

From pond to plate

Crayfish spring harvest ready to give local rural economy a boost CHINA, PAGE 5



Iran rules out dialogue with US under pressure WORLD, PAGE 7



In the spotlight

Theater season in Jiangxi sets stage for intl plays and artistes LIFE, PAGE 15

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2025

Anger boils over



Police officers try to keep demonstrators at bay on Sunday during a protest in Istanbul, Turkey, after the city's mayor Ekrem Imamoglu was jailed on corruption charges. The demonstrations have spread to more than 55 of Turkey's 81 provinces. UMIT BEKTAS / REUTERS See story, page 7

Global firms keen on fresh opportunities in China

By ZHONG NAN zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China's unwavering commitment to opening-up will propel new industrialization, green growth and digital transformation, showcasing the nation's growing strength in innovation and demand-driven productivity and creating fresh opportunities for global businesses, said top executives of leading multinational corporations on Monday.

Speaking at the China Development Forum 2025, held in Beijing on Sunday and Monday, the executives emphasized that as China shifts toward innovation-driven and green growth, foreign companies are committed to working with local partners, investing in high-end manufacturing, artificial intelligence and service industries, and strengthening their supply chain capabilities within the country.

During a symposium on the sidelines of the forum on Monday, Li Yongjie, deputy international trade representative of the Ministry of Commerce, outlined the country's next steps. Li said China will further advance comprehensive pilot pro-

Inside

Comment, pages 11, 12

and expand access to key areas including telecommunications, healthcare and education.

Encouraged by these efforts, Christophe Weber, president, CEO and representative director of Lake-Pharmaceutical, said his company will make targeted investments in data and digital solutions in China to unleash the power of new technology for the future of healthcare.

In January, the Japanese company announced the signing of an investment cooperation agreement to establish its China innovation center in Chengdu, Sichuan province. The facility will focus on digital healthcare innovation and will develop solutions using big data and artificial intelligence.

Danish technology and engineering conglomerate Danfoss Group has also seen strong momentum in sectors aligned with China's development priorities, with 70 percent year-on-year growth in its data center

business and 29 percent in its marine sector in China in 2024.

Kim Fausing, president and CEO of Danfoss, said the group will further scale up its presence in China in 2025 and beyond.

The company will start mass production later this year at its campus in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, producing insulated gate bipolar transistor modules and electric and hybrid power train systems. This follows the launch in January of its newly upgraded application development center in Suzhou, Jiangsu.

Acknowledging the shift in foreign investment patterns in China, John Quelch, executive vice-chancellor and American president of Duke Kunshan University in Jiangsu, said China's renewed commitment to opening up to foreign investment — backed by consistent government support and a more level playing field — is highly encouraging.

"With the country's growing innovation capabilities, foreign investment is increasingly focused on collaborative research and development activities, rather than being limited to manufacturing alone," he said.

Jean-Pascal Tricoire, chairman of

French industrial group Schneider Electric, said that with the development of digital technology, China's cultivation of new quality productive forces is not only driving the rise of the nation's emerging and future industries, but also transforming and upgrading traditional industries.

The term new quality productive forces, introduced in 2023, refers to advanced productivity freed from the traditional economic growth mode and productivity development paths. It features high tech, high efficiency and high quality, and aligns with the new development philosophy.

A total of 7,574 foreign-invested enterprises were newly established in China in the first two months of this year, representing year-on-year growth of 5.8 percent, statistics from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Meanwhile, foreign-invested businesses in China saw their export value grow 6.9 percent year-on-year to 1.08 trillion yuan (\$148.9 billion), according to the General Administration of Customs.

See Growth, page 3

CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ASEAN EXPANDS TO BENEFIT ALL

Neighbors look to prosper from innovation, advanced technology, job creation

By PRIME SARMIENTO, YANG HAN in Hong Kong and YANG WANLI in Bangkok



Five years after Chinese smartphone maker Oppo debuted in its home market, the company ventured overseas in 2009 and introduced its products to Thailand.

Oppo hasn't looked back since. Not only did it capture a large market share in Thailand, it also succeeded in branching out across Southeast Asia, with showrooms all over the region and a factory in Indonesia.

In 2024, Oppo overtook South Korea's Samsung to become the top smartphone brand in Southeast Asia with an 18 percent market share, or 16.9 million shipments, according to a report by global technology analyst Canalis, which attributed Oppo's success to its product calibration and high-end investment.

Shi Shuai, chief executive officer of Oppo Asia-Pacific, said the company

has been working to promote local authorization, cultivate local talent, and integrate into local cultures. He cited Oppo's factory in the city of Tangerang, west of the Indonesian capital Jakarta — the company's first manufacturing plant outside China — as an example, with the factory creating job opportunities for Indonesians, and contributing to long-term economic development.

Oppo's success in Southeast Asia shows how Chinese investment in the region has evolved over the past decade — with a strong focus on digital industries and advanced technology that is responsive to domestic market needs, conscious of corporate social responsibility, and contributes to the local economy.

See FDI, page 2

Cease-fire talks focus on energy sites

US, Russian delegations also discuss pause in Black Sea attacks in Russia-Ukraine war

By HENG WEILI in New York hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

The United States and Russia held talks on Monday aimed at producing a 30-day limited cease-fire between Russia and Ukraine — focused on stemming attacks on energy infrastructure — but the two countries in the conflict accused the other of continuing military attacks.

One major sticking point in the discussions is what targets would be off-limits to strike.

While the White House said "energy and infrastructure" would be covered, the Kremlin said that the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said he would like to see infrastructure such as railways and ports protected. Kiev blamed Moscow for a cyberattack that knocked out the online ticketing system for Ukraine's state railway service, causing long queues at stations on Monday.

The talks in the Saudi capital of Riyadh were expected to address some of those differences, as well as a potential pause in attacks in the Black Sea to safeguard commercial shipping.

A joint statement on the talks was expected on Tuesday, according to Russia media, which reported that the talks Monday lasted more than 12 hours.

"Not every negotiation yields a high-profile document or agreement," Grigory Karasin, part of the Russian team, told reporters during a break in the negotiations. "What matters is maintaining communication and understanding each other's positions. In this regard, we are succeeding."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the US had suggested the talks focus on ways to protect the Black Sea shipping route.

"This was President Trump's suggestion, and President Putin agreed to it," Peskov said.

He also said that on the table would be the restoration of a 2022 grain deal that allowed millions of tons of Ukrainian grain to be

exported. Russia withdrew from the agreement in 2023, claiming that Western sanctions restricted its own agricultural exports, The New York Times reported. The deal was originally mediated by the United Nations and Türkiye.

US President Donald Trump, in speaking to reporters at the White House, said territorial lines and the potential for US ownership of a key nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine also have been part of the talks.

Serhii Leshchenko, an adviser to the Ukrainian presidency, said the delegation remained in Riyadh on Monday and expected to meet again with the Americans.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that a Ukrainian drone targeted an oil pumping station in southern Russia that serves a pipeline carrying Kazakhstan's Caspian Sea oil to the Russian port of Novorossiisk. It said the drone was downed before it could reach the station.

Peskov said Monday that the Russian military has been fulfilling President Vladimir Putin's order to halt attacks on energy facilities for 30 days. He has accused Ukraine of derailing the partial cease-fire with attacks on Russia's energy facilities, including a gas metering station in Sudzha in Russia's Kursk region.

Ukraine's military general staff rejected Moscow's accusations and blamed the Russian military for shelling the station, a claim Peskov called "absurd".

Zelensky said Sunday evening that "since March 11, a proposal for an unconditional cease-fire has been on the table, and these attacks could have already stopped."

Zelensky has emphasized that Ukraine is open to Trump's proposal of a full, 30-day cease-fire.

Putin has made a complete cease-fire conditional on a halt of arms supplies to Kiev and a suspension of Ukraine's military mobilization — demands rejected by Kiev and its Western allies.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Future of Africa rests on financial cooperation

WORLD WATCH By Ahmed Moustafa

The railway highlights the success of Chinese financial approaches, which view infrastructure as key to stimulating comprehensive economic progress. In contrast to Western programs that focus on immediate assistance, Sino-African financial cooperation prioritizes investments that lay the groundwork for future success.

Another noteworthy project is the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway that links Ethiopia and Djibouti. This railway has transformed trade and logistics in the area by cutting travel time and costs, thus easing the flow of goods and people. The project reflects the sustainable, long-term ambition of Sino-African financial cooperation, which is to forge interconnected economic regions that benefit several nations. As former Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn stated, "This railway is a symbol of our commitment to regional integration and economic cooperation."

See Ties, page 3

Sino-African financial cooperation is set to be a game changer for Africa. The cooperation is defined by inventive financial strategies and a focus on infrastructure development, functioning as more than just economic dealings. It represents a strategic collaboration aimed at long-lasting growth and sustainability. The Chinese proverb, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime," perfectly encapsulates the spirit of Sino-African financial cooperation. A prominent example of this cooperation is the construction of the Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya. The China-led initiative has significantly enhanced transportation infrastructure while generating thousands of jobs and boosting economic activity along its route.



An elderly resident removes shards of glass from a broken window on Sunday after the building was hit by a Russian drone in Kyiv, Ukraine. GLEB GARANICH / REUTERS

INSIDE Full life-cycle focus Global Views, page 13

Newsstand prices: US \$1, Canada C\$1, UK 1.6, EU 1€, Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling, Asia Pacific: Thailand 120, Philippines 120 PHP, Myanmar 2000 Kyat, Japan 210 yen, Dubai 10 dirham, Pakistan 300 rupee

www.chinadailyglobal.com

A member of ANN CHINA DAILY GLOBAL

China Daily Global ©2025 All Rights Reserved

PAGE TWO



A worker assembles Oppo smartphones at the company's factory in Banten province, Indonesia, on Nov 19. MUHAMMAD FADLI / BLOOMBERG

FDI: China's presence in ASEAN surges



Visitors inspect Oppo smartphones at the company's store during a media tour in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Nov 19. MUHAMMAD FADLI / BLOOMBERG

From page 1

"Chinese firms seem to place greater emphasis on being good corporate citizens in their adopted locales. It is a common refrain among Chinese multinationals that they must benefit local communities and support local employment," Erica Tay, director of macro research at Kuala Lumpur-based Maybank, told China Daily.

Tay said while the first wave of Chinese direct investments in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in the early 2000s was mostly in State-owned enterprises involved in heavy industries, the second wave was aimed at private sector digital industries, and advanced manufacturing.

Chinese manufacturers that have expanded their capacity in ASEAN have been able to tap into abundant supplies of labor, land and energy, Tay said. These companies are also able to access a new market in ASEAN — the world's fifth-biggest economy with a combined population of over 670 million.

"In search of new markets where competition is less stiff than back home, Chinese firms have expanded their footprint by addressing the needs of ASEAN consumers," Tay said, adding that Chinese tech and e-commerce giants, tried and tested in the domestic market, are equipped to compete in emerging ones in Asia.

These companies have also benefited from the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, which gives goods produced by Chinese companies in their ASEAN bases preferential access in fast-growing consumer markets.

Manufacturing has long been a significant driver of FDI growth in ASEAN. In 2023, it comprised more than \$50 billion of FDI inflows, or 22 percent of the total, according to the October joint report by the ASEAN Secretariat and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

China was the third-biggest source of FDI in 2023, hitting \$17 billion, a year-on-year increase of nearly 20 percent.

The report noted that FDI from China is on "an upward trend" — rising from less than \$4 billion in 2010. The number of Chinese enterprises operating in ASEAN increased from 2,600 in 2012 to 6,500 in 2022.

The Chinese private sector has "gradually internationalized" toward ASEAN, it said.

