed to clear one of the two tracks later that day, allowing limited train movement.

MARUF RAHMAN / GETTY IMAGES

Europe aims at defense boost

White paper readied amid concerns over US role as security guarantor for EU

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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The European Union aims to dramatically boost its defense capabilities amid growing concerns of a less reliable United States as the bloc's traditional security guarantor, according to a white paper released by the European Commission on Wednesday.

The commission said the white paper "Readiness 2030" is "an ambitious packaging providing financial levers to EU member states to drive an investment surge in defense capabilities."

"The era of the peace dividend is long gone. The security architecture that we relied on can no longer be taken for granted," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

"Europe is ready to step up. We must invest in defense, strengthen our capabilities, and take a proactive approach to security."

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said for the past decades, the EU has not put a high enough price on defense.

"We must spend more," she said. The white paper was released

after von der Leyen proposed on March 4 to mobilize up to 800 billion euros (\$870 billion) through 150 billion euros in EU-guaranteed loans and a relaxation of EU's fiscal rules to allow member states to spend more on defense.

The EU's dramatic shift came after US President Donald Trump's administration sent shock waves across the bloc by attacking trans-Atlantic relations — from security, trade, democracy, freedom of speech to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The EU strategy described the US as "traditionally a strong ally" but said the US "believes it is over-committed in Europe and needs to rebalance, reducing its historical role as a primary security guarantor."

'Buy more European'

"We must buy more European. Because that means strengthening the European defense technological and industrial base," von der Leyen said.

A report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute released 10 days ago showed that European NATO members have

become more dependent on US weapons than before. European arms imports from the US skyrocketed by 155 percent over the 2020-24 period compared with the 2015-19 period.

Under the current EU blueprint, defense companies from the US, the United Kingdom and Türkiye will be excluded from the loan plan unless those governments sign security agreements with the EU.

French President Emmanuel Macron has long pushed for buying more French and European defense equipment.

"Those who buy Patriot should be offered the new-generation Franco-Italian SAMP/T. Those who buy the F-35 should be offered the Rafale. That's the way to increase the rate of production," he told French media on Sunday.

EU leaders' meeting in Brussels for a summit on Thursday and Friday are expected to discuss the defense proposals, but also focus on other key issues such as the bloc's economic competitiveness, EU budget and irregular migration.

Juan Moscoso del Prado, a member of the European Council on

Foreign Relations, argued that the EU should help private companies become more competitive through defense technology-guided industrial policy.

"As the events of last month make alarmingly clear, Europeans are now operating in more hostile and unpredictable geopolitical environment," he wrote in a commentary on the council's website.

"The question of how they now defend themselves is more pressing than ever. Some aspects of this challenge can only be resolved over the long term. Enhancing the competitiveness and productivity of the European defense industry is one such aspect," he wrote.

Giuseppe Spatafora, a researcher at the EU Institute for Security Studies, agreed, saying on X that "while Europe can't cut its dependencies on the US overnight, it can mitigate risks by investing in strategic enablers."

"Wow, Japan and South Korea can participate. US and UK cannot," Joel Atkinson, a lecturer at Monash University in Australia who is now based in Seoul, South Korea, said on X, referring to the new EU defense strategy.

2 US airlines to introduce more routes to China

By BELINDA ROBINSON in New York
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Two US airlines will increase the number of their flights to Beijing and Shanghai this year after China eased its travel policy for foreign tourists.

The airlines are introducing more routes to Asia after China updated its visa-free transit policy in December to allow tourists from 54 countries, including the United States, to stay for up to 10 days.

United Airlines will add to its routes to include a flight between Los Angeles International Airport and Beijing Capital International Airport from May after gaining approval from the US Department of Transportation.

The airline will put on a new flight

between Los Angeles and Beijing from May 1, said Annabelle Aston, director of international communications at United Airlines. It will have three flights a week using a Boeing 787-9 aircraft, she said.

The flights must begin between May 1 and May 11 under Department of Transportation rules, as United must operate the route consistently every three weeks for at least 90 days or the slot will be reallocated.

Failure to inaugurate service with a newly allocated frequency by May 11 will result in the unused slots reverting to the department, it said.

The United flight will have 257 seats, 48 in business class, 21 in premium class and 188 in economy, according to the industry publication Aviation Week.

United also applied for exten-

sions of waivers on six routes that are not being used to their fullest: Newark, New Jersey, to Beijing; Newark to Shanghai; Washington to Beijing; Chicago to Beijing; Chicago to Shanghai; and seven flights linking San Francisco to Shanghai.

The US and China have air transport agreements that allow US airlines to fly to China with Department of Transportation approval, as long as the flights are regular. During the pandemic, because of much less frequent travel, the department granted the waivers, which have been extended as operations have only slowly returned to normal.

United now has daily flights from San Francisco to Beijing Capital Airport and from Shanghai Pudong International Airport to both Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Delta has said it will resume non-stop flights between Los Angeles and Shanghai in June, using an Airbus A350.

Delta "remains committed to providing our Los Angeles customers with seamless access to destinations worldwide," said Joe Esposito, senior vice-president of network planning at Delta.

The company said it will also operate 17 weekly flights between the US and China, including existing routes from Detroit, Michigan, and Seattle, Washington State.

Air China has expanded its service to the US and now has five flights a week from New York to Beijing. Altogether it runs four flights a week to Beijing from four US cities and has a few going to Shanghai and Shenzhen from various US cities.

'Senior' penguins



A penguin trainer feeds geriatric African penguins in their exhibit area at the New England Aquarium, Boston, on Tuesday. The aquarium built a retirement exhibit for elderly penguins. BARRY CHIN / GETTY IMAGES

Trump urges Fed to cut rates as tariffs bring uncertainty

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump urged the Federal Reserve on Wednesday to cut interest rates to help offset the effects of his tariffs, renewing his vocal disagreement with the central bank's decision-making.

"Do the right thing," Trump demanded in a post on his Truth Social site, hours after the Fed decided to hold rates steady, while reducing its growth forecast and hiking its inflation outlook.

The Federal Reserve has penciled in two rate cuts this year, but chairman Jerome Powell noted that "uncertainty today is unusually elevated" and that inflation is ticking up.

The Trump administration's initial policies, including extensive import

tariffs, appear to have tilted the US economy toward slower growth and at least temporarily higher inflation, Powell said on Wednesday.

With overall sentiment sliding due to policy "turmoil", prices are projected to rise faster than expected perhaps largely because of Trump's plans to levy duties on imports from US trading partners, Powell said after the Fed announced it had held its benchmark overnight rate steady in the 4.25-4.5 percent range.

Fed policymakers still expect the central bank to deliver two quarter-percentage-point rate cuts by the end of this year, matching their projection in December. That's largely due to weakened economic growth offsetting higher inflation, and what

Powell called the "inertia" of not knowing what else to do given the muddled outlook.

"We understand that sentiment is quite negative at this time, and that probably has to do with turmoil at the beginning of an administration that's making big changes," Powell said.

Many economists have warned that the tariffs — which are being met with trade retaliation by some countries — threaten to possibly tip the US economy and others into recession.

Trump has admitted that the economy may suffer "a little disturbance" as his planned levies take hold, but that the United States is otherwise on the cusp of a "golden age."

In Wednesday's message, he again

stressed that April 2, when he plans to enact "reciprocal tariffs" designed to reset global trade, would be a "liberation day" for the US economy.

But he wants US interest rates to come down as well.

"The Fed would be much better off cutting rates as US tariffs start to transition (ease!) their way into the economy," he posted.

During his first term, Trump repeatedly expressed disagreement with the Fed's rate decisions, urging them to be lowered to boost the economy.

The Fed cut its benchmark interest rate by a full percentage point last year, but has kept rates on hold this year as it waits for further evidence that inflation will continue to fall,



Traders work as a screen broadcasts a news conference by US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York City on Wednesday. BRENDAN MCDERMID / REUTERS

and, more recently, for more clarity about the impact of Trump's policies. "We're not going to be in any hurry to move," Powell said. "The right thing

to do is to wait here for greater clarity about what the economy is doing."

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BUSINESS

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NEV boom prompts calls for refined petrochem exports

By ZHENG XIN
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Company executives and industry experts are advocating for the gradual easing of refined oil and chemical export restrictions, amid the rapid adoption of new energy vehicles nationwide.

They also proposed a measured relaxation of export controls on refined oil products and tax-free chemical exports through coordinated policy support.

In light of China's evolving energy landscape and the rapid adoption of NEVs, Ma Yongsheng, chairman of China Petroleum and Chemical Corp, also known as Sinopec, suggested steadily advancing the gradual relaxation of export restrictions on refined oil and tax-free chemical products during the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period.

"Exporting refined oil is beneficial for adjusting the flexibility of refining capacity and enhancing emergency security capabilities, as NEVs and traditional fuel vehicles have entered a new stage of competitive coexistence and development in China," Ma said.

In 2024, the domestic penetration rate of NEVs reached 41 percent and is expected to surpass 50 percent in 2025, becoming a major force in the growth of the auto market.

China's road transport fuel use, including gasoline and diesel, has entered a phase of decline, said the Economics and Technology Research Institute under China National Petroleum Corp.

The institute expects that by 2030, consumption will drop to between 344 and 310 million metric tons, a reduction of 12 to 20 percent compared to 2024.

Ma said that over the long term, reducing oil production while increasing chemical output — as well as focusing more on specialized products — will remain the prevailing trends.

He called for a coordinated and orderly approach to determining the scale and pace of this transition, underscoring the necessity of top-level design and scientific advances to ensure that the transformation aligns with market supply, while simultaneously achieving quality and efficiency improvements.

"China's consumption of gasoline and diesel has reached its peak

ahead of global trends, leading to a decline in demand and reduced pressure on domestic supply. Easing export restrictions on refined oil products could serve as a flexible mechanism to adjust refining capacity and enhance emergency response capabilities," he said.

Ma added that in 2024, domestic consumption of refined oil was 400 million tons, a decrease of 1.9 percent compared to 2023, due to the accelerated replacement of traditional energy with renewable sources alongside economic structural transformation in China.

Despite the decline in demand for refined oil consumption, demand for high-end chemical products and specialty materials is expected to keep growing in the coming years, he said.

Industry experts suggest that as China has been stepping up efforts to stabilize and strengthen its economy, chemical companies should step up efforts in high-end chemical products and specialty materials.

A significant influx of investments has targeted expanding scale and increasing output in the past few years in the country, leading to overcapacity in some sectors. However, a very limited proportion of such investments were allocated to structural optimization and high-end advancements, resulting in the current overcapacity situation, said Fu Xiangsheng, vice-president of the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Association.

It is necessary for the industry to prioritize structural optimization and increased investments in high-end development rather than solely focusing on expanding scale, he said.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said Chinese petrochemical firms' pivot toward high-end chemicals will be one of the primary reasons for their improved profit prospects in 2025.

The association believes China's petrochemical sector will bolster profits this year, marking a key turning point after a period of challenges.

Driven by a rebound in global oil prices, rising domestic demand and strong government support, China's petrochemical sector bottomed out and stabilized last year, and is on track for recovery, it said.



Diners eat at a restaurant in Shanghai on Feb 4. The city's services sector grew 5.7 percent year-on-year and contributed 78.2 percent to Shanghai's GDP last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Shanghai eyes stronger services backed by tech

Metropolis unveils guideline to boost sector's role in driving consumption

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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The high-quality development of Shanghai's services sector should better serve technological advancement and boost consumption, the city's municipal government said in a recent guideline.

According to the guideline, which contains 31 detailed measures, the services sector must further consolidate its role as an economic driver, seek new growth momentum, better stimulate consumption and create a quality ecosystem.

While the services sector grew 5.7 percent year-on-year and contributed 78.2 percent to Shanghai's GDP last year, or more than 4.2 trillion yuan (\$580 billion), the number of high-level service providers is still limited and the services provided are not diversified enough, said Qiu Wenjin, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission, in a news briefing on Monday.

Service providers have not invested enough in digitalization and they need to show improvement in their overall international competitiveness. Meanwhile, the services sector has much room for growth in contributing to consumption, Qiu said.

It is against this backdrop that the new guideline has been released.

In the guideline, more attention has been paid to those service providers — such as information services, technology services, entertainment, healthcare and catering — who can stabilize growth, generate more jobs and expand consumption, he added.

“Professional service providers specializing in metaverse-related technologies, such as extended reality smart devices, will also be nurtured in the city.”

Qiu Wei, chief engineer of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Economy and Informatization

To address the development needs of new quality productive forces, the construction of high-quality incubators, proof-of-concept centers and other platforms for the transformation of scientific and technological achievements will be supported.

Companies developing large language models will be aided in setting up industry funds. Technology service companies and institutions will gain access to the city's special technology loans to reduce costs, according to the new guideline.

In addition, universities and research institutes will be encouraged to establish an operating model under which ownership, operation and income rights of technology achievements are separated, said the guideline.

Efforts will be made to introduce more services sector leaders, said Qiu Wei, chief engineer of the Shanghai Municipal Commission

of Economy and Informatization.

The Shanghai Global Investment Promotion Conference 2025, which is scheduled for Tuesday, will introduce more quality information technology service companies and industrial service providers so that a complete industrial chain can be built in Shanghai. More new quality productive forces in the services sector will thus be nurtured, she said.

Besides, industrial enterprises will be encouraged to deepen their cooperation with leading internet companies and e-commerce platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Pinduoduo for online marketing. Industrial companies can hopefully explore more consumption outlets this way, Qiu Wei said.

New types of information products will be provided in Shanghai, she said.

"Finance, education, healthcare and manufacturing will be the major sectors seeking AI application scenarios. Professional service providers specializing in metaverse-related technologies, such as extended reality smart devices, will also be nurtured in the city," Qiu Wei added.

Luo Zhisong, chief economist at the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, pointed out that the inadequate supply of service-related products currently means the city is unable to fully explore its consumption potential. Therefore, Shanghai will create high-quality, diversified and complex service consumption scenarios.

New models, such as housekeeping integrated with property management services, housekeeping integrated with elderly care and property management services integrated with other daily life services, have already emerged in Shanghai. Under the same logic, tourism, sports and healthcare can also be combined with other services, Luo said.

Hainan to expand healthcare facilities

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
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Hainan province, one of China's most popular tourist destinations, recently launched a three-year action plan to boost its healthcare sector, with the unveiling of various supportive measures, such as transforming existing buildings into healthcare facilities and reducing land leasing costs for businesses.

According to the plan, some existing buildings could be redeveloped, allowing for the transformation of facilities including vacant commercial spaces, factories, school buildings, offices and training facilities into those for healthcare services.

Hotels and resorts could launch such services if their operational conditions meet regulatory standards. Enterprises are also being encouraged to redevelop residential properties into such service facilities after necessary checks.

Gao Min, president of the Hainan Health and Wellness Tourism Association, highlighted the potential of the plan. "The transformation of existing properties into healthcare service facilities can boost the development progress of the province's healthcare sector," Gao said. "With the measures transforming more existing facilities into healthcare facilities, Hainan will be better able to meet the ever-upgrading demands from tourists."

The plan also advocates for the development of rural collective construction land.

Sun Xiangtao, executive director of the Hainan Rural Holiday Tourism Association, said: "Over the past few years, rural tourism in Hainan has seen significant improvements in terms of infrastructure and services, along with a refreshed ecological environment, making Hainan an ideal choice for travelers looking for healthcare services."

"The plan will also boost village homestays and lift the occupancy rate of rural tourism accommodation, contributing to the development of Hainan's rural healthcare tourism."

The island province aims to build a niche market by launching healthcare projects that leverage its natural conditions, and medical and cultural resources. Hainan has the charm to attract investment and major enterprises to this end, experts said.

"Flexible land supply, along with policies promoting the transformation of existing properties, have lowered the barriers for entry, making it particularly attractive among small and medium-sized enterprises as well as newcomers," Gao said.

Electrici-tea!



An employee of State Grid Zhejiang Lishui Power Supply Co (right) visits Greentea Hill Tea Co Ltd in Songyang county, Zhejiang province, offering on-site help with power consumption on Wednesday. Tea harvesting in Songyang, a major tea-producing area in China, is gaining momentum along with the coming of the Spring Equinox, which fell on Thursday this year. LIAO MIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Jinhua-Jiande HSR sees solid progress

Construction of the Jinhua-Jiande High-speed Railway is progressing as a major beam yard building box girders for the HSR completed its construction work recently. State builder China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp said its beam yard in Jiande, Zhejiang province has finished two days ahead of schedule the construction of all 85 box girders for the second phase of the HSR, which will connect Lanxi to bullet train services. The Jinhua-Jiande HSR is a key local rail line that aims to enhance regional connectivity and integrate tourism

resources across East China.

E-bike trade-ins hit 2mln units since Jan

China has seen more than 2.04 million new e-bikes sold under its consumer good trade-in program as of Tuesday, generating 5.61 billion yuan (\$783 million) in new sales of such bikes, according to the Ministry of Commerce on Wednesday. Since the start of this year, the daily sales volume of e-bikes under this program has averaged 27,000 units — 2.5 times the figure recorded the previous year, the ministry said.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Pilot projects instrumental in opening-up progress

By WANG KEJU
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China has set its sights on exploring new frontiers for opening-up, with education and culture being the next areas of focus, which senior executives said are windows of opportunity for foreign companies that are only set to widen.

"Last year, China pushed for pilot projects to expand opening-up in the areas of value-added telecommunications, biotechnology and wholly owned hospitals in eligible regions," said He Yongqian, a Ministry of Commerce spokesperson, at a news conference on Thursday.

The results have been tangible, with 13 foreign-invested enterprises already being granted licenses to operate value-added telecommunications services, over 40 foreign biotech projects established and three wholly foreign-owned

hospitals approved, according to the ministry.

As China continues to build on the success of these initial pilot programs, policymakers are now exploring ways to expand opening-up trials to sectors such as education and culture, He said.

Data from the ministry showed that the 11 provincial regions selected for opening-up pilot initiatives in the services sector collectively attracted \$41.3 billion in foreign direct investment last year — a figure that accounts for over half of China's total foreign investment in the services sector.

This opening to foreign investment helps foreign firms further tap into the Chinese market, said Malu Nachreiner, head of the Region Asia for the Crop Science Division of Bayer.

"We have heard and seen how eager the Chinese government is to welcome foreign companies, which

creates a positive environment for collaboration and growth. This is what makes us very excited. We have seen this trend of opening-up for foreigners happening in every single industry," Nachreiner said.

He, from the ministry, said that the Chinese government will continue to extend equal treatment and support to both domestic and foreign companies in large-scale equipment upgrades, consumer goods trade-ins, government procurement processes and bidding competitions.

"The goal is to ensure that foreign enterprises operating in China are provided with a fair and level playing field, allowing them to compete on an equal footing with their domestic counterparts," the spokesperson added.

"I've always found that China has been opening-up and we have not seen in any situation where the opening-up process has been

slowed down or been reversed," said Benjamin Lam, deputy president of MUPG Bank (China), a subsidiary of Japan's Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group.

After strategically reviewing their business operations in China, more multinational corporations are reaffirming their commitment to developing and continuing business in the country, Lam said.

According to a survey released in February by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China, as many as 58 percent of its member enterprises have indicated that they plan to either expand or sustain their existing investment footprint in China this year.

A report by the American Chamber of Commerce in China in January has also revealed that more than half of surveyed US-invested enterprises are poised to increase their investments in the country this year.

COMMENT

Editorials

Anti-Chinese sentiment and xenophobia barrier to productive sci-tech exchanges

It defies belief how narrow-minded or lacking in common sense some politicians of the United States can be. Congressman Riley Moore has stepped to the fore as an example of this, introducing a bill last week to ban all Chinese nationals from receiving US student visas.