Textile and garment manufacturers invested in Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam;



An employee works at an electronics factory of Shanghai Greatway Industry Co in northern Vietnam in October. YAO QILIN / XINHUA

electronics companies ventured to Malaysia and Vietnam, while technology companies went to Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

In contrast, Chinese companies that invested in ASEAN more than 20 years ago were State-owned enterprises mostly involved in mining and oil exploration, construction, hydropower, and in the development of special economic zones and industrial parks.

Before 2018, the year when China-US trade tensions started, nearly half of Chinese FDI was mostly in real estate and finance.

But after then US president Donald Trump decided in June 2018 to impose a 25 percent tariff on \$50 billion of Chinese exports, China's investment pattern in ASEAN started changing. From 2020 to 2023, investment in manufacturing increased at an annual average rate of 33 percent, compared with less than 10 percent in the years 2010 to 2018, the report said.

The supply chain disruption caused by the pandemic has also pushed many Chinese manufacturing companies to diversify abroad, with ASEAN a primary beneficiary of increased Chinese FDI in manufacturing.

Strategic opportunities

Analysts and industry players expect that Trump — who started his second term as president by slapping an additional 10 percent tariff on Chinese goods in February — will push more Chinese companies to move production out of China to ASEAN countries.

"Chinese companies are facing strategic opportunities amid the golden decade of going global," Feng Qingqiang, general manager of Youdao Ads, told China Daily.

Youdao Ads is a digital marketing solution provider launched by Youdao Inc, a subsidiary of Chinese internet company NetEase Group. By using emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, the platform connects over 10 million influencers, and reaches over 2 billion users worldwide in 75 countries and regions.

With the improvement of the Chinese manufacturing sector and brand management capabilities, coupled with a slowdown in domestic consumption growth, there are more opportunities for international expansion, said Feng. Many high-quality, innovative, and cost-effective Chinese products are becoming increasingly competitive in overseas markets, he added.

Southeast Asia's geographical location, young population, and the similarity of its current economic development to China's past growth, present significant market potential for Chinese enterprises, Feng said.

"After the pandemic, the e-commerce market in Southeast Asia has seen rapid growth, with the e-commerce penetration rate in key regional countries to reach 6.5 percent by 2025, a notable increase from the pre-pandemic level of 5 percent," he said.

In Malaysia, China is one of the top three

FDI sources, hitting over 28 billion ringgit (\$6.33 billion) in 2024, according to the Malaysian Investment Development Authority.

Safwan Nizar Johari, acting investment consul for the Malaysian consulate in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, said most of the recent Chinese investments are in the EV, battery, and other allied industries.

After China and Malaysia celebrated the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2024, Chinese companies are keen to do business in Malaysia as the multicultural country has a big ethnic Chinese population, Safwan said. "So it's easy for a Chinese company to do business in our country. When they go to Malaysia, they say many people can speak Chinese, there are many similarities with Chinese culture," he said.

Safwan said Malaysia also positions itself as a regional hub, allowing Chinese companies to use it as a production base to export around ASEAN.

One of these companies that bet big in Malaysia is the Geely Holding Group from Zhejiang province.

In 2017, the Hangzhou-based carmaker acquired a 49.9 percent stake in local car manufacturer Proton, with the goal of jointly developing it into the No 1 brand in Malaysia and one of the leading brands in ASEAN.

"Following years of integration, Proton has achieved a comprehensive transforma-

tion in research and development, manufacturing, quality, procurement, and marketing, securing the second position in sales and market share in Malaysia for six consecutive years," a Geely spokesperson told China Daily.

Jobs, shared prosperity

In Thailand, Chinese firms accounted for more than 42 percent of the 981.65 billion baht (\$28.9 billion) total investment by foreign entities in 2024, according to the Department of Business Development of Thailand.

Chinese automakers and electronics companies are the top investors. Chinese EV production facilities, most of which are located along the kingdom's Eastern Economic Corridor, recorded a total production capacity of 474,000 vehicles in 2024, according to the Kasikorn Research Center. Production capacity is forecast to rise to 620,000 this year.

Wichai Kinchong Choi, senior vice-president of Kasikornbank, highlighted the role of Chinese innovative technologies in helping transform Thailand into an EV production hub in Southeast Asia.

"While we have witnessed Western economic power using protectionism and trade barriers to benefit its own interests at the expense of fair competition, multilateralism and free trade are firmly believed to maintain the future direction for successful and sustainable world economic growth for more years to come," Wichai said.

Narongsak Putthapornmongkol, president of the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, said Chinese factories have created many jobs in Thailand. The Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Zone has helped boost Thai export volume to \$3 billion over the past year and provided jobs for more than 55,000 Thai people, according to the chamber.

Oppo's factory in Indonesia has nearly 20,000 local employees and contracts with local suppliers, according to Shi, CEO of Oppo Asia-Pacific. Oppo has worked with local vocational colleges on internship programs, supplying a significant number of skilled technicians to Indonesia.

Ma Si, Li Fusheng, and Cheng Yu in Beijing contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at prime@chinadailyapac.com



Left: A staff member displays a model of an electric multiple unit train at the signing ceremony of a joint venture agreement between China Communications Construction Company and Malaysia Rail Link in Putrajaya, Malaysia, on Dec 18. CHONG YOON CHUNG / XINHUA Right: Screens show information about Chinese electrical appliance maker Midea Group's 5G factory in Chonburi province, Thailand. XINHUA

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
yangwanli@chinadaily.com.cn

Going overseas brings Chinese enterprises closer to Southeast Asia, further deepening understanding between the people, according to Jiang Xuan, regional head of the Midea Group.

"We positioned Thailand as our biggest overseas hub for manufacturing, sales, and distribution," said Jiang Xuan, Asia-Pacific regional president of the Chinese home appliance giant.

"Through enhancing our operations in Thailand, we are moving forward to the three-year strategic goal of becoming a leader in the home appliance industry in the Asia-Pacific region," he added.

One of the first Chinese brands to relocate its industrial chains to Southeast Asia, Midea saw its market share of household air conditioners in Malaysia rank first last year.

In Thailand, its market share of microwave ovens and refrigerators took the top spot, while in Vietnam the Chinese company was in second place.

Midea operates seven manufacturing plants in Thailand, producing a wide range of products, including home air conditioners, refrigerators, laundry white goods, and other home appliances.

Appliance maker Midea spreads regional footprint

Midea has an Asia-Pacific regional office in Singapore, as well as an office in Thailand that helps support its overall operations in Southeast Asia.

"With a stable political environment and favorable business policies, Thailand will play a key role as a regional manufacturing hub and attract more long-term investment," Jiang said.

Cooperation between China and Southeast Asia has mutual benefits, he said. While Chinese enterprises expand their business reach in the region, Southeast Asia countries see a boost in employment.

The Midea Group has around 10,000 employees in Thailand, and Jiang said almost 97 percent of them are locals.

"Moreover, China's most advanced technologies and manufacturing experiences have helped boost local production. For some countries with their own development goal of going green, Chinese innovation is also a crucial contributor," he said.

The group's new regional distribution center started operations in Bangkok last year.

The facility has 1,000 square meters of storage space, and its operations have shortened



Online
See more
by scanning
this code

the average delivery time across Southeast Asia from 60 to 45 days.

Since the establishment of Midea's first factory in Thailand, challenges and difficulties such as cultural differences had to be overcome, Jiang said.

"Despite the blood ties and historical friendship with the Chinese, Thai people have their own characteristics," Jiang said. "For example, they prefer doing things at a slower pace than us. They also prefer to follow strict and detailed instructions."

To boost mutual understanding and trust, he said the company has organized regular training and study tours for Thai employees and invited them to visit the group's factories in China.

"We also showed full respect to local culture by planning celebrations for Thai festi-

vals such as Songkran (the Thai New Year)," Jiang said.

"In our canteens, we serve both Thai and Chinese cuisine to introduce Chinese food to our employees while making them feel at home," he added.

Apart from bridging cultural differences, the group has also overcome the varied demand for products in different Southeast Asian markets.

For instance, Jiang said, smart home appliances are more popular in Vietnam than in Thailand.

"Thai people are keen to choose twin-tub washing machines instead of the single-tub ones that are now mostly used by Chinese," he explained.

Jiang sees these differences in market demand as business opportunities. Chinese brands already have vast experience in traditional product manufacturing techniques that some regions may prefer, he said.

Southeast Asia also has great potential markets for some home appliances, such as air conditioners.

According to the Household Energy Survey Report of the Statistics Department of

Thailand, the penetration rate of air conditioners in Thai households was 37.5 percent in 2022.

Another report released by the International Institute of Refrigeration in 2019 showed that air conditioner ownership in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia was lower than 10 percent.

Midea now not only produces air conditioners for homes, Jiang said, but also cooling systems for buildings. In the near future, the group may also explore the Thai elevator market.

"As our production volume grows, we've cultivated a lot of small and middle-sized local enterprises, helped to enhance local supply chains, and benefited logistics as well as storage companies," Jiang said.

"All these will then contribute to the kingdom's overall competitiveness in the industry," he added.

The group's Thai-manufactured products are also sold in Europe and the United States.

"This allows the local supply chain to learn more about the market outside of Thailand as well as the demand from non-ASEAN regions, which will lay the basis for the kingdom's future economic growth," he said.

Fan Feifei in Beijing contributed to this story.

TOP NEWS

Nations urged to work for true multilateralism

By ZHAO JIA
zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

Amid multiple global crises, Chinese and foreign officials called on Monday for stronger international cooperation and solidarity to uphold multilateralism and tackle pressing challenges.

Their remarks were delivered at an international symposium in Beijing that focused on reinforcing the United Nations' role and advancing multilateralism.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of both the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War and the founding of the UN.

In a written address, Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted that humanity stands at a critical historical juncture.

He highlighted China's proposals — the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, alongside the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative — as solutions to global challenges, saying that they have gained increasing recognition and support worldwide.

Wang emphasized that China, as a UN founding member and permanent Security Council member, remains committed to practicing true multilateralism with all parties.

He pledged to uphold the UN's central role and promote a governance model based on extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, injecting positive energy into creating a fairer, more equitable global system.

In September, the Summit of the Future, held at the UN's headquarters in New York, adopted key documents, including the Pact for the Future, offering actionable recommendations for global governance reforms.

Guy Ryder, the UN's undersecretary-general for policy, described the pact as a powerful reaffirmation of nations' dedication to the UN, global solidarity and international law.

"It has set out a clear vision of the international system that can deliver on its promises, including the Sustainable Development Goals, which is more representative of today's world and prepares for the challenges of tomorrow," he told the symposium on Monday.

Regarding challenges such as climate change, conflicts and slow development, he said that it is "precisely these circumstances that make multilateralism more important than ever. It will require extraordinary efforts to keep our system working for the

It will require extraordinary efforts to keep our system working for the peoples of the world."

Guy Ryder, the United Nations' undersecretary-general for policy

peoples of the world"

Martin Mpana, Cameroon's ambassador to China and dean of the foreign diplomatic corps in China, praised the UN's immense potential as the most representative and authoritative intergovernmental body, calling it a legal community and a platform for global cooperation.

Noting the UN's evolution since 1945 amid a shifting geopolitical landscape, Mpana stressed the urgency of reforms and enhancement of the body's transparency and accountability, enabling it to address 21st-century challenges.

Mpana also hailed "China's consistent commitment in deepening cooperation with the UN, in consolidating its authority, and in steering global governance reform in the right direction."

As a responsible nation, China has been "a permanent supporter of the course of the UN", he added.

China is the largest contributor of peacekeeping troops among the permanent members of the UN Security Council, the second-largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and the second-largest contributor to the UN's regular budget.

Assistant Foreign Minister Miao Deyu affirmed China's dedication to high-quality development and expanding high-level openness, providing new opportunities for global modernization and stability in a turbulent world.