"Every year we allow nearly 300,000 Chinese nationals to come to the US on student visas. We've literally invited the CCP to spy on our military, steal our intellectual property and threaten national security," Moore said in a statement. He called for Congress to end what he called China's exploitation of the US' student visa program. "It's time we turned off the spigot and immediately banned all student visas going to Chinese nationals."

Further stretching the boundaries of credulity is the fact that his prejudicial bill is cosponsored by five other Republican representatives.

Although the bill has little chance of being adopted despite the anti-China sentiment prevalent in Washington, it is a sign that the country's legacy of racism and xenophobia against the Chinese people is being honed with a new edge.

Some US lawmakers proposed last year that US universities should not allow Chinese international students access to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields involving sensitive technology due to security concerns. And some universities have already done that.

Yet research has shown that China has been the most important foreign supplier of US-based scientists for more than two decades. The rising xenophobia against students from China amid the US-China tech competition will have an impact on the development of science and technology not only in the United States, but also in the world.

The "China Initiative" launched by the US Department of Justice in 2018, which initiated a US government investigation of scientists of Chinese descent, has led to the departure of a growing number of Chinese-born scientists from the US. As a result, an increasing number of Chinese scientists are choosing to come back to work in China instead of staying in the US.

At the same time, the number of Chinese students going to study in the US has been declining in the past couple of years. In the 2023-24 school year, more than 277,000 Chinese students were studying in US universities, one-fourth of the total number of international students, according to an annual report on international students from the Institute of International Education. The number was more than 300,000 in the 2020-21 school year, when Chinese students were the largest group of foreign students studying in the US. Now Indian students have become the largest group of foreign students in the US.

With anti-Chinese sentiment and xenophobia continuing to smolder in the US, an increasing number of Chinese students will choose to study in other countries instead of the US. This will considerably decrease the revenue of US universities, and at the same time reduce the contribution Chinese scientists make to US science and innovation.

History has shown that isolationism is detrimental to the development of science and technology. That some US lawmakers are turning a blind eye to the contributions Chinese-born researchers and scientists have made to the status of the US as the world leader in science and technology only highlights their own shortsightedness and narrow-mindedness.

Some more clear-thinking US politicians have recognized that this is counterproductive to the development of science and technology in the US.

China knows well what an important role reform and opening-up have played in its social and economic development. It welcomes cooperation of all kinds with any country, and it supports its students to study abroad. It also welcomes students from any country to study in China.

China believes that exchanges with the US in as wide a range of areas as possible are important for the development of both countries as well as the development of the world.

Any move to block exchanges between China and the US in any area is against the trend of human development.

Phone call builds momentum toward peace

China has advocated since day one that the Ukraine crisis be resolved through dialogue and negotiation. As Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a news conference on Wednesday, the country welcomes all efforts toward a ceasefire and believes that talks are a necessary step in order to achieve peace.

That the US and Ukrainian leaders talked via telephone on Wednesday, their first conversation since their disastrous Oval Office meeting last month, should be regarded as part of such efforts. In their phone conversation, which seems to have been more amicable, the Ukrainian leader agreed to a 30-day ceasefire on strikes on Russian energy and civil infrastructure, which had been proposed by the US president. A reciprocal arrangement had already been accepted by his Russian counterpart.

Although the partial, temporary ceasefire falls short of the full ceasefire that is being sought, Kyiv's agreeing to it marks a meaningful beginning of what appears to be an accelerating process to arrive at a political settlement of the three-year-old conflict.

In a US State Department news briefing after the call, spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said that technical teams would meet in Saudi Arabia in the coming days to discuss broadening the ceasefire to the Black Sea on the way to a full ceasefire, which "could be the first step toward the full end of the war".

That both Russia and Ukraine have agreed to eliminate key civil and energy infrastructure facilities from attack zones for 30 days is an indication of the common wish of the two parties to de-escalate the conflict. As Bruce said, this is significant as it is "the first agreement that has created the potential of a de-escalation". Despite the hard-won progress, relevant parties should be well aware of the difficulties ahead, as it will prove challenging to find common ground given the stark divide in their respective demands.

It is against this backdrop that the technical teams involved will meet in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to begin working on the nitty-gritty of implementing the deal and hopefully brokering it. This is a critical opportunity for the US side to align Kyiv and Moscow on a comprehensive 30-day truce, which could provide the springboard for talks aimed at a final settlement.

Although Kyiv remains skeptical of Moscow's commitment to peace, urging the US to increase its military and intelligence assistance to Ukraine, it still believes that a ceasefire would "open up opportunities". As the Ukrainian leader said, "once a ceasefire is in place, even if one side attempts provocations, there is still political will, publicly announced to the world".

The "opportunities" also include all peace-loving countries taking advantage of the current momentum. More mediation efforts are required to create conditions conducive to the two parties persevering with what is likely to be a fraught and fractious back-and-forth blame game as they try to squeeze out an advantage in their give-and-take.

As said, China supports all efforts dedicated to peace and hopes that the steps taken so far will lead to a fair, lasting and binding peace agreement that is accepted by all parties concerned. Finding a sure-footed pathway to peace and stability should be the priority of all involved in the talks.

While the different stakeholders have different appeals and interests that have led to the conflict, those will not be resolved through force. Eventually, there must be a viable European security framework that is acceptable to all parties on the continent, and that should be the ultimate goal of the talks.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict should serve as a wake-up call to the potential consequences of putting self-interest before common interest. Be it the losses on the battlefield or the inevitable concessions that will have to be made at the negotiation table, they should serve to remind the direct stakeholders in European security of how valuable peace is and prompt them to reflect on their historical debt to the most invaluable public good of humanity.

That means while incorporating the political resolution of the Ukraine crisis into the process of forming a new collective continental security architecture, relevant parties should focus on dialogue over confrontation, partnership over alliance, and win-win cooperation over zero-sum games — as war will produce no winners, while peace will produce no losers.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

Opening-up provides foreign investment with opportunities

The 2025 Action Plan for Stabilizing Foreign Investment outlines 20 specific measures across four key areas. These include expanding independent opening-up, enhancing investment promotion, improving the effectiveness of open platforms, and strengthening service and guarantee efforts. The plan seeks to further relax market access, optimize the business environment, and attract foreign investment.

Since 2024, China has fully lifted restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector; implemented a nationwide negative list management system for cross-border trade in services and promoted the orderly expansion of opening-up in relevant sectors. Additionally, China has supported the participation of qualified foreign institutions in pilot business projects, actively aligned with international high-stan-

dard economic and trade rules and steadily advanced institutional opening-up.

The plan proposes to expand pilot opening-up in telecommunications, healthcare, education, and other fields, and to accelerate and deepen the comprehensive pilot efforts to broaden the opening-up of the service industry. A series of specific measures have also been introduced, such as encouraging long-term investments by high-quality foreign capital in China's listed companies, formulating policies to promote reinvestment by foreign-invested enterprises and expanding the scope of industries that encourage foreign investment. These measures not only provide robust policy support for foreign-invested enterprises, but also further boost their confidence in developing within China. Notably, the removal of restrictions on for-

ign-invested companies using domestic loans has significantly facilitated equity investments and the establishment of headquarters-type institutions in China.

The action plan requires that all policy measures be implemented by the end of this year. This underscores the Chinese government's confidence and determination to uphold high-level opening-up and vigorously attract foreign investment.

Investing in China means investing in the future and partnering with China means embracing opportunities. The immense potential and stable, healthy development of the Chinese economy will not only drive the steady recovery of the global economy but also provide foreign investors with vast cooperation opportunities and valuable development prospects.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

US should reflect on its tariffs-and-egg dilemma

A US Department of Agriculture report on March 14 says national average wholesale egg prices have been "steadily declining", but on social networking sites a number of people in the United States are still complaining about the high prices of eggs in supermarkets.

Maybe it takes time for supermarkets, which buy eggs from wholesale markets, to adjust their prices for consumers. Or maybe real-time egg prices vary from place to place and it's too early to say that the egg price crisis in the US is over.

Whatever the case, the high egg prices should remind the US government that no country can alone pro-

duce enough to take care of the needs of all inhabitants on Earth. International trade remains an essential, effective way of balancing different countries' needs and products. That is like the ABC of economics and there is reason enough to believe the US leaders know it, as they have asked European countries, including Denmark, to export more eggs to the US. Yes, the same Denmark, from which the US had earlier threatened to annex Greenland.

The US leadership seems ignorant of the fact that imposing tariffs will only curb cross-border trade and push up costs, harming its own consumers. It's rather absurd the US asks coun-

tries to export more eggs on one occasion and threatens to impose more tariffs on the other, as the two measures are, in essence, contradictory.

People of the US know better than their government perhaps. According to US Customs and Border Protection data, by mid-March "significantly more egg products" were seized at US borders "than the number of seizures of the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl". Before the US leadership wields the tariffs baton again, it should listen to the voice of its own people and slash tariffs so that US citizens can buy affordable eggs without needing to smuggle them into the country.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

'De-Americanization' of trade is on the cards

The United States' weaponization of tariffs not only harms the interests of other countries, but also increases the uncertainty for the US economy, which in turn has a profound impact on global trade and the world economy.

The US' weak consumption growth and shrinking manufacturing activities have lowered market expectations and risk aversion is on the rise.

The tariff policy makes imported goods and related products more expensive in the US, which will directly harm the interests of US consumers and companies. Small and medium-sized enterprises in the country have already found it difficult to cope with rapid changes in the supply chain and on the cost side. They are likely to become the first batch of "dominoes" to fall under this round of tariff shocks. According to data of S&P Global Market Intelligence, the total number of US corporate bankruptcies in the first two months of this year has reached 129, the highest since 2010, and most of the bankrupted companies are small businesses.

Nor will imposing tariffs necessarily help create jobs in the US. Research by the Peterson Institute for International Economics shows

that although the US' steel and aluminum tariffs protected about 14,000 jobs in the steel industry in 2018, they led to the loss of 75,000 jobs in the downstream manufacturing industries.

So although the imposition of tariffs seems to be in line with the "America First" policy, the tariffs actually backfire on the US economy and seriously undermine investor confidence. Relevant data show that the total market value of US stocks has evaporated by about \$7.7 trillion over the past month. Under the escalating tariff "chaos", the US economy may experience inflation or even recession.

That will unavoidably be a drag on the world's economic growth, as indicated by the latest estimates of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that both US and global economic growth are set to be lower than previously projected as the US' punitive tariffs on goods imported to the US weigh on growth.

"Global GDP growth is projected to moderate from 3.2 percent in 2024, to 3.1 percent in 2025 and 3.0 percent in 2026, with higher trade barriers in several G20 economies and increased

geopolitical and policy uncertainty weighing on investment and household spending," the OECD said on Monday in its interim Economic Outlook report.

Annual GDP growth in the United States is projected to slow from its recent strong pace, to be 2.2 percent in 2025 and 1.6 percent in 2026 the report forecasts. In the OECD's previous projections in December, it had estimated 3.3 percent global economic growth this year and next, with the US economy expected to grow 2.4 percent in 2025 and 2.1 percent in 2026.

The US tariff policy deviates from the principle of free trade and undermines the multilateral cooperation mechanism of global economic governance. In order to avoid the high tariffs of the US, companies in various countries will have to adjust their layout, reduce their dependence on the US market, and find new suppliers and production bases. The final consequence may be the opposite of the US' objective, as the tariff policy might form a trend of "de-Americanization" in the global industry and supply chains.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Joseph Sifakis

Toward industrial artificial intelligence

The meteoric rise of artificial intelligence since the beginning of this century marks a new era in science and technology revolution, a turning point in history, where the production and application of knowledge are no longer the privilege of humans.

However, despite the impressive achievements, which led to the emergence of generative AI, a lucid analysis of the situation leads us to conclude that AI is still in its infancy; it is currently focused on assistants, such as ChatGPT, which operate in question-answer mode.

These systems are considered "black boxes", and their properties cannot be thoroughly understood and guaranteed to the same level as the properties of traditional information and telecommunication technology systems. Since AI only gives us building blocks, the question that arises is: How do we use them to create intelligent systems to achieve human-level intelligence?

There are many fields of application in science, services and industry where the use of AI remains marginal. These areas need increased automation, reliability and modes of interaction other than conversational.

We need systems capable of analyzing complex phenomena, and understanding their dynamics and properties in scientific



In this context, China is well placed to develop a more reliable AI that is better adapted to the needs of the real economy, particularly to achieve the long-awaited transition to autonomous systems.

fields, ranging from medicine and life sciences to climate and universe sciences. Most important, we need to develop autonomous systems for various industrial applications, as foreseen by the internet of things, such as autonomous transport systems, smart grids, intelligent factories and farms, and autonomous communication systems.

Autonomous systems can be considered as the ultimate stage in the development of AI. They are composed of agents,

each pursuing its own specific goals while cooperating to achieve global goals of the systems they are part of. Current AI technologies are far from sufficient, as demonstrated by the setbacks to the autonomous car industry, an emblematic case illustrating the scale of the autonomy challenge.

The promise of fully autonomous cars before 2020, despite substantial investment, did not come true.

All the signs are that AI has reached a plateau and that its use for and impact on the real economy are yet to come. This is due to factors such as insufficient reliability of current technologies, but also to the strategy of Big Tech, which prioritizes the adoption of conversational technologies by the general public. Big Tech is engaged in a frantic race, relying on a questionable brute force approach, which assumes current solutions are enough to achieve human-level intelligence, and that it is mainly a question of size. They are thus pushing for gigantism, which requires colossal investments in high-energy-consuming infrastructure.

This strategy aims at occupying the field through a blitzkrieg and eliminating competing companies, or even countries, that do not have the same investment capacity. But everything indicates this strategy also involves serious economic risks. More and more voices are being raised to warn against the imbalance between the volume of investments and their yield, to the point that some fear the bursting of a financial bubble.

Adding to these problems is the lack of agreement on a global regulatory framework to control the risks associated with AI products, which is a serious obstacle to the use of AI in critical decision-making processes. Safe AI is a global concern and has been the subject of activities organized by the United Nations, as well as a series of global summits held in London, Seoul and, this year, Paris.

Unfortunately, there is still no consensus on a concrete and realistic global regulatory framework, as the positions of the main stakeholders differ on what are the risks associated with the use of AI, what can and should be regulated, and how can it be achieved in practice.

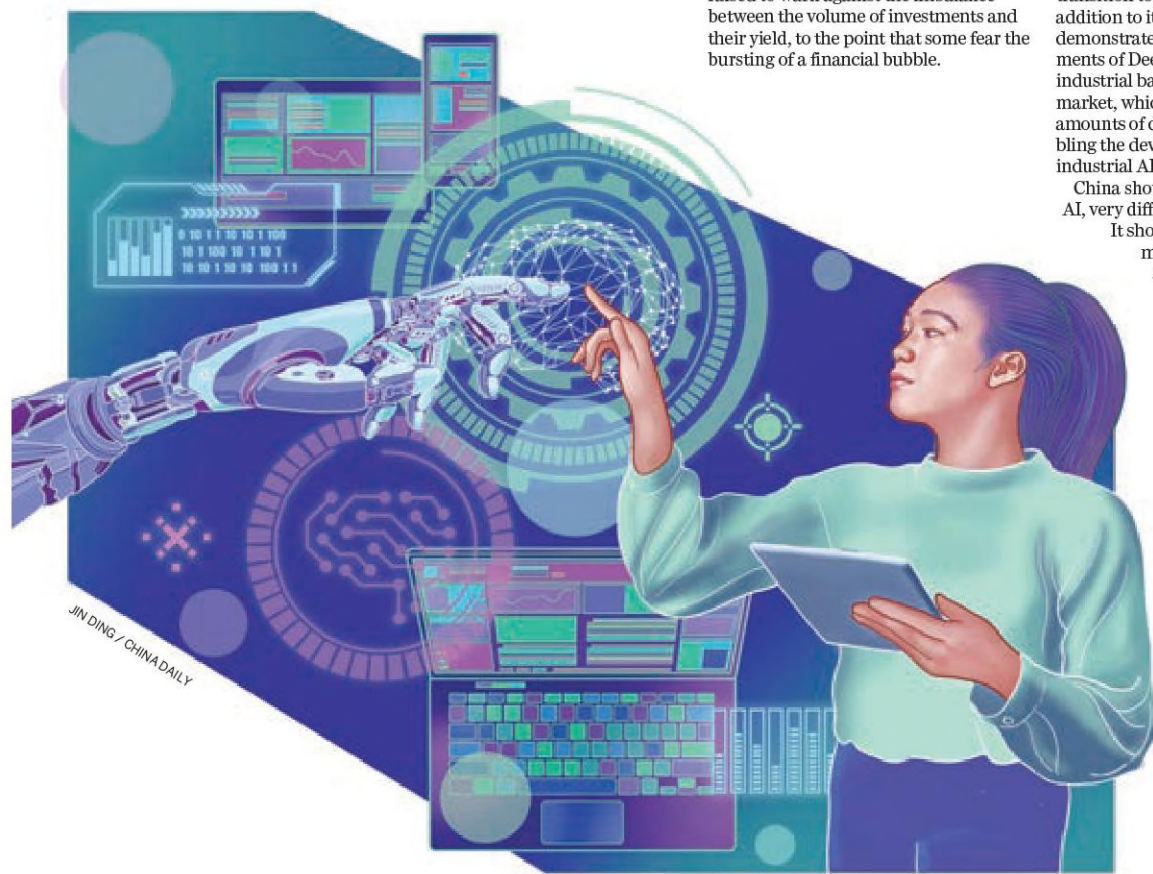
These divergent positions are reflected in particular in the profound disagreement between the European Union and the United States on AI regulation. The EU has adopted a comprehensive regulatory framework, the AI Act, which has adopted a risk management approach to AI systems. Its strict application excludes the use of AI in a large number of "unacceptable risk" and "high risk" applications. In contrast, US regulations are much less restrictive and only include guidelines and recommendations.

In this context, China is well placed to develop a more reliable AI that is better adapted to the needs of the real economy, particularly to achieve the long-awaited transition to autonomous systems. In addition to its strong position in AI, as demonstrated by the recent achievements of DeepSeek, China has a solid industrial base and a unified domestic market, which can provide huge amounts of domain-specific data, enabling the development of cutting-edge industrial AI applications.

China should create its own vision of AI, very different from that of Big Tech.

It should create synergy and mobilize a critical mass among the sectors concerned in order to develop specific infrastructure facilities and data platforms that would contribute to the development of trustworthy industrial AI. Its realization should enable China to take the lead in industrial AI, balance the strategic game of AI, and join forces with like-minded countries to regulate AI in a way that reconciles the imperatives of development and safety in the interest of society.

The author is a recipient of the Turing Award (known as the Nobel Prize for Computing) and founder of the Verimag laboratory in Grenoble. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Anthony Moretti

More curiosity, less negativity key to Sino-US exchanges

Recent surveys indicate that an overwhelming majority of Americans hold a negative opinion of China, which should not come as a surprise to anyone following the US administration elites' rhetoric, often repeated without fact-checking by major news outlets.

A Pew Research Center survey from May 2024 found that 81 percent of US adults view China unfavorably, with 43 percent expressing a very unfavorable opinion. Similarly, a Gallup poll from March 2023 reported a record low 15 percent favorability rating for China among Americans, marking a significant decline from previous years.

Looking for a key reason why Americans in general have a negative opinion of China? Start with leading US administration officials' statements.

Besides US President Donald Trump's scathing remarks against China in the past, Antony Blinken, who served as secretary of state in the Joe Biden administration, raised eyebrows when he lashed out at China, claiming the country was seeking to undermine the world order.