"Today's world needs unity, not division; cooperation, not confrontation," Miao said. He emphasized that Beijing advocates open, inclusive and collective development while opposing the politicization of development, forced decoupling and ideological divisions.

Miao said that "much of today's global chaos arises from a few countries eroding the rule of law and risking a return to 'jungle law'".

He underscored the importance of mutual respect, equality among nations and an international order rooted in international law.

Under attack



A Palestinian man rushes an injured girl away from the site of an Israeli airstrike on Sunday at a makeshift displacement camp in central Gaza City. The latest attack left many without shelter. OMAR AL-QATTAA / APF

China's development to bolster global economy

Official says country striving to position consumption as primary driving force

By WANG KEJU
wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

Faced with growing external uncertainties, China's focus on advancing its high-quality development agenda will not only bolster domestic resilience but also contribute to global economic stability and prosperity, senior officials and business executives said at the China Development Forum 2025 in Beijing.

In particular, the stronger emphasis of the world's second-largest economy on consumption and innovation this year, along with its unchanged commitments to wider openness, has provided great opportunities for global businesses to grow in the Chinese market and beyond, they said at the two-day event, which concluded on Monday.

Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the Office of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs, said, "China's economy continues its upward trajectory

this year, and there is still ample room for policymakers to leverage countercyclical adjustments."

Backed by a steadfast commitment to high-quality growth, China is going to provide a crucial source of stability and certainty for the world economy, he added.

To this end, Han said that China is striving to "position consumption as the primary driving force and stabilizing pillar of its economic growth".

"While China already boasts a sizable consumer market, the proportion of consumption in the national economy and total demand is still relatively low, lagging behind developed countries by around 20 percentage points. This indicates immense potential for further consumption expansion," Han said.

Earlier this month, the Chinese government rolled out an action plan dedicated to boosting consumption, with a particular focus on promoting higher household incomes and alleviating financial pressures on consumers.

The implementation of a comprehensive reform package aimed at catalyzing consumption and improving productivity could raise China's annual potential growth rate by around 1 percentage point in the medium term, said Nigel Clarke, deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

According to IMF research, this would translate to a nearly 20 percent increase in the country's GDP level by 2040 compared with the baseline forecast.

Meanwhile, it is imperative to recognize that the global economy is experiencing a profound transformation, driven by many factors. One of the most important of these might be technology, artificial intelligence in particular. That holds true for China as well, said Roland Busch, president and CEO of Siemens AG.

China announced in its Government Work Report in early March that the country, under the AI Plus initiative, will work to effectively combine digital technologies with its manufacturing and market strengths.

Han said that by placing science and technology at the forefront, the nation is actively deploying digital technologies, green technologies and AI to upgrade and revive traditional sectors while nurturing the industries of the future tailored to local conditions.

Anil Wadhvani, CEO of Prudential, said: "A shift toward a more consumption-driven economy and strategic capital allocation to high-growth sectors will be critical for long-term sustainability. The world is watching as China's success directly influences global economic stability."

"With world-class manufacturing, technological advancements and deep global market integration, China is uniquely positioned to lead the next phase of high-quality growth," he added.

Despite the challenges the global community has faced in recent years, the value of openness and cooperation as a catalyst for mutual progress has been consistently validated, according to business executives.

"Today, we are living in a world that faces an ever-growing range of complex challenges from increased geopolitical tensions, fragmented economic growth, to rising risks of extreme weather and natural catastrophes to name but a few," said Andreas Berger, CEO of Swiss Re.

"These and many other challenges require us to work even more closely together. As such, global collaboration and constructive dialogue are even more vital to navigate issues and ensure a shared prosperous future," Berger added.

Fighting back



Canadians gather on Saturday at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto, Canada, to protest against United States President Donald Trump's declaration that he wanted Canada as the 51st US state. STEVE RUSSELL / GETTY IMAGES

Growth: Protectionism undermines prosperity

From page 1

Expressing concern over rising global protectionism, Oliver Zipse, board chairman of Germany's BMW AG, said that economic growth thrives through opening, not closing.

Zipse warned that such measures will diminish prosperity for all, emphasizing that the best response to decoupling or de-risk-

ing is more cooperation, not less.

Antoine de Saint-Affrique, CEO of Danone SA, a French multinational food products company, said that given China's economic significance, a healthy and growing China benefits the entire world.

"Growth in China contributes to the expansion of the global economy, and a thriving global economy, in turn, supports shared prosperity and peace," he added.

From page 1

Sino-African financial cooperation focuses significantly on developing energy infrastructure, which is vital for regional economic growth. For example, in Zambia, China has invested in and built several hydroelectric power plants, such as the Kariba South Extension Project and the Kafue Gorge Lower Hydropower Station. These initiatives have greatly boosted the country's electricity generation capacity, benefiting both industries and households while decreasing dependence on fossil fuels.

The sustainable aspect of these projects aligns with global environmental objectives, positioning Sino-African financial cooperation as a more responsible and progressive approach compared to many Western programs.

The Belt and Road Initiative serves as another key element of financial cooperation, aiming to establish a network of trade routes and infrastructure projects linking Asia, Africa and Europe. In Africa, the BRI has facilitated the creation of various ports, roads and industrial parks. A notable example is the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor, which is intended to improve regional connectivity and trade. The BRI's holistic

strategy, which encompasses multiple sectors and countries, distinguishes it from Western initiatives that frequently function in isolation.

Additionally, Sino-African financial cooperation prioritizes capacity building and skill transfer. In Nigeria, the Chinese government has set up several vocational training centers to equip locals with the necessary skills to operate and maintain infrastructure projects. This strategy ensures that the advantages of these projects extend beyond immediate gains and are sustained over time. As Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari remarked, "The skills and knowledge transferred through these programs will empower our people and drive our economy forward."

The effectiveness of Sino-African financial cooperation can be clearly seen in its capacity to adapt to local needs and conditions. Unlike Western programs that often apply one-size-fits-all solutions, Chinese initiatives are customized to meet unique challenges and opportunities of each country. For instance, in Angola, China has made significant investments in agricultural development, modernizing farming practices and boosting food production.

This localized strategy not only addresses immediate economic

demands but also enhances food security and supports rural development. Sino-African financial cooperation is built on the fundamental principle of sustainability, with a focus on projects that positively impact the environment. In South Africa, for example, China has backed the development of renewable energy projects, such as solar and wind farms. These efforts not only help lower carbon emissions but also generate new economic opportunities in the green sector. The sustainable focus of these projects aligns with global initiatives to tackle climate change and foster green growth.

Moreover, the transparency and accountability of Sino-African financial cooperation are on the rise, with an increasing focus on good governance and anti-corruption measures. In Ghana, for instance, China has collaborated closely with local authorities to ensure that infrastructure projects are managed transparently and that funds are utilized effectively. This dedication to transparency fosters trust and guarantees that the benefits of these projects are equitably distributed among the population.

Egypt, with its strategic location and expanding economy, has become a key area for Sino-African financial operation. The Suez

Canal Economic Zone exemplifies China's investment in Egypt, aiming to transform the region into a global logistics and manufacturing hub that can create thousands of jobs and attract international investors. It also showcases the power of collaboration and the potential for Sino-African financial cooperation to stimulate economic growth and prosperity in Africa.

Finally, Sino-African financial cooperation stands out due to its long-term vision and strategic approach. In contrast to many Western programs that tend to prioritize immediate assistance and short-term benefits, Chinese initiatives aim to create a lasting impact.

By focusing on investments in infrastructure, energy and human capital, Sino-African financial cooperation is laying a foundation for a more prosperous and sustainable future in Africa. As the Chinese saying goes, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." The journey of Sino-African financial cooperation in Africa is just starting, with a great potential for transformative change.

The author is director and owner of Asia Center for Studies and Translation based in Cairo, Egypt. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Initiative to raise quality of seeds, crops

Launch ceremony sees introduction of 35 varieties by 27 companies in Hainan

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
chenbowen@chinadaily.com.cn

China has introduced its first batch of certified seeds into the market, marking a key step in improving seed quality and boosting crop yields. The initiative aims to raise seed standards, enhance agricultural production and strengthen the country's seed industry.

At a launch ceremony in Sanya, Hainan province, on Saturday, the National Agro-Tech Extension and Service Center awarded certification to 27 seed companies, allowing 35 varieties of certified seeds to enter the market.

"Seed certification is a standardized quality assurance system that focuses on high-quality seeds and emphasizes process management. It involves certification bodies confirming and issuing certificates and labels to prove that a batch of seeds meets specified requirements," an official from the center said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The official added that seed certification is internationally recognized as a reliable method to ensure seed quality, serving as a "credit guarantee" for good seeds, a "health check" for seed companies and a "passport" for international trade.

In 2023, the State Administration for Market Regulation and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs issued guidelines to establish a unified national seed certification system. Two certification bodies were accredited in 2024, and the first group of seed certification inspectors was registered, officially putting the system into practice.

More than 10 million kilograms of

seeds from 35 varieties have been certified, according to the center. Test results show that certified seeds for crops such as corn, soybeans and rice have significantly higher germination rates and purity levels than non-certified seeds.

Certified corn seeds have shown a 4 percentage point increase in their germination rate and a 1.5 percentage point improvement in purity over single-seed sowing standards, while certified hybrid rice seeds have outperformed national standards by 8.6 and 2.9 percentage points, respectively.

Peng Xubing, general manager of Hubei Kangnong Seed Co, said the company, which specializes in research and production of corn, konjac (elephant yam) and Chinese medicinal plant seeds, plans to use the certification as an opportunity to accelerate its transformation into a modern seed enterprise integrating breeding, reproduction and promotion.

Starting Oct 1, newly revised mandatory seed quality standards will take effect, further raising seed quality requirements and standardizing labeling and usage instructions. These standards aim to enhance the quality criteria of some crop seeds, including purity and germination rate, for five cereal crops (rice, corn, wheat, sorghum, and millet) and four oilseed crops (rapeseed, sunflower, peanuts and linseed).

The new standards, which supplement the seed certification system, are expected to reinforce China's commitment to improving agricultural productivity and ensuring food security through advanced seed certification and quality control measures.

Shanghai to strengthen foundational AI research

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

National legislators and political advisers from universities in Shanghai are urging a stronger focus on foundational artificial intelligence research to bolster the nation's capabilities in basic theories and original algorithm development for AI industrialization.

The calls for the change, made during the annual sessions of China's top legislature and advisory body known as the "two sessions" which were held in Beijing in March, emphasize the need to strengthen basic theoretical research in AI data science, improve top-level planning and coordination for key technology research, development and application innovation, and build high-quality data sets.

"Universities, especially the top-tier ones in Shanghai, should serve as the best source and research pioneer area for driving the innovation and development of AI technology," said Gu Xianglin, a National People's Congress deputy and a professor at Tongji University.

He cited the advantages of higher education institutions, including talent concentration, diverse disciplines, well-equipped research bases and international collaboration.

While acknowledging Shanghai's progress in AI industry scale, technology and enterprise numbers, legislators and advisers pointed to existing shortcomings.

Last year, Mei Bing, an NPC deputy and Party secretary of East China Normal University, led a research effort involving 37 NPC deputies in Shanghai to examine the AI Plus initiative and the development of new quality productive forces.

Their findings highlighted that China's research on basic AI theory and original algorithms remains relatively weak, and that there is a significant gap between China and leading foreign technology companies in theoretical exploration and large-scale AI model development.

In his Government Work Report at the National People's Congress on March 5, Premier Li Qiang pledged to advance the AI Plus initiative, integrating digital technology with manufacturing and market advantages and supporting the widespread application of large models.

He outlined plans to develop new-generation intelligent terminals and smart manufacturing equipment, including intelligent connected new energy vehicles, AI-enabled phones and computers, and intelligent robots.

NPC deputies said the government's focus on computing power and data deployment signals comprehensive support for AI industry development, driving the integration of AI into various industries and creating opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Fang Shouen, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and Party secretary of Tongji University, described AI as a fundamental technology for socioeconomic development and industrial transformation, as well as a key area of global competition.

A World Economic Forum report projects a 40 percent increase in global demand for AI-related jobs by 2027. The McKinsey Global Institute predicts China's AI talent gap could reach 4 million by 2030.

"Therefore, cultivating a sufficient number of high-quality AI professionals with innovative capabilities is key to the successful implementation of the national strategy for AI development," Fang said.

Jin Li, an NPC deputy and president of Fudan University, said the institution has launched new AI education reforms, emphasizing integrated teaching and learning and creating an intelligent teaching environment.

"Our goal is to enable students not only to learn how to use tools, but also to master and transform them," he said.

Study trip



Russian students learn traditional Chinese painting techniques under the guidance of a teacher at Tianjin Foreign Studies University in Tianjin on Sunday. On that day, a group of 22 students from Russia embarked on a two-week in-depth study tour of Chinese language and culture. During their time in Tianjin, the students will not only participate in courses such as Chinese calligraphy, Chinese painting and tea art, but also visit famous landmarks. JIANG BAOCHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Yunnan coffee gaining intl recognition

By ZHENG ZHENG in Shanghai
zhengzheng@chinadaily.com.cn

For more than a decade, German entrepreneur Eric Baden has been working to elevate coffee from Yunnan province into the top tier of the global market, alongside renowned beans from Colombia and Ethiopia.

Baden, who runs Coffee Commune, a Shanghai-based brand, said he was particularly inspired by a recent comment from President



Eric Baden

Xi Jinping. During a visit to the Old Town of Lijiang in Yunnan on March 19, Xi was offered a cup of coffee and remarked that "Yunnan coffee represents China."

"It's a remarkable statement because coffee has long been considered a Western beverage and culture," Baden said. "But that is no longer true. Young Chinese consumers have embraced coffee just as

much as tea — some even prefer it."

Baden, 58, is widely known in China as "Coffee Laolin". Since founding Coffee Commune in 2016, he has worked with Yunnan farmers to develop specialty coffee — a category that was virtually nonexistent in the region before. By introducing advanced cultivation, processing and roasting techniques, he has helped growers transition from bulk production to premium beans.

His efforts have paid off. Coffee Commune won China's first international silver medal for its specialty Yunnan blend several years ago, and more awards have followed since small farms began developing their own high-quality brands.

"I've seen tremendous improvements in growing and processing has transformed."

Public recognition of Yunnan coffee is also rising. When Coffee Commune opened its shop in Shanghai's Pudong district six years ago, customers primarily sought imported beans from Colombia or Ethiopia. Now, many specifically request Yunnan varieties.

"Consumers have become much

more knowledgeable about Yunnan coffee," Baden said. "They recognize the diversity of flavor profiles and are gaining confidence that it can rival Costa Rican, Colombian, or Kenyan coffee."

Yunnan produces more than 98 percent of China's coffee. Last year, the province exported 32,500 metric tons of coffee — a 358 percent increase from the previous year — reaching 29 countries and regions, including Germany and the United States, according to Yunnan customs.

"Everyone around the world, including in China, thinks of tea as China's beverage," Baden said. "But it's time to acknowledge that coffee also plays a major role here."

He said he has also noticed China's coffee culture expanding beyond younger generations.

"We see a lot of people in their 50s and 60s eager to learn about coffee and how to brew it at home," he said, referring to Coffee Commune's academy in Yunnan's Pu'er region, where courses are offered on coffee production and preparation.



Online
See more
by scanning
the code.



Farmers harvest fresh coffee fruits from the trees in Pu'er, Yunnan province, on Dec 2. LIU RANYANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Artificial intelligence takes sex toy industry by storm

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn

The burgeoning development of artificial intelligence has found a sultry new frontier in the sex robot industry, as a Chinese company unveils a new series of realistic dolls designed to respond like humans.

Enhanced by open-source AI, the dolls can talk, identify and mimic emotions. Developed by WMdoll in Zhongshan, Guangdong province, the MetaBox series of robotic dolls have human-like qualities that the maker claims can fulfill both physical and psychological needs.

With the integration of AI, the company's MetaBox doll series even responds to tactile stimulation, allowing users to satisfy personal needs — even if it is just a rubber fantasy.

"Traditional adult dolls generally aim at fulfilling basic physical needs, but AI gives them emotional value," said Liu Jiangxia, founder of WMdoll in Zhongshan.

After testing with members of the public overseas in December, the initial batch of 200 units was released in North America, Japan and Europe. They quickly sold out at a price of \$1,600 to \$2,000 each. High-end models currently online are marked at around \$3,000.

That may be a bargain compared with the cost of a real human com-

panion. Dolls don't have physical or emotional needs, and they're entirely predictable. They won't argue. They don't require food. They don't have morning breath. Plus, unlike a human, you can store them in a closet.

Prices vary because of different custom configurations, including height and external attributes, such as skin type, Liu said.

Also, you pay more to get the full range of human qualities brought by AI, including a large language model, or LLM, for speech, the technology behind generative ser-

vices such as DeepSeek and ChatGPT.

"Users need to pay a subscription fee, starting at \$100 for the first year, if they want to experience all the AI interactive functions of the models tested," Liu said.

Demand from overseas continues to rise, with projected sales growth estimated at 30 percent year-on-year after the official release in April, he said.

"We are currently accelerating data iteration and making production capacity adjustments to meet the increased overseas demand," Liu said.

The series of dolls includes six female and two male models designed to represent six professions — secretary, doctor, nurse, teacher, police officer or businessperson. You get a choice of eight personalities and voices. The dolls currently support conversations in English, German, Japanese, Korean, French and Spanish.

"Their personalities are not gender-specific and can be customized based on the users' preferences," Liu said. With 32 wireless sensors inside, a doll can engage in multi-day conversations and respond to tactile stimulation.

Currently, the AI sex dolls are only available for sale in overseas markets, but they could be launched in the Chinese market very soon. The company is working closely with Chinese-language AI

service providers to develop a Chinese version of the innovative adult toys that will meet domestic demand, he said.

According to iMedia Research, a global third-party data mining and analysis firm that specializes in industries of the new economy, China's adult toy market exceeded 130 billion yuan (\$17.88 billion) in 2023 and is expected to nearly double that by the end of the year.

When it was founded in 2010, WMdoll manufactured products made of soft and flexible thermoplastic elastomer, or TPE — a material commonly used for human body models. The company made a rapid transformation to focus on adult sex toys. With an eye on customer desires, it produced its first TPE dolls in 2012.

"Our customers were keen on buying TPE models of body parts that look and feel human. So we expanded into making TPE sex dolls," Liu said.

The company partnered with domestic AI humanoid robot provider Mind with Heart Robotics, a Shenzhen company, to produce dolls that have emotional facial expressions and physiological data linkages.

"We will continue exploring technological innovations in the sex doll industry, as we are aimed not only at satisfying physical needs but also the psychological needs of our users," Liu said.

CHINA



Left: A chef cooks crayfish at a restaurant in Xuyi, Jiangsu province, on March 8. WANG JIANMIN / XINHUA



Right: People enjoy crayfish dishes at a restaurant in Xuyi on March 8. YANG SUPING / XINHUA

Below: Farmers grow aquatic plants at a modern crayfish farm in Xuyi on March 8. GU JIHONG / XINHUA



CRAYFISH DRIVE RURAL VITALIZATION



A worker processes flavoring paste for cooking crayfish at a factory in Xuyi on March 8. GU BINFU / XINHUA

Aquaculture industry in Xuyi county welcomes the spring harvest

By CHINA DAILY

In the picturesque countryside of Xuyi county, Jiangsu province, the arrival of spring not only brings blossoming flowers and lush greenery but also heralds the season of fresh crayfish. As the sun warms the land, local farmers and fishermen eagerly prepare for the harvest of these delicious crustaceans.

In recent years, Xuyi has vigorously developed the crayfish industry, with the county's crayfish aquaculture area reaching

nearly 670,000 hectares. A total of 210,000 people are engaged in the crayfish industry, and it has become the major industry driving local rural revitalization.

Focusing on the five key aspects of "seedlings, base building, processing, standardizing and branding", the entire crayfish industry chain in Xuyi has an annual total output exceeding 30 billion yuan (\$4.15 billion).

Xuyi crayfish have been honored with titles such as China's top 100 agricultural products and China's Geographical Indication Agricultural Products.



Workers sort buckets of crayfish cooking flavoring at a factory in Xuyi on March 8. WANG CHUN / XINHUA



From left: A farmer works at a modern crayfish farm in Xuyi on March 8. WANG CHUN / XINHUA



A farmer throws a crayfish trap into a pond to harvest crayfish at the farm on March 8. QIAN XIANHUA / XINHUA

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

Inner Mongolia cuts water use in solar sector

Cities of Ordos, Baotou employ purification projects to push autonomous region to become leader in renewable energy

By HOU LIQIANG in Beijing and YUAN HUI in Hohhot

A state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant in Ordos, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, has developed an innovative solution to minimize water consumption in China's rapidly expanding solar panel industry.

While the use of water in making solar panels is not as intense as in some other industries, this wastewater recycling solution further reduces the water footprint of solar panel manufacturing.

After wastewater flows out of the production line for crystalline silicon, which is used for producing photovoltaic solar cells — an essential component of solar panels — at a zero-carbon industrial park of the Mengsu Economic Development Zone, 95 percent of it will return to the production line as high-quality reclaimed water for reuse within only 35 hours.

At present, approximately 50,000 metric tons of wastewater produced in the zone is processed via this water recycling project every day, the total investment of which is over 2.2 billion yuan (\$304 million).

Gao Wei, the project's Party chief, said this means only 2,500 tons of fresh water is needed daily to meet production needs.

As China advances toward its climate goals of peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060, the country's solar panel production has been continuously ramping up to meet the growing demand for solar energy. China's solar power capacity reached approximately 886 million kilowatts last year, reflecting a year-on-year increase of 45 percent, according to the National Energy Administration.

The zero-carbon industrial park serves as a prime example of China's efforts to enhance the use of reclaimed water in its rapidly growing solar panel industry, a step toward making the sector more sustainable.

Gao said the 5 percent of the water not reused in the production line undergoes a specialized treatment process through an evaporation and crystallization system. This means that there is no discharge of wastewater at all.

"This zero-emission model sets a precedent in the field of photovoltaic wastewater treatment in China," he said. "Conversely, concentrated water treatment in traditional sewage plants often faces challenges in achieving zero emissions, usually necessitating dilution or additional wastewater treatment to meet emission regulations."

The salts separated in the evaporation and crystallization system, such as sodium chloride and sodium sulfate, are utilized as resources, he said, adding the sodium chloride, for example, can be used for producing snow-melting agents.

"This method of resource utilization not only decreases waste emissions, but also creates extra



Clockwise from top: An aerial photo shows a state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant in Ordos, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. The plant treats 50,000 metric tons of wastewater from a zero-carbon industrial park of the Mengsu Economic Development Zone in Ordos every day. Workers check equipment at the plant. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

economic value," he said.

Gao said the project's wastewater processing technique is designed to address a critical challenge in the solar panel industry — the high salt and hardness levels in wastewater, along with difficult-to-degrade organic matter.

The facility uses highly efficient silica and a hardness removal pretreatment process, he noted.

He said it also employs multiple technologies to treat challenging pollutants in wastewater from crystalline silicon production, including high levels of dissolved solids and chlorides.

These measures ensure that the reclaimed water meets requirements for the ultrapure water needed for photovoltaic manufacturing.

Ordos authorities have vowed to further tap the potential of reclaimed

water in meeting demand from its booming solar industry, especially because the city is located in an arid area with scarce water resources in the Yellow River Basin.