Recently, former US senator Mitt Romney said China is "an existential threat" to the United States. For a long time, Romney was considered a voice of reason in the Republican Party. If he is a man of reason, then what does that say about the others?

The list goes on, but the cumulative effect is obvious: US officials' rhetoric must be scrutinized when analyzing why



Although typically reported only by the local media, the frequent trips made by US students and their teachers to China demonstrate the importance of increasing people-to-people exchanges.

Americans hold such a hostile opinion of China. But the media, which should do so, are happy to play along with the officials.

The Diplomat, an influential magazine that covers Asia, recently wrote: "A key feature of mainstream Western media today is the relentless China-bashing. It is off the charts and tiring, often involving regurgitated trivia or fabricated stories with no evidence to support callous statements about the country, demonstrating a deep lack of understanding. But such stories continue to be churned out with no end in sight."

No credible US media organization should ever want such a critique written

about it. But too often journalists refuse to question the dominant narrative that China is a threat to the US. What does this say about the US media which too often appear unwilling to disseminate opinions that counter the baked-in narrative that China is bad?

Given these facts, it is perhaps a relief to know that the public opinion data are not worse. To speak favorably about China or the Chinese people, especially anywhere near Washington, the epicenter of US power, is to risk strange looks from people and questions about whether you are a "real American". And suggesting an outreach effort between the US and China is likely to result in a firm shake of the head accompanied by an assertive "no".

I know this from experience. On more than one occasion over the past year or so, I have invited professional colleagues to write editorials/op-ed pieces that would appear in Chinese publications, such as China Daily. One person said he appreciated the offer but getting involved with Chinese "propaganda" was not of his interest. Mind you, this individual is a PhD. If such a person refuses to engage with China, it is not surprising that US netizens often ask if it is safe for US nationals to visit China.

One wonders if anyone of those engaging in such conversations has taken the time to find out how incredibly safe China is.

Moreover, US universities send a peculiar message to the public when they sever educational partnerships with China.

Perhaps no Confucius Institute is operating on any US college campus today. Worse, earlier this year, the University of Michigan suddenly announced that it was ending its longstanding collaboration with a top Chinese university.

In short, if US organizations and institutions such as the government, media and the higher education department refuse to have impartial discussions on China, can anything be done to change the narrative and improve US public opinion of China?

The call from Chinese President Xi Jinping for 50,000 American youths to visit China over the next five years offers a beacon of hope. Although typically reported only by the local media, the frequent trips made by US students and their teachers to China demonstrate the importance of increasing people-to-people exchanges. One Iowa resident spoke of the importance associated with students from her city going to China, saying, "I think our challenge is to grow a curiosity and understanding and find ways to work together."

Indeed, we need more curiosity, less negativity; more understanding, less stereotyping; more cooperation, less conflict.

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Chen Weihua

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It makes no sense at all to continue funding VOA or Radio Free Europe

The president of Brussels-based Foreign Correspondents Association, of which I am a part, issued a statement voicing solidarity with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, whose funding was terminated by the Donald Trump administration last Saturday as part of the broader cuts to the US Agency for Global Media.

I argued in a column in 2011 that it makes no sense for Voice of America, a sister broadcaster of RFE/RL and Radio Free Asia, to exist today because it was created in 1942 during World War II and had its heyday during the Cold War years. Its parent body, the USAGM, is an arm of the US government information/disinformation campaign.

The Cold War ended more than 30 years ago. So when European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas sounded nostalgic on Monday about RFE, which she said she listened to decades ago, she inadvertently admitted that it was a thing of the past and irrelevant today.

Unlike during the Cold War, there are no confrontational political blocs in Europe today. Russians can travel freely around the world. Their travels have been restricted in recent years only due to the anti-Russia policies of some EU member states.

If the Chinese government were afraid of its people knowing the truth about the world as some critics claim, it would not have allowed its citizens to travel abroad in such large numbers.

For China, there has been a sea change over the past decades. The National Immigration Administration reported 291 million exits from and entries into the country by Chinese nationals in 2024. According to UN Tourism, Chinese people's expenditure on overseas travel hit \$196.5 billion, compared with \$150 billion by US citizens, in 2023.

If the United States, and the EU member states further facilitate and expedite their visa approvals, the number will skyrocket as many Chinese are looking forward to traveling abroad for leisure and for business.

These people are best suited to tell the real stories about China and what they see abroad. If the Chinese government were afraid of its people knowing the truth about the world as some critics claim, it would not have allowed its citizens to travel abroad in such large numbers. That almost all those Chinese people who traveled abroad have returned to China means they didn't feel "persecuted" at home as those critics claim.

The hundreds of thousands of Chinese students studying abroad and who chat with their family members in China on WeChat are also much better messengers of China and the world than VOA and its sister broadcasters.

Unlike my first trip to the US in the early 1990s when cars and high-rises were scarce in China, and Beijing boasted the country's only subway, today's China has caught up with, and in some cases overtaken, the Western world.

It's absurd to claim that VOA/RFA/RFE/RL practice "unfettered", "independent journalism" and provide "accurate, impartial and fact-based reporting", for they are simply US government propaganda tools.

The US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, better known as the Smith-Mundt Act, had long forbidden VOA and others to broadcast directly to US citizens to protect them from the propaganda spread by their own government. This speaks volumes of the nature of propaganda they were spreading.

Although the USIEE Act eased the restrictions in 2013, I am yet to see balanced reporting on China by VOA, because it is part of US government smear campaign tool making China look bad.

In a world where mutual understanding is critical to world peace and prosperity, VOA and its sister broadcasters have been busy promoting misunderstanding by telling one-sided stories and false narratives about some countries.

Those who argue that the latest US government move will create a vacuum for China and Russia forget the hard truth that Western media outlets, not those from China, Russia or other Global South countries, dominate the global landscape.

It makes more sense for the US and the EU to admit more tourists and students from those countries that VOA/RFA/RFE/RL have been targeting, so they can tell the real stories of their countries. It also makes more sense for US and European people to visit, study and work in China to see the country with their own eyes, rather than being misled by VOA, and form their own opinion about China and the Chinese people.

GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategic Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

DAVID GOSSET

Principled position

Celebrating 70 years of the Bandung Conference and its vision and ideals that continue to inspire

Seventy years ago, the Indonesian city of Bandung hosted a historic gathering that would leave a lasting impact on international relations. The Bandung Conference, also known as the Asian-African Conference, brought together 29 newly independent nations,



representing more than half of the world's population at that time. These nations, emerging from the shadow of colonialism, sought to assert their sovereignty, promote economic and cultural cooperation, and chart a path forward in a world dominated by Cold War rivalries. To borrow the wise words of Indonesia's first president Sukarno from his introductory speech at the conference, they were injecting "the voice of reason into world affairs". Among the key figures at the conference was then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, representing the newly established People's Republic of China. His presence underscored China's desire to engage with other developing nations and to make its voice heard on the global stage. In his report on the conference, US political scientist and China expert Arthur Doak Barnett rightly observed that this was the moment when New China truly asserted its presence on the international stage, due in part to the diplomatic finesse and personal charisma of Premier Zhou.

Although the world has changed significantly since 1955, the ideals championed at the Bandung Conference continue to resonate. The principles outlined in the final com-

munique, often referred to as the 10 Principles of Bandung, remain strikingly relevant today. In the face of growing geopolitical tensions, severe challenges to multilateralism, economic inequalities and the uneven development of emerging technologies, the Bandung spirit remains a steadfast guiding vision for global cooperation.

The 10 Principles of Bandung served as a foundation for peaceful coexistence and cooperation among nations. They emphasized respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, and the promotion of mutual interests. Two principles, in particular, stand out as especially relevant in today's global context.

The first principle reaffirmed the importance of adhering to the Charter of the United Nations, emphasizing respect for fundamental human rights, sovereignty and equality among nations. At a time when the UN faces criticism and increasing polarization among major powers, this principle reminds us of the value of a rules-based international order that promotes peace and cooperation.

Equally significant is the fourth principle, which calls for the "abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country". This principle remains a topic of intense debate in contemporary geopolitics. The nations attending the Bandung Conference strongly opposed colonialism and foreign domination, and this commitment to non-interference continues to resonate today, particularly in discussions around sovereignty, economic independence and the avoidance of great-power rivalry dictating the fate of

smaller nations.

While the geopolitical landscape has evolved dramatically since 1955, the core issues that inspired the Bandung Conference remain pressing concerns for many developing nations. Economic disparities, neo-colonial influences and power imbalances in global governance persist. However, the Bandung spirit lives on in the efforts of the Global South to assert greater agency in world affairs.

In recent years, initiatives, such as the BRICS grouping, the Belt and Road Initiative and the push for reforms in global financial institutions, are examples of developing nations seeking to reshape international structures in their favor. These efforts reflect the Bandung ideals of economic cooperation, self-determination and reducing dependency on former colonial powers.

Moreover, South-South cooperation has expanded significantly in trade, technology exchanges and diplomatic collaboration. Organizations such as the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States embody the principles of regional solidarity that were central to the Bandung vision. The rising influence of these groups signals that the Global South is not merely a passive participant in international affairs but an active force in shaping global policies. A good example of the significance of South-South relations is the economic exchange between China, the world's second-largest economy, and ASEAN. In 2024, both sides remained each other's largest trading partners for the fifth consecutive year.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Despite the continued relevance of the Bandung principles, challenges remain. Multilateralism, the very framework that the Bandung Conference sought to strengthen, is under strain. Some major powers have undermined international institutions, while economic and political rivalries have led to a fragmented global order. Trade wars, unilateral sanctions and military interventions have often disregarded the core tenets of the Bandung Conference, particularly the principle of non-interference.

At the same time, developing nations continue to advocate for a fairer and more inclusive global system. Calls for a more democratic UN Security Council, debt relief for struggling economies and reforms in global financial governance reflect the enduring desire of the Global South to achieve the equity

that the Bandung Conference envisioned.