The per capita water resources in Ordos is only 1,287 cubic meters, compared to the national average level of 2,100 cubic meters. While the city's annual precipitation ranges from 150 to 350 millimeters, the city's evaporation levels stand between 2,000 and 3,000 millimeters.

Despite this, the city has 30 solar panel manufacturers and supporting enterprises, covering the entire industrial chain, according to a statement from the department of industry and information technology in Ordos in response to inquiries from China Daily.

While the output of polycrystalline silicon in the city decreased by 43 per-

cent year-on-year in 2024, the city registered significant increases in the production of monocrystalline silicon and many other materials and components for solar energy development, the statement said.

Output of monocrystalline silicon reached 48,700 tons last year, a 431 percent increase on the year prior. The production of silicon wafers in the city, for instance, surged by 503 percent to 3.8 billion slices, while the manufacturing of solar cells saw a significant spike of 1,825 percent to 23.3 gigawatts.

Silicon wafers are the most commonly used semiconductors in solar panels. Positive-type and negative-type wafers are combined in a solar cell to convert sunlight into electricity through the photovoltaic effect.

The production of wafers is a crucial step in panel manufacturing that

requires water consumption. Water is essential for cooling and lubricating the cutting tools, as well as for cleaning the wafers. Usually, producing one regular silicon wafer requires approximately 500 milliliters of water, equivalent to a regular bottle of water.

Ordos has effectively addressed the constraints of water resources on its photovoltaic sector by utilizing reclaimed water, drainage and mine well water, as highlighted by the city's Department of Water Resources.

There are 25 operational wastewater treatment plants in the city, primarily situated in urban areas and industrial parks, with a daily processing capacity of 520,000 cubic meters. Ordos has also completed the construction of four projects for storing reclaimed water to enhance its utilization.

Almost 91 percent of the reclaimed water generated in the city was collected and utilized last year, the department reported. It emphasized that the city will continue its efforts to leverage these unconventional water sources to meet the water demand of its crystalline silicon industry.

In Baotou, which produces 40 percent of the country's monocrystalline silicon and polycrystalline silicon, and is striving to build a global green silicon city, the local government has also intensified efforts to utilize reclaimed water to meet the demand of manufacturers.

The output of polycrystalline silicon in Baotou increased by 94.7 percent year-on-year in 2024 to 753,000 tons, and the production of monocrystalline silicon soared by 94.4 percent to 558,000 tons, according to Zhang Pengfei, an official with Baotou's development and reform commission.

In addition to constructing three new industrial wastewater treatment and reclaimed water purification projects, one wastewater treatment plant underwent an upgrade to meet higher standards, according to the commission. The efforts increased the city's daily capacity to provide highly purified reclaimed water by 163,500 cubic meters, meeting the water consumption demand of five crystalline silicon companies.

By the end of last year, a new wastewater treatment plant was put into use at Baotou Equipment Manufacturing Industrial Park.

The 850-million-yuan plant can produce 90,000 cubic meters of high-quality reclaimed water daily, said Feng Jianxi, an executive at Baotou Water Resources Group, the operator of the facility.

"The center excels in treating both domestic sewage and complex industrial wastewater, producing outstanding treatment outcomes. This enables the reclaimed water to meet the high-quality demand of crystalline silicon manufacturers in the industrial park," he said.

The project is a microcosm of Baotou's efforts to tap the potential of reclaimed water in supporting its huge crystalline silicon sector and other industries, according to a statement from Baotou's development and reform commission.

"In recent years, Baotou has launched 16 projects as part of a national pilot initiative for building demonstration cities for utilizing reclaimed water, with a total investment exceeding 4.1 billion yuan... All the projects will be completed and put into use this year, increasing the city's annual capacity to allocate and utilize reclaimed water by 70 million cubic meters.

"These facilities will aid in the establishment of a reclaimed water utilization system in Baotou, incorporating small-scale subsystems within enterprises, medium-sized systems in industrial parks, and an overarching system spanning the city," the statement said.

Restored Grand Canal celebrated on World Water Day

By HOU LIQIANG
houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

China has made remarkable progress in rejuvenating its waterways as it endeavors to uphold "river ethics", seeking to safeguard the rights of rivers for sustainable existence.

The latest progress was shared at the 2025 World Water Day Open Day in Beijing's Tongzhou district on Saturday, where the northernmost section of the famed Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal is located.

Addressing the event, Peng Jing, president of the China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research, said the theme of this year's event was about celebrating the living heritage of artificial waterways such as the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal.

The canal is the world's longest and oldest artificial waterway that is still in use today. But due to reasons such as changes in river course and poor maintenance, this ancient

waterway that once connected five major rivers has been disconnected for the past century.

In 2022, the Chinese government launched an initiative to bring life back to the more than 1,700-kilometer Grand Canal with water from the South-to-North Water Diversion Project.

Over the years, the project has transferred billions of cubic meters of water from the south to supplement the dry and populous north. Thanks to the diversion, water systems in the north can recover from overuse, people have better quality water to drink and from 2022 on the disconnected canal has resumed full flow, Peng said.

It's encouraging to see the modern artificial waterway support the ancient canal, which dates back nearly 2,500 years, and revitalize natural rivers and people who depend on them, she said. It demonstrates the co-dependent relationship between humans and water.

"I believe the story of the Grand

Canal proves one simple thing: That harmony between humans and water is achievable. By protecting, passing on and harnessing the flowing legacies, humans are given a chance to survive our current crises and grow further," she noted.

Li Haihong, who heads IWHR's technical team for the river ethics program, said that the resumption of full flow in the once disconnected sections of the Grand Canal is an example demonstrating China's commitment to the practice of river ethics. "River crises occur because humans have emphasized their rights during development while neglecting their duties, leaving the rights of rivers unprotected. Constructing river ethics is about strengthening human responsibilities and duties and protecting the rights of rivers," she said.

Li said the canal used to play a vital role in promoting the economic and cultural development and exchanges between the country's north and south, and people and the

canal once lived in harmony.

Since 1855, however, the northern section of the canal had ceased to flow, making it lose its vitality, she said.

Since 2022, more than 800 million cubic meters of water has been diverted to the canal, restoring its vitality. Over 300 million cubic meters of water has been diverted to irrigate more than 53,300 hectares of farmland along the canal, replenishing the groundwater.

Li noted the Xiliao River in Northeast China, which is the only major river among China's seven largest rivers with an interrupted flow, as another example demonstrating China's commitment to river ethics.

Thanks to a 2020 initiative to supplement rain water and floodwater into it, the watercourse has had water in its trunk for the last five years, she said.

According to a recent release from the ministry, its efforts to supplement water in the Yongding River, which dried up in 1996, has also



Cleaners collect garbage on the Hanjiang River, a major source of water for the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, in Shiyan city, Hubei province, on March 21. CAO ZHONGHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

significantly rejuvenated the mother river of Beijing. The river has seen water flow continuously along its entire length for five straight years since 2021, it noted.

River ethics were included in one of four initiatives proposed by China's Minister of Water Resources Li Guoying in March 2023 during the 10th United Nations Water Conference. "We should respect the right of rivers to survive in nature, treat

water as a living entity, develop river ethics, protect river health and achieve a harmonious coexistence between humans and rivers," he said.

The minister has been advocating for river ethics at least since 2009 when he headed the Yellow River Conservancy Commission, an affiliate of the ministry that oversees the management of the Yellow River, China's mother river.

WORLD

Istanbul mayor arrested on corruption charges

ISTANBUL — The Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem Imamoglu has been suspended from office and detained on corruption charges, Turkey's Interior Ministry said on Sunday.

Imamoglu's removal was a "temporary measure under the law", the ministry said on X, citing allegations of unlawful acquisition of personal data for profit, bribery, tender rigging and establishing a criminal organization.

Imamoglu, 54, had been held for questioning since Wednesday. He was arrested after a statement in court on Sunday and transferred to Marmara Prison in Istanbul's Siliври district.

He has denied the charges he faces as "unimaginable accusations and slanders" and called for nationwide protests on Sunday.

Imamoglu, of the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, won a second term as Istanbul mayor in March last year, defeating President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party candidate Murat Kurum.

The government denies that investigations are politically motivated and says courts are independent.

Police have detained more than 1,100 people since the arrest of Imamoglu sparked the country's worst unrest in years, officials said on Monday.

The demonstrations began in

Istanbul after Imamoglu's arrest and have since spread to more than 55 of the country's 81 provinces, sparking clashes with riot police.

A nationwide ban on street gatherings was extended on Saturday for four more days.

Separately, Turkey's Vice-President Cevdet Yilmaz and Central Bank Governor Fatih Karahan sought to calm market jitters that sparked a sharp sell-off in Turkish assets since Imamoglu was detained. Analysts expect that to accelerate after his imprisonment.

On Monday Imamoglu was nominated as a presidential candidate by the CHP for the 2028 elections, a party spokesman told AFP. The CHP, the second-largest party in parliament, held a primary election on Sunday, in which the only candidate was Imamoglu.

The nonmember vote — more than 13 million, according to the CHP — could indicate that Imamoglu enjoys wide public support beyond the party faithful. The party's chairman said it showed the need for early elections.

No general election is scheduled until 2028.

If Erdogan, who has led Turkey for 22 years, is to run again, parliament would need to back an earlier election since the president will have reached his limit by that date.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Iran says no dialogue with Washington under pressure

TEHERAN — Iran cannot negotiate directly with the United States under existing conditions of "maximum pressure", the country's foreign minister said on Sunday, dismissing the prospect of reviving a 2015 nuclear agreement in its original form.

Seyyed Abbas Araghchi criticized the US sanctions and said Tehran would not engage in talks while under intense economic restrictions, sanctions and other threats. "No wise individual will enter direct negotiations under circumstances where maximum pressure exists," he told Iran's Khabar Online news agency.

Iran has received a letter from US President Donald Trump addressed to its Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and is considering a reply rejecting direct talks with the US under pressure given Washington's past perfidy, Iran's Mehr News Agency reported. "We have negotiated many times, including very recently," Araghchi said. "Our ongoing talks with the three European countries are, in fact, something of an indirect negotiation over our nuclear program."

"The format of negotiations is always relevant in diplomatic relations, whether the two sides talk directly or indirectly. For now, our tactic and method is to have indirect negotiations."

"In circumstances where there is 'maximum pressure', no one in their sound mind would enter into direct talks."

The United States, under the first term of Trump, withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of

Action, or JCPOA, that Iran signed with world powers in July 2015.

Araghchi, one of Iran's chief negotiators in the JCPOA talks, said reviving the deal in its "current form and text" was no longer feasible. He cited Iran's advances in nuclear capabilities since the US withdrawal in 2018 and more sanctions by the other party.

"The JCPOA, in its current form, cannot be revived in my opinion," he said. "They have set many new sanctions and the conditions have changed."

Peaceful activities

Although Iran has scaled back compliance with the JCPOA in response to renewed US sanctions, Araghchi reiterated that Tehran's nuclear activities remain peaceful.

Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman and deputy chairman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Sunday that Iran is firm and resolute in preserving its rights.

Iran's nuclear program has undergone the harshest nuclear inspections and no other country is as much under inspection as Iran, Kamalvandi was cited by Mehr as saying. He objected to the claim that Iran is carrying out "unpeaceful nuclear activities".

Kamalvandi reaffirmed Iran's readiness to return to its commitments if its rights are not ignored, Mehr reported.

Mike Gu in Hong Kong contributed to this story.

XINHUA

Dino dash



Participants in T-Rex costumes are off to a start during the Tyrannosaurus Race held at Funabashi Racecourse in Chiba, Japan, on Saturday. The quirky event, featuring about 550 racers, has gained popularity since its inception in the United States in 2017. TOMOHIRO OHSUMI VIA GETTY IMAGES

Talks seen as key for E. Asia collaboration

Experts highlight push by Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul to work together more closely

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo
jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

An annual meeting between foreign ministers of China, Japan and South Korea provided a great opportunity for the countries to present the world a constructive and forward-looking vision, Japanese experts say.

During the 11th China-Japan-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tokyo on Saturday, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his counterparts Takeshi Iwaya of Japan and Cho Tae-yul of South Korea agreed to strengthen communication, enhance mutual trust and work more closely together.

Ukeru Magasaki, director of the East Asian Community Institute in Japan, said: "Looking at the world today, we are in a period of great upheaval. If China, South Korea and Japan can navigate through this period of instability, there is no doubt that in about five years they will become a major center of the global economy."

China is at the forefront of the scientific and technological revolution, and Japan and South Korea should recognize that collaboration within a framework to ensure the stability and smooth operation of global industrial and supply chains serves their interests, said Magasaki, a former senior official in Japan's foreign ministry.

"If people-to-people exchanges become more active, it will become clear that cooperation between Japan, China and South Korea is the right path for these nations to pursue."

In the meeting the three countries moved to resume negotiations on a China-Japan-South Korea free trade agreement and to prepare for a leaders' meeting this year.

Kazuyuki Hamada, an international political economist and former parliamentary vice-minister for foreign affairs of Japan, said, "In this critical moment the meeting holds greater significance than ever."

Trilateral collaboration should extend beyond the Asia-Pacific region, serving as a stepping stone toward addressing global challenges, Hamada said.

"With the security environment becoming increasingly severe and the risks of environmental destruction and natural disasters rising rapidly, cooperation is more crucial than ever."

To prevent military conflicts, he urged mutual visits between defense officials and regular exchanges among disaster prevention experts from the three countries to pool information, including expertise.

Opposing protectionism

Kumiko Haba, former vice-president of the International Studies Association and a distinguished professor at Josai International University in Japan, attributed the renewed economic collaboration between Japan, China and South Korea in part to their efforts to counter the US move toward protectionism.

"To mitigate economic damage, Japan is increasingly looking to East Asian collaboration as a means of stabilizing its economy," Haba said.

She suggested that rather than focusing on military expansion, policies should shift toward economic transformation and greater people-to-people exchanges.

Hidetoshi Tashiro, chief economist with the Japanese consultancy Infinity LLC, said the United States appears

to be "reverting to a 19th-century style of protectionism or mercantilism."

"Japan, China and South Korea have the opportunity to actively cooperate in advanced technology sectors, complementing each other's strengths to generate new drivers of economic growth."

On Saturday Wang and Iwaya co-chaired the sixth China-Japan High-Level Economic Dialogue in Tokyo, the first such dialogue between the two countries in about six years.

The dialogue "serves as a model for cooperation among non-US countries", Tashiro said.

If Japan and China use this momentum to advance a free trade agreement, "it will not only greatly contribute to their own economic development, but also shift the economic center of gravity from the US to East Asia, ensuring a smoother global economic cycle and fostering 21st century economic growth", he said.

Japan and China have the potential to foster extensive and in-depth collaboration in various economic spheres, he said. For example, combining Japan's sophisticated manufacturing technology with China's innovative artificial intelligence capabilities could create entirely new markets and tackle the challenges posed by their rapidly aging populations.

Takakage Fujita, secretary-general of the Association for Inheriting and Propagating the Murayama Statement, a Japanese civic group, said that rather than following US directives, Japan must fully embrace Asian diplomacy, starting with improving Japan-China relations.

"Without coexistence and mutual prosperity with China and the rest of Asia, Japan's success in the 21st century is simply impossible. Strong Japan-China relations are the cornerstone of Asia's greatest security guarantee, and Japan must never lose sight of this."

Greenland lambasts trip by US delegation

COPENHAGEN/WASHINGTON — Greenlandic leaders criticized an upcoming trip by a high-profile US delegation to the Danish territory that President Donald Trump has suggested the US should annex.

The delegation, which will visit a United States military base and watch a dogsled race, will be led by Usha Vance, wife of US Vice-President JD Vance, and include National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and Energy Secretary Chris Wright.

Greenland's outgoing Prime Minister Mute Egede called this week's visit a "provocation" and said that his caretaker government would not meet the delegation.

"Until recently, we could trust the Americans who were our allies and friends, and with whom we enjoyed working closely," Egede told the local newspaper Sermitsiaq. "But that time is over."

The Greenlandic government is in a caretaker phase after a general election on March 11 won by the Democrats, a pro-business party that favors a slow approach to independence from Denmark.

Jens-Frederik Nielsen, leader of the Democrats, called for political unity and said the visit by the US delegation during coalition talks and with municipal elections due next week, "once again shows a lack of respect for the Greenlandic people."

Visit to military base

Waltz and Wright plan to visit the Pituffik space base, the US military base in Greenland. The White House said they will get briefings from US service members there.

They will then join Vance to visit historical sites and attend the national dogsled race.

Brian Hughes, spokesman for the White House National Security Council, said the US team is "confident that this visit presents an opportunity to build on partnerships that respects Greenland's self-determination and advances economic cooperation".

Trump has made US annexation of Greenland a major talking point since taking office for a second time on Jan 20. Greenland's strategic location and rich mineral resources could benefit the US.

The governments of both Greenland and Denmark have voiced opposition to such a move.

Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said in a written comment reacting to news of the visit that "this is something we take seriously".

Denmark wants to work with the United States, but it should be cooperation based on "the fundamental rules of sovereignty", she said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

XINHUA

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

x.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

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

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900, San
Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No.1543

Forum stresses Cambodia-China cooperation framework

PHNOM PENH — A high-level think tank forum opened on Monday in Phnom Penh with a focus on deepening Cambodia-China "Diamond Cooperation Framework" toward building a Cambodia-China community with a shared future in the new era.

Co-hosted by the Royal Academy of Cambodia and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the two-day forum was convened in the Cambodian capital on Monday and in the cultural province of Siem Reap on Tuesday.

Zhen Zhanmin, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said China and Cambodia are ironclad friends who share weal and woe and help each other, and their relations have maintained a high level of development for a long time.

The construction of a community with a shared future between China and Cambodia has continued to advance in depth, accumulating valuable experience and playing a demonstrative role in building a community with a shared future for

the surrounding areas and even for mankind, Zhen said.

"China and Cambodia use political mutual trust to safeguard the construction of a community with a shared future, economic and trade cooperation to strengthen the foundation of the construction of a community with a shared future, and cultural exchanges to win people's hearts and minds for the construction of a community with a shared future."

Think tank exchanges are an important part of cultural exchanges and play a unique role in enhancing policy communication, promoting practical cooperation and fostering people-to-people exchanges, Zhen said.

Khy Sovannratana, secretary of state in Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, said the forum was an important platform to strengthen the unwavering commitment of Cambodia and China in promoting various areas of cooperation and reviewing significant developments.

The bilateral relationship has been nurtured by successive generations of leaders, he said.

"This historic bond has grown from strength to strength, evolving into an ironclad friendship built on the foundation of win-win cooperation, peaceful coexistence, mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and noninterference in internal affairs."

Strong ties

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and China on July 19, 1958, the two countries have developed a strong and multifaceted relationship, particularly in key areas of political, economic, military and cultural cooperation.

"The Diamond Cooperation Framework is a testament to our partnership, serving as a concrete road map based on mutual trust, shared objectives and commitments."

Sok Touch, president of the Royal Academy of Cambodia, said Cambod-

ia and China agreed in 2023 to develop the Diamond Cooperation Framework with six priority areas, including political cooperation, energy and people-to-people exchanges.

"Overall, I could say that Cambodia-China relations in the new era have reached the highest-ever level in history."

Kin Phea, director-general of the International Relations Institute of Cambodia of the Royal Academy of Cambodia, said that under the Diamond Cooperation Framework, the two countries have been working together to develop an "Industrial Development Corridor" and "Fish and Rice Corridor".

"China has always been ready to work with the international community to restore confidence in multilateralism and globalization, build an open and pluralistic world economy, and blaze a new trail in inclusive growth and sustainable development."

BUSINESS

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

Income redistribution seen as urgent task

Experts call for greater wealth transfer from SOEs to social welfare

By ZHOU LANXU,
OUYANG SHIJIA
and WANG KEJU

China should look beyond short-term stimulus and decisively redistribute incomes to expand consumption, especially by transferring more State-owned wealth to the social welfare system, leading economists and policy researchers said.

Now is the time to act, they said, with the latest consumption stimuli, such as the trade-in programs, creating a window to plan for long-term reforms to sustain momentum after the immediate stimulus effects wear off, paving the way for the much-anticipated consumption-driven economic model.

"Policymakers have begun prioritizing bolstering domestic consumption, but a long-term structural reform framework is essential beyond short-term measures," said Chen Yuyu, director of the Peking University Economic Policy Research Institute and a professor at PKU's Guanghua School of Management.

Chen said that to increase consumption's share of GDP by 10 to 15 percentage points over 15 years for a more balanced and self-sustaining economic model, China must redefine the allocation of State-owned enterprises' profits, whose savings are now mostly reinvested into their own expansion.

"Reforms now emphasize SOE profitability. The next step is to establish a clear framework for

distributing these earnings — a portion must be transferred to households and this should be acted upon now," he said.

Chen's views were echoed by another major policy think tank.

The central government should moderately reallocate government-held wealth to households, including via pensions, to foster economic rebalancing, the Institute of Finance and Banking, part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences or CASS, proposed in a recent report.

Recent policy developments signal an unprecedented commitment by policymakers to transition China's economic model toward consumption-driven growth.

According to the Government Work Report, ultralong special treasury bonds totaling 300 billion yuan (\$41.3 billion) will be issued to support the expanded consumer goods trade-in programs this year, along with measures to provide childcare subsidies and raise old age benefits.

Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the Office of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs, said over the weekend that the country aims to increase the share of household income in national income.

Han said China has significant potential to expand consumption as its consumption-to-GDP ratio is about 20 percentage points lower than that of developed countries.

Final consumption, including government and household consumption, contributed 56.8 percent of China's GDP as of 2023 whereas household consumption contributed 39.6 percent, according to the latest official figures.

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, said apart from the short-term consumption

subsidies, a more fundamental solution lies in social security reforms, such as easier access to public housing and healthcare for migrant workers to reduce their precautionary savings.

"To deliver that, China needs to do huge fiscal transfer to the benefits system," Xing said. "It's probably the central government's turn to try to fill the gap by either channeling dividends from State-owned capital to the social security system, or gradually shifting China's policy focus from supporting infrastructure to spending more on social welfare."

Xu Gao, chief economist at BOC International, estimated that transferring 10 trillion yuan of non-financial State-owned equity — out of a total of 102 trillion yuan as of 2023 — into the social security fund to subsidize low-income groups could expand consumption by at least 1 trillion yuan annually.

Acknowledging the proposal's feasibility, Zhang Bin, deputy director of the CASS' Institute of World Economics and Politics, nevertheless, said that achieving a huge short-term impact could be challenging, especially given uncertainties over SOE asset liquidity.

"Similar reform steps actually have been ongoing for quite some time. If you're expecting significant short-term changes, that might be unrealistic," Zhang said.

In 2017, the State Council issued a plan for transferring State-owned capital to strengthen the social security fund, requiring that 10 percent of State-owned equity in large and medium-sized SOEs and financial institutions be transferred to cover shortfalls in the basic pension fund. The transfer was largely completed as of last year.

Contact the writers at
zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn

AI seen as key to high-quality growth

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's emphasis on advancing the application of fast-evolving artificial intelligence technology in a wide range of industries will inject new momentum into the country's high-quality economic growth and create enormous opportunities for multinational corporations to invest in the country, said government officials and business executives.