The Bandung Conference was a defining moment in the history of post-colonial nations, symbolizing their collective aspiration for a just and peaceful world. Seventy years later, the world has changed, but the issues of sovereignty, economic independence and international cooperation remain as vital as ever. While some challenge the principles of multilateralism and non-interference, the Bandung ideals continue to inspire nations seeking an equitable global order.

As the Global South asserts itself on the world stage, it carries forward the Bandung spirit, championing cooperation, mutual respect and a vision of global governance that prioritizes peace over conflict and partnership over domination. In an increasingly complex world,

the message of the Bandung Conference remains a powerful reminder that international relations should be built on dialogue, equality and the shared pursuit of progress.

In a speech that resonated with all who heard it, Premier Zhou emphasized at the Bandung Conference that the goal should be to seek common ground, not to foster division. Pursuing common ground was the wise course then, and it remains the right approach for those who seek peace, justice and shared prosperity for all of humanity, not just for a privileged few.

The author is founder of the China-Europe-America Global Initiative. 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.

WARWICK POWELL

Alternative reality

The principles of the Non-Aligned Movement offer a viable path toward a peaceful future

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. It also marks the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference and the 64th anniversary of the formal founding of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In the intervening years, the world has experienced numerous and persistent bouts of disputes and warfare. Many of these conflicts have been instigated and agitated by US interventions, as described by Monica Duffy Toft and Sidita Kushi in their book *Dying by the Sword: The Militarization of US Foreign Policy*. Between 1946 and 1989, the United States initiated on average 2.4 military interventions per year, and between 1990 and 2019, this increased to 3.7 interventions per year.

While many mainstream Western commentators argue that the postwar period marked the development of a more stable and peaceful US-led liberal world order, which was subsequently consolidated after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, other scholars such as John Mearsheimer and Patrick Porter have demonstrated the gulf between US rhetoric and the reality of US practice.

What are the principal observations we can make about the challenges to peace in the 21st century, based on the experiences of the past 80 years; and how can the principles that undergird the Non-Aligned Movement contribute to the realization of multipolar peace in our times?

The 80 years since the end of World War II, the 70 years since the Bandung Conference and the 64 years since the formal founding of the Non-Aligned Movement offer

critical insights into the challenges the world faces in realizing peace in the 21st century. These observations are particularly relevant in light of the persistent conflicts, power struggles and interventions that have characterized international relations during this period.

Despite the establishment of international institutions such as the United Nations, power politics and interventionism by major powers, particularly those of the US, have continued to destabilize regions.

The reality of US practice has consistently undermined the illusion of a liberal world order. Rather, the US and other Western powers have often acted in ways that contradict their stated principles, prioritizing national interests over global stability and the sovereign security interests of others. As time has gone on, the legitimacy of international institutions has been eroded amid an emerging and growing distrust of Western-led initiatives.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the high water mark for the 30-year unipolar moment that followed. Now the world is becoming increasingly multipolar or multi-nodal in character with the re-emergence of centers such as China, India, Russia and other regional powers. In some ways, this shift has catalyzed the intensification of geopolitical competition at the risk of destabilizing regions and undermining collective efforts to address global challenges such as development, ecological protection and pandemics.

At the same time, the 21st century has seen a rise in asymmetric warfare, with non-state actors,



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

insurgent groups and terrorist organizations playing significant roles in conflicts. These actors often exploit power vacuums created by failed states or foreign interventions. The use of proxy wars by major powers has further complicated efforts to achieve peace and stability, as the situation in Ukraine tragically demonstrates.

Yet, we are witnessing not just the re-emergence of great power rivalry per se. Arguably, the systemic changes that are unfolding are

creating a different set of dynamics and orderings. It is in this emergent space that the experiences and perspectives of the Non-Aligned Movement can contribute to multipolar peace.

The Non-Aligned Movement emerged during the Cold War as a coalition of states seeking to resist domination by either the US or the Soviet Union. Its core principles — respect for sovereignty, non-interference, peaceful coexistence and mutual cooperation — remain high-

ly relevant in today's emergent multipolar world.

The Non-Aligned Movement adheres to some key principles.

First, the Non-Aligned Movement's emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference provides a counter-narrative to the interventionist policies of major powers. By upholding these principles, the movement can help protect weaker states from external interference and foster a more equitable international order.

Second, the Non-Aligned Movement's commitment to peaceful coexistence and diplomacy offers an alternative to the militarized approaches that have dominated the unipolar period. By prioritizing dialogue and negotiation, the movement can help de-escalate conflicts and build trust between states.

Third, the Non-Aligned Movement has long advocated for a more inclusive and democratic multilateralism. In a multipolar world, this vision can help reform international institutions to better reflect the interests of the Global South. South-South cooperation can also promote economic and technological collaboration among developing countries, reducing their dependence on Western-dominated systems.

Fourth, the Non-Aligned Movement's anti-hegemonic stance challenges the dominance of any single power or bloc in international affairs. By advocating for a more balanced distribution of power, the movement can help create a multipolar system that is more stable and just. This includes addressing economic inequalities and ensuring that developing countries have a

greater say in global governance.

Last, the Non-Aligned Movement's emphasis on collective action and solidarity can help address transnational issues such as climate change, pandemics and poverty. By working together, non-aligned states can amplify their influence and push for solutions that prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable.

The experiences of the past 80 years underscore the challenges of achieving peace in a world marked by power politics and interventionism underpinned by ideological universalism. However, the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement offer a viable path toward a more equitable and multipolar peace: a peace grounded not just on the absence of military conflict but on the symbiotic indivisibility of peace and prosperity.

This underscores the important role that countries of the Global South, including China as the largest developing nation, can play in advocating and advancing global peace — not just in a negative sense, as the absence of military conflict, but in a positive sense, as a set of institutions and practices that enable non-violent dispute resolution through consensus. A positive peace also realigns security and prosperity as symbiotically co-dependent. A multipolar peace rests on the ability of the global majority to show that not only do they insist on a break with the violent past, but that they insist on playing an active role in building a peaceful alternative.

The author is an adjunct professor at Queensland University of Technology and a senior fellow at the Taihe Institute. 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.

LIFE

On some of the murals inside the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province, is the iconic image of flying apsaras, celestial beings draped in diaphanous attire and billowing ribbons.

The elegance exuded by these airborne fairies inspired artists to translate their poses into dance moves, particularly in the 1970s when the Gansu Song and Dance Ensemble captivated the Chinese dance scene with the original dance drama *Flower Rains Along the Silk Road*.

Dance experts like Gao Jinrong, a pioneering scholar, have been researching the murals and sculptures, and Dunhuang dance has evolved into an important Chinese classical dance genre.

In Dunhuang, educators are cultivating a new generation of dancers. Northwest Normal University's Dunhuang College, with departments such as dance art, fine arts and tourism, is one school dedicated to researching and promoting Dunhuang culture.

Dunhuang College's dance art department was established in 2014, according to the department's director Su Ruixuan.

"Like other professional dance academies, our curriculum includes courses on ballet, Chinese classical dance, modern dance, choreography and folk dance, along with dance history and theoretical courses," she says.

"However, because of our unique location, a highlight and compulsory course is Dunhuang dance training and performances."

From their first semester, the students are required to study theoretical learning of Dunhuang's history and culture, particularly the murals in the Mogao Caves, to provide a solid foundation for practical Dunhuang dance training from the second semester.

In addition to fundamental technique training, the students learn routines that sequence individual dance moves and poses before rehearsing excerpts from classic dance productions and choreographing original pieces.

Zhao Yuru, a sophomore in the department, says that thanks to the proximity, students often go on trips to the grottoes to view the murals, imitate the original poses, and compare them with today's dance moves.

One of her favorites is Cave 112, which depicts a flying apsara featuring a "reverse pipa playing" pose — hands reaching up and plucking the strings of a *pipa* (four-string Chinese lute) on the back, a signature pose in Dunhuang dance.

"Among the caves with 'reverse pipa playing' images, Cave 112 is the most classic. The *pipa* player takes the central role with several musicians playing other folk instruments positioned on both sides. I feel a sense of majesty when performing the gesture," Zhao says.

The program has 365 graduates and current students. Around half the graduates joined professional dance troupes while the other half work as dance instructors.

According to Su, teachers in the department work to develop their own curriculum inspired by the characters and stories depicted in the murals.

In this way, they can better guide students to create original works in their junior year.

Along with other teachers, such as Qiao Lei, they have also innovated by combining Dunhuang dance with other genres like modern dance.

Their original productions have won



Su Ruixuan teaches Dunhuang dance at Northwest Normal University's Dunhuang College and now serves as director of the college's dance art department. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Dancing for Dunhuang

Experts pass down a moving art inspired by Mogao Caves murals, **Cheng Yuezhu** and **Ma Jingna** report in Dunhuang, Gansu.



Dance productions choreographed by Su have been performed at cultural venues and institutions at home and abroad.



awards at dance contests, and the teachers and students often participate in exchanges and perform at universities and art institutions worldwide.

The department has been working to introduce Dunhuang dance to local primary and secondary schools.

It has customized exercise routines for students, hosted popularization courses at student societies, and created original dance works for the schools.

Born and raised in Jiayuguan, Gansu, Qiao worked at the Gansu Song and Dance Ensemble and performed in the 2008 edition of *Flower Rains Along the Silk Road* at age 13.

"The main challenge of Dunhuang dance is that students must master the movements and understand the cultural connotations within," Qiao says.

"We, as teachers, are essentially passing down previous generations' work. I hope students will pass down the tradition and promote it to a wider audience so that more people will learn about and study it."

Reflecting on his own learning processes and those of students today, he feels a sense of inheritance across generations.

"When I started learning Dunhuang dance, I studied the movements summarized by Gao Jinrong. They have a relatively gender-neutral style. All the movements are incredibly true to the murals as if they are carved out and brought to life," Qiao says.

In their teaching methods, apart from Gao's system, they also adopt that of Dunhuang dance expert Shi Min, who researched and developed moves for male dancers.