Liu Liehong, head of the National Data Administration, said AI technology is promoting economic and social development at an unprecedented speed and has become an important driving force bolstering a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation.

Liu made the remarks on Monday at the China Development Forum 2025 in Beijing, emphasizing that the advancements of AI technology are closely linked with the development and utilization of data, while the combination of high-quality data with AI will give full play to the multiplier effects of data elements.

He said the administration will accelerate the establishment of basic systems for data, step up the supply of high-quality data and press ahead with the construction of digital infrastructure such as a national integrated computing power network, to lay a solid foundation for AI innovation and industrial applications.

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

"For businesses in China looking to boost their productivity and maintain competitiveness, technologies led by AI present an unprecedented opportunity to create value, respond dynamically to change and build resilience," said Samantha Zhu, chairwoman of Accenture Greater China.

Zhu said the recent progress in the wave of AI-led innovation is very encouraging as companies quickly pick up the signal and mobilize themselves to harness the use of such technologies. "We anticipate more innovation and applications happening across industries and functions, from R&D to manufacturing, from customer interface to warehouse, from upskilling to sustainability," she added.

China's AI sector will make big strides in the next 10 to 15 years, with its market size reaching 1.73 trillion yuan (\$238.4 billion) by 2035, accounting for 30.6 percent of the global total, said market research company CCID Consulting.

Executives attending the forum also hailed China's efforts in bolstering technological innovation and cultivating new growth drivers. Ola Kaellenius, Mercedes-Benz Group's chairman of the board of management, who attended the

forum, said it is always innovation and technology that spread growth.

He highlighted China's striving for innovation and the environment and policymakers that support unleashing such potential, adding: "That's why we have been investing in R&D in China. With the dual R&D engines in Beijing and Shanghai, we are innovating in China, for China and for the world."

The chairman said: "The Chinese market is a main pillar of our global strategy, and a key driver of our electric and digital transformation. Mercedes-Benz remains committed to long-term investment in China."

The company is investing 14 billion yuan in China together with local partners into new cars and new technologies, and expanding its footprint here.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of consultancy Roland Berger, said people now realize that there's so much innovation in China, and it is quite critical for foreign companies to continue to invest in technological research and development in China. Depoux expects that there will be a lot of scientific discoveries and disruptions coming into innovation.

"In the past decade, we have seen Chinese companies leapfrogging globally in many industries. China has made rapid progress in the development of AI technology, becoming one of the global leaders, and the pace will further accelerate. AI will unlock massive opportunities for our business," he said.



A visitor checks out snacks of Oishi, a brand of Philippine food company Liwayway, during a trade expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Shanghai home to more foreign players

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

Shanghai is further consolidating its position as an ideal foreign investment destination by certifying 30 regional headquarters of foreign corporations and 10 research and development centers on Friday, alongside factors including its solid economic foundation, business environment and rich talent pool serving as great draws for multinational firms, said senior executives.

As of the end of February, Shanghai was home to 1,027 foreign corporations' regional headquarters and 597 foreign-funded R&D centers, said the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce.

"As a Philippine company starting to develop in Shanghai as early as 1993, we are the witness and beneficiary of China's reform and opening-up," said Li Peiming, executive vice-

president of Liwayway (China) Co Ltd.

"Thanks to Shanghai's open and inclusive policy, we've benefited from the relaxed business environment and achieved development globally through our platform in Shanghai," Li said.

US-based consumer health company Kenvue also benefits from Shanghai's exceptional business environment and made the city its top choice when selecting its headquarters for the Chinese market, said Gift Arpapor Samabhandhu, president of Kenvue China.

Along with local government support, the city's robust economic foundation, rich talent pool and high level of openness, the company has achieved effective localization and high-quality development over the past nearly four decades, Samabhandhu said.

Kenvue was among the first batch of foreign-funded enterprises to settle in Shanghai, locating three of its

four Chinese factories in the metropolis. It also has an R&D center in Shanghai, Samabhandhu said.

"Shanghai offers one of the best business environments for foreign-funded companies, and the city's stable policy and great talent are attracting companies like us to launch our China headquarters here," said Zong Yanping, managing director of Delonghi Appliances (Shanghai) Co Ltd.

Calling the decision a commitment of continuous investment in China, Zong said the company is extremely optimistic about the Chinese market, adding that about 65 percent of the Italy-based company's global business comes from coffee machines, and he sees great potential in China going forward.

Delonghi has enjoyed the largest market share and double-digit growth in China over the past few years, but Zong believes there is still great growth potential for China's coffee machine market.



Every grain on your plate comes from hard work. Cherish food, reduce waste.

CHINADAILY

PUBLIC INTEREST AD: 073

Briefly

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 20 pips to 7.178 against the US dollar on Monday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate

each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the greenback is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

Hainan Airlines launches Beijing-Oslo flights

Hainan Airlines launched direct flights between Beijing and Oslo

on Saturday, further strengthening air connectivity between China and Northern Europe. Flight HU769 from Beijing Capital International Airport landed at Oslo Gardermoen International Airport at 5:02 am local time. A welcome ceremony was held at the airport to celebrate the operation of the flights.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

CHINA DEVELOPMENT FORUM

AstraZeneca puts faith in innovation

Pharma MNC investing more in R&D to achieve its 'In China, for global' goal

By LIU ZHIHUA
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

Multinational pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca is bullish about China's role as a global innovation powerhouse, underpinned by the country's sound prospects as well as its growing innovation capability in new and emerging sectors, its top executive said.

Pascal Soriot, global CEO of AstraZeneca, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily that the company is investing more in research and development in the world's second-largest economy rather than merely in manufacturing, in order to achieve its goal of "In China, for global", which means leveraging China's supply chains to produce and export medicines, while also cooperating with Chinese partners to discover new medicines and develop them globally.

"We can see here the development of new quality productive forces is leading to breakthrough innovation in artificial intelligence, of course, and across many industries, including the pharmaceutical industry."



Pascal Soriot, global CEO of AstraZeneca

"China will become, or actually has already become a big engine of innovation in our industry," Soriot said, pointing to "enormous innovations" across various pharmaceutical technologies happening in the country, including gene therapies, cell therapies, antibody-drug-conjugates, as well as recent breakthroughs in artificial intelligence achieved by Chinese AI companies such as DeepSeek.

"In recent years, we've invested more and more in R&D, innovation and science to actually not only bring our medicines to patients in China but also to leverage the innovation that exists here and work with local biotech companies or academic institutions to come up with new products and develop them globally."

Soriot's remarks came as the United Kingdom-based pharmaceutical giant announced on Friday an investment of \$2.5 billion in Beijing to establish its sixth global strategic R&D center, together with major research and manufacturing agreements.

The new R&D center, AstraZeneca's second in China following the one in Shanghai, will advance early-stage research and clinical development, and will be enabled by an AI and data science laboratory. The company already has two such centers in Europe, and two in the United States.

"We basically have made China a critical part of our global organization. Some companies use China simply as a distribution network, but for us, China is a key part of our core R&D engine," Soriot said. "Our team here in China is now leading the development of global projects."

With an investment of \$2.5 billion over the next five years, AstraZeneca will accelerate the establishment of new R&D collaborations in the country. For instance, it has a strategic partnership with Beijing Cancer Hospital in translational research, data science and clinical development. It is also signing two collaboration and licensing agreements with two local startups to discover multispecific antibodies and to develop macrocyclic peptides.

In addition, AstraZeneca is launching a new joint venture with Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based BioKangtai, to develop, manufacture and commercialize innovative vaccines for respiratory and other infectious diseases. This will be AstraZeneca's first and only vaccine manufacturing facility in China.

"We can see here the development of new quality productive forces is leading to breakthrough innovation in artificial intelligence, of course, and across many industries, including the pharmaceutical industry. It's also leading to a whole pool of talented scientists that are now inventing for the future of medicine," Soriot said.

"You are going to realize that in our industry, innovation started accelerating in China only four to five years ago ... China has made enormous progress and has come from being a follower to becoming a leader today in our sector in terms of innovation and coming up with new medicines over the last five to six years."

The chief executive also said the company is aligning itself with China's pursuit of opening-up and common prosperity, making sure everybody benefits.

For instance, as part of the new investment, the company has a commitment to a program that aims to help doctors and patients in remote parts of China.

He also advocated for global collaboration in science and technology, saying it is very important to keep the world connected so that everybody can collaborate across geographies and share knowledge to benefit the world as a whole.

AstraZeneca's revenue in China reached \$6.41 billion last year, ranking top among multinational pharmaceutical companies in the country.



Shoppers are seen at an IKEA mall in Wuhan, Hubei province, in February. The household products' company serves about 90 million customers in China each year. JI PENGFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

IKEA 'planning now for the next 60 years' in nation

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

IKEA, a leading global home furnishings maker and retailer, remains deeply committed to the Chinese market, reinforcing its long-term presence through strategic investments in retail and supply chain operations and sustainable development, said its top executive.

Jon Abrahamsson Ring, CEO of Inter IKEA Group, said that the company is committed to China's economic landscape, innovative supply chains and sustainable initiatives during his participation at the China Development Forum 2025 held on Sunday and Monday in Beijing.

With a history of doing business in China spanning six decades, IKEA sees significant potential for continued growth. "We are very confident, we believe in China and are planning now for the next 60 years," Ring said.

The CEO said that the company aligns with China's long-term strategic vision, highlighting shared values in sustainability and accessibility. Serving about 1 billion customers annually, IKEA is committed to providing affordable home furnishing solutions while prioritizing environmental responsibility, he added.

"On average, we have worked with our suppliers in China for 15 years or more."



Jon Abrahamsson Ring, CEO of Inter IKEA Group

Recognizing the vast potential of the retail market, Ring said that IKEA serves about 90 million customers in China each year but sees ample opportunity for expansion in a market of over 1.4 billion people.

He oversaw the retail business of IKEA in the early years when the company entered the Chinese market.

IKEA is evolving beyond its traditional large-format stores by integrating smaller store formats that are closer to urban communities, as well as enhancing its e-commerce solutions to reach more consumers.

In addition to its large store format in suburban areas, IKEA has introduced smaller retail formats in recent years which enable more frequent customer visits and attract new customers by bringing

them closer to the brand. "Instead of visiting our big stores an average of four times a year, they now visit smaller stores 10 to 12 times a year," he said.

The company has also capitalized on its growth in global e-commerce. "We have gone from less than 5 percent e-commerce five years ago, to today where it accounts for 26 percent," Ring added.

In addition to retail, China plays a vital role in IKEA's global supply chain, contributing over 25 percent of its global sourcing. "We source almost all our material categories here in China," Ring said.

This regional strength allows IKEA to maintain a robust supply chain network, with 80 percent of its products sold in China being sourced from China. "The combination of global and regional capabilities makes us more resilient," he said.

IKEA fosters long-term relationships with over 300 suppliers in China, encouraging collaboration in innovation and sustainability efforts.

"On average, we have worked with our suppliers in China for 15 years or more. We don't just buy and leave, we develop methods to recycle materials, optimize production processes and minimize waste together," Ring said.

The company is also at the forefront of automation in furniture production. "Manufacturing today is highly automated, especially for bookcases, kitchens and wardrobes. It's a data-driven process, optimized from design to distribution," he said.

Sustainability is a central pillar of IKEA's strategy in China, with ambitious goals for renewable energy adoption and emissions reduction. The company has managed to grow global sales by 10 billion euros (\$10.84 billion) over the past decade while reducing absolute CO2 emissions by 28 percent. "China is our leading market when it comes to renewable energy," Ring said.

He praised China's rapid advancements in renewable energy infrastructure, which have enabled IKEA to make significant progress. "In 2021, we had 5 percent renewable electricity in our supply chain in China. In fiscal year 2025, the renewable electricity share in our supply chain in China reached 92 percent," he said.