Gao and Shi have visited the department for instructions, along with other renowned dance artists including dancer and choreographer Huang Doudou and head of the National Ballet of China Feng Ying.

Qiao designed his original choreography based on the Four Heavenly Kings (protective deities in Buddhism), which serve as practice material for male students.

"The Four Heavenly Kings are strong and imposing, with a fierce expression. All the moves and gestures, even though our limbs and body might be curved, are full of power and sturdiness," says Zhang Si'an, a sophomore.

When he began learning dancing, as a child, he trained in ballroom dance but later developed a passion for traditional Chinese dance forms.

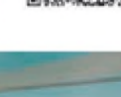
A native of Gansu, he is familiar with the Dunhuang murals. Dunhuang College, rooted in the home of the grottoes, seemed an ideal institution to learn this unique dance genre.

"I really enjoy Dunhuang culture. Through the courses on Dunhuang history and cave art, I've learned about the grottoes from the earliest to the most elaborate," he says.

"I've only scratched the surface of this heritage but I'd like to continue learning and deepening my understanding. After graduation, I hope to travel around the country and teach people about the beauty of Dunhuang."

Contact the writers at chengyuezh@chinadaily.com.cn

Online
See more by scanning the code.





AD



东北虎

Amur tiger

Between heaven and earth,
together with other sentient beings, I live.

— Zhuangzi, philosopher, late fourth century BC

天地与我并生，而万物与我为一



—《庄子·齐物论》




LIFESHANGHAI

Peking Opera diva is pitch perfect for role

Performer bridges tradition with modernity by conducting bold experiments to captivate today's audiences, **Zhang Kun** reports.



Center and above right: Scenes from *Farewell My Concubine*, performed at Shanghai Oriental Art Center on March 14, starring Shi Yihong as Yuji. Top left: Shi teaches Peking Opera performance at Columbia University earlier this year. Above left: She talks with associate professor Andrea S. Goldman of University of California, Los Angeles. Top right: A portrait of Shi, the prima donna at Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Throughout her illustrious career, 53-year-old Shanghai native Shi Yihong has remained dedicated to the timeless art of Peking Opera, also known as Jingju. Regaled as a diva singer, she is celebrated for her masterful performances.

Not only does she uphold the values of this ancient art form, but the most prominent woman in Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company skillfully bridges the gap between tradition and modernity while attempting bold experiments to captivate contemporary audiences.

Shi is a Peking Opera performer of female characters portrayed in Mei Lanfang style. Born in Shanghai in 1972, she joined the company in 1990, winning many national awards.

While she is known nationwide for her performances in classical repertoire, Shi is recognized for performing different Peking Opera styles. She even made a Kunqu

Opera production in 2013. She had French novelist Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* adapted into a Peking Opera production in 2008, and played the role of Esmeralda. In 2021, she adapted the 1990s martial arts movie *New Dragon Gate Inn* into a Peking Opera.

Farewell My Concubine, one of the most celebrated Peking Opera repertoires, was created by Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) and Yang Xiaolou (1878-1938) in the 1920s. It tells the story of Xiang Yu, a warlord in the 3rd century BC, and features the evening before his final battle for the throne, which he has no chance of winning. Shi plays the heroine Yuji, a beloved consort of Xiang, who dies by suicide as a gesture of devotion and unwavering loyalty to her hero.

Today, *Farewell My Concubine* is widely popular as a representative piece of Mei Lanfang-style Peking Opera recognized for its arias and the heroine's sword dance. Shi has performed the opera for decades,

though her performance is not a faithful copy of Mei's version.

"I first learned the opera from Maestro Zhang Meijuan, then picked some characteristics and details I found in other artists' performances. I then put together my own version based on Maestro Mei's interpretation," she says.

Shi performed in the opening shows for the classic Chinese opera series at the Shanghai Oriental Art Center this year, which has hosted the annual traditional Chinese opera showcase for 15 years. The actress gave sold-out performances of *Farewell My Concubine* on March 14 and *The Unicorn Purse* on Saturday.

"You could feel her suffering by the way she looks at him. When she dances with the swords, your heartbeat speeds up with the drumbeat. Audiences were so overwhelmed by her performance that they swarmed the stage for the ovation," audience member Cai Xin wrote on Xiaohongshu, or RedNote, a Chinese

social media platform, after seeing Shi's performance on March 14.

A story about war and love, the opera appeals to audiences worldwide. In 2017, Shi performed it with Shang Changrong as Xiang at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and Richardson Auditorium at Princeton University in the United States.

Encouraged by the audiences' enthusiastic response, the East Asian Studies department at Princeton University set up an annual project, inviting her and her colleagues from the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company to introduce Peking Opera to US students. The following winter, a group of students from Princeton visited and studied for two weeks at the company.

In the past few years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was held online. In January, Shi finally made her second visit to Princeton. "We taught them to sing

the arias, dance with short spears, and paint their faces for different characters. The students enjoyed it and learned very quickly," she tells China Daily. It gave her great joy to see the foreign students present a Peking Opera show on campus after studying for just two weeks.

Shi went on to perform and talk about Peking Opera at top universities including Columbia in New York City, Yale in Connecticut, Harvard in Massachusetts, and the University of California, Los Angeles.

"I was very impressed by the fact that so many people are interested in Peking Opera and curious about Chinese culture, including Chinese people and others from various cultural backgrounds. I met with members of Peking Opera societies in several universities," she adds.

"I also met professors who asked questions about Peking Opera. It made me reflect on what I've learned since childhood from a new perspective." Those include: Why do

actresses always walk in circles on the stage? Why do the musical instruments follow the opera singers? How do the choreography and arias serve the storytelling?

"These discussions made me realize how Peking Opera is deeply rooted in Chinese aesthetics and philosophy," she says.

Peking Opera is an important part of China's cultural heritage. Shi maintains that it is important to keep the art moving forward and continue to communicate with modern audiences.

Masters such as Mei Lanfang worked with some of the best playwrights and theater artists of their time. Together, they pushed Peking Opera to an unprecedented artistic level. "I hope to work with playwrights in this way and create new operas that resonate with today's audiences," Shi says.

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By ZHANG KUN

The first time Ye Xiaogang performed at the Shanghai Spring International Music Festival, he was an 11-year-old dancer. This year, the festival, as one of China's longest-running music festivals, is celebrating its 40th session. Ye, now a prominent composer in China, will present his compositions in a concert at the festival.

On March 12, Ye, chairman of the China Musicians' Association, flew from Beijing to Shanghai to discuss the upcoming *Ye Xiaogang's Symphonic Works Concert*, which will take place at Shanghai Symphony Hall on April 2 under the baton of 86-year-old Chen Xieyang, who is celebrating his 60th anniversary in the music industry.

At the 18th Shanghai music festival in 1999, Chen conducted the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra in playing Ye's compositions *Spring* and *The Story of Shenzhen*. Since then, the orchestra has played more than 30 of Ye's works, according to Zhou Ping, the director of the orchestra.

The symphonic suite *A Song of Farewell* is a piece commissioned by

the orchestra in 2018 and adapted by the composer from the opera of the same title in 2010, which will be included in the upcoming concert.

"I want audiences to follow the narrative thread, the ups-and-downs in the storytelling after removing the arias and lyrics in the opera," Ye says about the symphonic suite.

"I noticed people humming the melody as they walked out of the concert hall," Zhou recalled about the opera's premiere. "That shows Ye's ability to create beautiful melodies, in signature Ye style."

Ye says: "I want audiences to understand my composition without difficulty. When I was younger, I took pride in writing complex music and hearing conductors complain about the frequent beat changes in my work, making it almost impossible for the orchestra to play."

Today, Ye is steadfastly against the widespread tendency among young composers to show off their abilities by writing music that is difficult to understand. "After all,



Left: Ye Xiaogang (middle) checks out the collection of his compositions on exhibition at Shanghai Symphony Hall with conductor Chen Xieyang (right). Right: A poster of the upcoming concert on Ye's compositions. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

music is meant to be heard, rather than studied.

"I try to compose music that will be played for decades, that people will enjoy listening to, and can tell it is the sound of our culture and generation," he says.

Ye's concert program will also feature *Mount Emei*, a piece inspired by the landscape and culture of Sichuan province, and *Cantonese Suite*, based on the folk music of the composer's home province of Guangdong.

The 40th session of the Shanghai music festival will take place from Sunday to April 9 with 50 concerts, six dance productions and 13 other events such as mini-festivals, music-themed exhibitions and a call for new music compositions.

Music festival hits a celebratory high note

Ten nationwide companies will perform during the festival. More than 40 percent of the shows will feature new compositions and artists, showcasing the latest achievements in the music sector around China, says Xia Yujing, deputy chairperson of the Shanghai Federation of Literary and Art Circles.

More than 30 percent of the shows will be international productions, such as *Wuthering Heights* by the Wise Children Theatre Company from the United Kingdom, which premieres on the Chinese mainland at the Shanghai Culture Square from April 4 to 6.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and the World Anti-Fascist War. The opening concert on Sunday will be celebrated with three modern Chinese compositions based on the occasion — *Ode to the Red Flag*, *Yellow River Cantata*, and *China, My Beloved Mother*.

Additionally, 2025 marks the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Italy. The festival will feature seven concerts with music from Italy.

LIFE



“
If more people start thinking about it, we might be able to find the answer, or answers, so that we won't wait another 1,600 years to find the next 'artemisinin'.”

Liang Guibai, writer



A remedy from history

Writing about the rediscovery of ancient antimalarial treatment, author poses thought-provoking questions, **Yang Yang** reports.

In 330, Ge Hong, a Taoist scholar and alchemist born in 283, moved to Luofu Mountain in present-day South China's Guangdong province to continue his pursuit of physical immortality, which he believed could be attained through alchemy.

He soon became known for his lifesaving prescriptions. Apart from alchemy, Ge spent much of his time studying herbal medicine and collecting and testing different prescriptions before recording his findings in books like the *Zhou Hou Jiu Zu Fang* (later known as the *Zhou Hou Bei Ji Fang*), a prescription guide for emergencies.

One day, a farmer from a village at the foot of the mountain came to seek Ge's help. Many of the villagers had fallen ill, suffering from alternating chills and fever. Some had even died. It was a common affliction in the south of China, and was thought to be caused by miasmas. Ge gave the farmer two different prescriptions, and told him that they might take effect three days after drinking them.

Three days later, Ge's student reported that both prescriptions had worked, so he noted them down in the *Zhou Hou Jiu Zu Fang*.

In the late 19th century, more than 1,500 years later, the cause of the disease was finally discovered. The alternating chills and fever were brought on by malaria, a disease that is estimated to have killed between 25 and 50 percent of all humans that have ever lived.

By way of treatment for malaria, Ge recorded 43 prescriptions in the *Zhou Hou Jiu Zu Fang*, including the two he gave to the farmer — one based on *changshan*, or dichroa root, an antifebrile, and another based on *qinghao*, or sweet wormwood.

“Take a handful of *qinghao*, soak it in two *sheng* (about 400 milliliters) of water, squeeze out the juice, and consume all of it,” Ge writes.

It was not until the latter half of 1971, when pharmaceutical chemist Tu Youyou was rereading the *Zhou Hou Bei Ji Fang* as part of her research into effective traditional Chinese medicine prescriptions to treat malaria, that *qinghao* emerged as a promising choice.

Tu explained when she received the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine in 2015 that, the research team of which she was a member had tried the plant, but its effect proved unstable. When Tu read Ge's prescription, it suddenly occurred to her that the extraction process might need to avoid high temperatures, and so she considered using a method that involved solvents with lower boiling points.

This unusual spark led to a groundbreaking scientific discovery, resulting in a new drug that has saved millions of lives and benefited humanity as a whole.

The question is why, during the more than 16 centuries since Ge, there had been no progress regarding the use of *qinghao* to treat malaria in China. That is something Liang Guibai, the author of *Shuang Yao Ji*, or *A Tale of Two Drugs*, hopes readers will think about while reading. He's co-founder and chief scientist at Shanghai-based SHEO Pharmaceuticals, and an independ-



Top left: A TCM lab test in Liuzhou, Guangxi province. Top right: Villagers tend to sweet wormwood plants in Liuzhou's Rongan county. PHOTOS BY QIN QINGHE / FOR CHINA DAILY. Above: Liang Guibai's *Shuang Yao Ji*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: *Shuang Yao Ji*, or *A Tale of Two Drugs*, reveals scientific milestones regarding quinine and artemisinin, both antimalarial drugs. Right: Liang, the author, is a drug research and development scientist. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



ent consultant in preclinical research and development of drugs.

The “two drugs” in the title refer to quinine and artemisinin, two naturally occurring antimalarial drugs.

In concise and vivid language, Liang uses what he calls a mix of half fiction and half nonfiction to present key historical moments in scientific advancement.

The writer Han Songguo comments on the book that besides science, it focuses on the history of the two drugs and also explores the related history of human

migration, transportation, medicine, warfare, territorial change, political games, technological advancements, and even monetary history.

Liang did a lot of research before writing to find details of those key moments. Where the records were missing, he devised stories to make the book “more visually engaging”. One example is the aforementioned story of Ge prescribing medicine to save people at the foot of Luofu Mountain.

About eight years ago, Liang, a drug research and development scientist with a

doctoral degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States, was invited to give 12-hour lectures on new drug developments at a business school.

Twelve hours is a long time, so he incorporated a lot of background information about the new drug development process into the lectures, including the tale of the two drugs.

After hearing him, one of Liang's friends said that he should write a book based on the lectures. Liang wrote an outline and proposed it to Yilin Press, with which he

was already working on the book series, *The Stories of New Drugs*.

“I feel I am the right person to write the book, not only because I have gathered so much background material of the two drugs, but also because of my personal experience,” he says.

The discovery of quinine and artemisinin, two natural medicines, fundamentally changed human health, altered the world order, and profoundly transformed the worlds of chemistry students like Liang.

When he was studying chemistry at Fudan University in the 1980s, Liang wanted to become a writer. As a young man interested in literature and art, he spent most of his time playing sports, reading world classics, playing cards and dancing, leaving him little time for chemistry. But the trajectory of his life was completely changed in a single lesson, during which the professor recounted the story of how quinine was synthesized, the starting point of modern organic synthesis.

If, as Liang wrote in the epilogue of his book, the synthesis of quinine “opened up the world of chemistry” for him and made him “truly fall in love with organic chemistry”, then the synthesis of artemisinin allowed him to “start thinking about the magical world of life”.

The peculiarity of *qinghao* urged him to think deeper: “Why does sweet wormwood contain a compound with such a unique structure? Why is it only found in that plant, and not in others like grass? Is it truly meant to be a natural compound for killing malaria parasites?”

These questions, he explains, may also be helpful in inspiring people to think about how to find the next “artemisinin” hidden in the compendium of TCM prescriptions.

“If there is an initial intent in writing the book, it is to get people to think about this question together. Right now, it's a question without an answer. But if more people start thinking about it, we might be able to find the answer, or answers, so that we won't wait another 1,600 years to find the next ‘artemisinin,’” he writes.

The book includes excerpts about sweet wormwood and treatment methods for malaria from the *Zhou Hou Bei Ji Fang* and Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) medical expert Li Shizhen's *Compendium of Materia Medica* for reference.

“Compared to Li's encyclopedic collection of herbs and prescriptions, I'm more interested in Ge's 43 prescriptions for treating malaria, because among the three known effective natural antimalarials — quinine, artemisinin and the alkaloid of the antifebrile dichroa root, he got two correct more than 1,600 years ago,” he says.

“Compared to sweet wormwood, obviously Ge had conducted more studies on dichroa root, and had been trying to improve the prescription for it,” he says.

Despite the plentiful sorcerous content in the *Zhou Hou Bei Ji Fang*, Liang says that he will continue researching Ge's prescriptions to see if there are any other special discoveries.

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Seeing China through the eyes of classic Iranian poetry

By EHSAN DOOSTMOHAMMADI

The friendship between China and Iran has a long history, with deep-rooted ties along the Silk Road dating back centuries. At the same time, the brilliance of Chinese culture spread along this route to the distant land of Persia, enriching cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Throughout history, Chinese culture and civilization gradually permeated various aspects of Iranian society, particularly literature.

Chinese elements became an essential source of inspiration for Persian poets, who not only wove Chinese landscapes, characters and stories into their verses, but also expressed deep admiration and longing for Chinese aesthetics, craftsmanship and sculpture. These literary works are not only a testament to the cultural exchanges between China and Iran, but also a valuable legacy of mutual learning between civilizations.

Diverse elements of Chinese culture and civilization have influenced Persian literature, particularly Persian poetry. Many poets evoke the mystique of China

in their work. In the vast universe of Persian literature, poets have long woven their admiration for and depictions of China into their work.

This tradition became more pronounced after Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings). Spanning centuries, these poems reflect deep perceptions of China, shaped by both observation and imagination. Throughout the long history of cultural exchanges, some Persian poets even visited China — Saadi, for example, visited Kashgar in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in the late 14th century and recorded an encounter with a young man in *The Rose Garden*.

As we all know, China has been famous for its traditional medicine since ancient times, and musk from Hotan prefecture in Xinjiang, was once a special link between the two cultures. In Persian poetry, musk is praised as a substance endowed with a poetic soul. It is like a messenger traveling through time and space, bringing freshness and inspiration to Persian poetry and injecting new vitality and spiritual connotations into this ancient literary tradition. Persian poets such as Hafez and Farid al-Din Attar wrote



Iranian Sinologist Ehsan Doostmohammadi addresses an academic forum on Confucianism in Zhejiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

affectionately about Hotan musk.

In classical Persian poetry, the depiction of ideal love is often deeply influenced by Chinese culture. This influence recurs throughout Persian poetry, shaping its particular, and profound portrayal of love. For instance, the Chigil, an ancient tribe that inhabited today's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and parts of Kyrgyzstan, was used as a poetic symbol of beauty in Persian literature. Persian poets transformed the Chigil into a lasting

emblem of elegance and charm, forever immortalized in their verses.

Rumi, in *Divan-i Shams* (The Collected Poems of Shams), wrote: “What should you know of the (sweet) savor of patience, O you of brittle heart — Especially, of patience for the sake of that Beauty of Chigil?”

In the history of Persian poetry, references to Chinese architecture can be traced back to the early Ghaznavid Dynasty, one that's with a Turkic origin that ruled over parts

of what is today Afghanistan, Iran and India from the 10th to the 12th centuries. During this period, Persian poets subtly incorporated descriptions and praise of Chinese architecture into their works. The distinctive design and layout of Chinese courtyards particularly captivated Persian poets, who regarded them as the pinnacle of architectural elegance and expressed admiration for their beauty in their poetry.

For instance, Sanai, in *The Walled Garden of Truth*, wrote:

“What a lucky soul, bathing in the gentle embrace of spring. Enjoying the sweetness of kisses, the joy of embraces, the most beautiful in the world.”

That Chinese-style courtyard, with an infinite view, Like a glory, like a treasure generously given by Caesar to his beloved daughter, Radiating nobility and elegance.”

Sana's poem delicately captures the joy of spring's return, while also skillfully weaving in the artistic charm of Chinese courtyards. This fusion of imagery adds an exotic and culturally rich dimension to the poem.

In Iranian culture, poetry is key to

depicting other countries. China, as an ideal land in Iranian mythology, has crafted a positive and captivating image, symbolized by “ideal love”, its famous musk, and brilliant art. It enriches Iran's multicultural perspective and deepens the Iranian people's understanding and respect of Chinese culture. Acting as a bridge, poetry has facilitated the integration of the two cultures, enhancing Iran's appreciation of Chinese history and civilization. It has also laid a solid foundation for friendly relations between the two countries, underscoring the crucial role of cultural exchanges in fostering international cooperation.

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