As IKEA continues to evolve in China, it remains focused on its founding mission. "For 82 years, we have done one thing — making good home furnishing products affordable for as many people as possible," Ring said.

Vale heartened by country's economic prospects

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Multinational mining and steel-making major Vale S.A. said it sees substantial investment opportunities in China and reaffirmed its commitment to the Chinese market fueled by unwavering confidence in the nation's sustained economic growth.

"As our largest market globally, China has a very vibrant economy with massive opportunities for investment. We will continue deepening our foothold in the country considering the massive market opportunities," said Gustavo Pimenta, CEO of Vale.

"As a long-term partner of China for over 50 years, we see tremendous opportunities for collaboration with China. We have been actively engaging in discussions with potential Chinese partners to jointly develop projects abroad and we look forward to working with our Chinese partners to jointly grow our business overseas, creating long-term value for the global steel industry, he said.

"China, the world's largest steel manufacturer and iron ore consumer, is very important for Vale. It has been our largest market since 2006 and the destination of more than 50 percent of our iron ore products since 2014.

"We believe that China will continue to be our most important market in the future." Pimenta expressed confidence in China's economic outlook, as the

"As our largest market globally, China has a very vibrant economy with massive opportunities for investment."



Gustavo Pimenta, CEO of Vale

country remains committed to unwaveringly promoting high-standard opening-up while continuously improving its business environment for foreign investors.

"Last year, China's GDP grew by 5 percent year-on-year, meeting its pre-set growth target, an admirable achievement especially when we consider the increasingly complex international environment last year. This growth has once again reflected the strong resilience of the Chinese economy," he said.

"This year, China set a growth target of around 5 percent for its economy, which we believe will be achieved."

According to Pimenta, Vale is glad to see the action plan, issued by the Chinese government last month to stabilize foreign investment, boost domestic consumption while addressing structural challenges.

"The action plan has been well received by multinational corporations like Vale and we remain confident of the dynamism of the Chinese economy."

China has taken multi-pronged measures to stabilize foreign investment since the start of this year. Last month, the country issued an action plan to stabilize foreign investment in 2025.

Vale said China will remain at the core of its business strategy, while the company has been making every effort to meet the evolving demands of Chinese customers.

The company signed a memorandum of understanding in Beijing on Thursday with HBIS Group, a leading Chinese iron and steel manufacturer, to deepen collaboration on decarbonization and jointly promote the green and low-carbon development of the steel industry.

The two parties will jointly explore low-carbon solutions, breakthrough decarbonization technologies such as circular economy, hydrogen metallurgy, and carbon capture, usage and storage, and new paths and new methods in the field of carbon asset management.

Vale also produces metals used in energy transition.

Industry experts believe international energy companies have been increasingly targeting China, which has been experiencing rapid advancements in new energy technologies.

Driven by ambitious carbon neutrality targets and significant

investments in renewable energy infrastructure, China presents a highly attractive market for global energy companies, said Wang Lining, director of the oil market department under the economics and technology research institute of China National Petroleum Corp.

By participating in China's expanding green energy sector, global firms can diversify their operations, tap into the world's largest energy market and position themselves at the forefront of the global energy shift, he said.

Looking ahead, Pimenta pointed to further collaborative opportunities with Chinese partners in decarbonization.

The company has been cooperating with China's BYD, the country's largest electric vehicle manufacturer, to study the electrification of light vehicles. Some electric models will be tested in the mining company's operational areas, with the aim of reducing the use of cars powered by fossil fuels.

It has also been working with Jinko Solar, one of China's major solar technology companies, to construct a solar power plant in Brazil, one of the largest solar projects in Latin America, with a peak installed capacity of 766 megawatts, equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of a city with 800,000 inhabitants.

As the world's largest consumer of steel, and consequently, a major importer of iron ore, China is expected to remain a dominant force in global steel consumption and production growth.



AstraZeneca's booth is seen during an expo in Beijing in November. The pharma company announced an investment of \$2.5 billion to establish a global R&D center in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Q&A WITH CEO

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

Retail giants bullish on consumption rebound



Nancy Liu
President of DFS China



Kelly Zhang
General Manager of Bimbo China



Jamie Zhu
General Manager of Ziwi Petfood
Greater China



Saravoot Yoovidhya
CEO of TCP Group

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

LIU: The two sessions introduce policies focused on deepening reforms and expanding high-level opening-up, especially those in line with initiatives like the 2025 Action Plan for Stabilizing Foreign Investment. Hainan Free Trade Port's critical role in China's new phase of openness is of great significance. Multinational corporations highly recognize Hainan FTP's potential and are eager to understand relevant policies. We hope to see transparent policies that ensure equal treatment for both domestic and foreign enterprises, promoting fair competition, lower costs and improved services. With these reforms, we believe Hainan will become a world-class international consumption hub. DFS, backed by LVMH's global ecosystem, is confident in playing a vital role in Hainan FTP's development.

ZHANG: Policy measures from the two sessions further optimize the business environment for foreign enterprises. We look forward to leveraging these initiatives to drive business growth and serve more consumers in the market. We greatly appreciate the government's commitment to high-level opening-up, which has consistently created opportunities for Bimbo China. Notably, Mankattan Beijing, our subsidiary, recently received certification as a Beijing Foreign-Invested R&D Center by the Beijing Municipal Science & Technology Commission and the Zhongguancun Science Park Administrative Commission. This recognition strengthens global Bimbo's confidence to further inject funding to build local R&D innovation capabilities. We have sensed more practical support from local governments for Bimbo China.

ZHU: We believe the two sessions significantly advance reforms and opening-up. As an ultra-premium New Zealand pet food brand in China, Ziwi has experienced China's open and supportive approach toward foreign businesses, which has strengthened our commitment to investing here. To further enhance the business environment, we hope for streamlined Customs procedures for pet products, faster inspection and quarantine processes, and stronger intellectual property protections. These measures would enable us to deliver high-quality products to Chinese consumers more efficiently.

YOOVIDHYA: China's commitment to reform and opening-up has been clear. This year's two sessions introduces further concrete measures to enhance market access and business confidence. Over the past year, we have seen the removal of foreign investment restrictions in manufacturing, the expansion of pilot projects in key sectors and the introduction of 20 new measures to stabilize foreign investment. As a global company invested in China's long-term growth, I look forward to policies that streamline administrative procedures, enhance regulatory transparency, and promote high-quality consumption growth, creating more opportunities for businesses like TCP Group. At TCP Group, we see these reforms as essential to fostering a thriving, consumption-driven economy. A transparent, predictable, and well-structured regulatory framework will allow businesses like ours to contribute more effectively to China's economic vitality and global integration. We remain committed to deepening our presence and working closely with stakeholders to drive sustainable growth in this dynamic market.

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

LIU: DFS contributes to China's high-quality development through global-local synergy. Our Yalong Bay project, opening in Hainan FTP, will integrate over 700 luxury brands while incubating local talent and sustainable practices. By blending LVMH's global resources with AI-driven innovations — such as personalized shopping experiences and smart supply chains — we aim to elevate Hainan's luxury sector into a globally competitive industry. This model not only supports China's industrial upgrade, but also sets a benchmark for sustainable, tech-driven retail.

ZHANG: Between 2023 and 2024, Grupo Bimbo invested an additional \$72 million in China to enhance product safety, upgrade production facilities, expand manufacturing capacity and improve factory environments. We place product safety as a No 1 priority. We drive product innovation through our Beijing and Shanghai R&D centers, developing safe, healthy and delicious products to meet evolving consumer needs. For sustainability, Bimbo China implements Global Bimbo standards consistently. For example, we are gradually shifting to eco-friendly logistics solutions with new energy vehicles.

ZHU: Ziwi is deeply committed to developing "new quality productive forces" which align closely with China's vision for high-quality development. At Ziwi, we prioritize innovation and technology to drive long-term growth and sustainability. By leveraging globally advanced pet food production technologies and utilizing big data to deeply analyze market demand in China, we develop high-quality, nutrient-rich pet foods that promote technological advancement and transformation within the pet industry. We are steadfast in our commitment to sustainable development, adopting eco-friendly production methods to reduce our carbon footprint. This philosophy is integral to Ziwi's brand messaging, as we aim to inspire both industry peers and consumers to embrace environmentally responsible practices. Through these efforts, we actively support China's "dual carbon" goals and contribute to a greener, more sustainable future.

YOOVIDHYA: The development of new quality productive forces is a critical driver of China's high-quality growth, and at TCP Group, innovation has always been at the core of our strategy. We are committed to a technology-first, innovation-driven approach, continuously integrating cutting-edge advancements across production, operations, sales and R&D to enhance efficiency and create greater value. In manufacturing, our Sichuan TCP Group Red Bull Beverage production base is a prime example of this commitment. We have introduced industry-leading high-speed automated production lines and intelligent three-dimensional warehouses, seamlessly integrating production, storage and resource optimization. This not only boosts efficiency, but also enables us to meet global green factory standards, reinforcing our dedication to sustainability. On the R&D front, our China R&D center leverages AI and big data analytics to gain deep consumer insights and accelerate product innovation. A key milestone was the launch of China's first bottled Red Bull product in 2023, a testament to our ability to adapt to evolving consumer needs through advanced technology.

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

LIU: AI will redefine luxury retail through hyper-personalization and immersive experiences. At the DFS Yalong Bay project, we plan AI-powered tools like virtual stylists and AR try-ons to enhance customer engagement. China's rapid AI adoption, fueled by strong R&D and a tech-savvy consumer base, positions it as a global innovation leader. We are confident in China's ability to maintain breakthroughs in AI — driven by retail solutions — which is in line with our goal of providing excellent customer experiences.

ZHANG: DeepSeek is indeed an innovation that has surprised the world. Bimbo China pays high attention to AI education and leveraging. Within the company, IT experts provide AI training for our team, encouraging associates to use AI to improve work efficiency. On the commercial side, we are also attempting to leverage AI to generate creative ideas and constructive solutions to resolve business issues. China's rapid rise in AI, robots, integrated circuits and digital infrastructure will reshape competitiveness dynamics in related industries globally. Bimbo China aims to leverage these new technologies to improve its operating efficiency, speed of innovation and cost structure.

ZHU: In recent years, artificial intelligence has been a hot topic, and now China's advancements in AI technology have taken this conversation to new heights, showcasing its leading position in the industries. "Made in China" is further influencing the world, particularly through progress in AI and the global impact of sectors like new energy vehicles, highlighting its strong potential for sustained breakthrough innovations. We are confident in China's leadership in transformative technologies, which will enhance our operational efficiency, especially through data-driven insights, to better understand Chinese consumers and help us better meet the consumers' evolving needs. By leveraging advanced AI and data analytics, we can significantly enhance our new product development process and improve consumer-brand communication efficiency. These technologies enable us to analyze data on consumer preferences, market trends and nutritional needs, allowing us to identify gaps and opportunities in the market.

YOOVIDHYA: AI is reshaping industries at an unprecedented pace, and at TCP Group, we see it as a game-changer for the food and beverage sector. From R&D and production to consumer engagement and supply chain management, AI presents vast opportunities to enhance efficiency, personalize experiences and drive innovation. Our R&D center is already leveraging AI and big data analytics to gain deeper consumer insights and accelerate product development, thus ensuring that we stay ahead of evolving market trends. In manufacturing, AI-powered automation is helping us optimize production lines, improve quality control and enhance operating efficiency. Meanwhile, AI-driven predictive analytics and smart logistics allow us to respond to consumer demand with greater precision, reducing waste and improving supply chain resilience. China's thriving AI ecosystem and commitment to innovation provide a strong foundation for sustained technological breakthroughs.

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

LIU: China's consumption potential remains robust, driven by a growing middle-income group and policy incentives like duty-free expansion. Hainan's Spring Festival duty-free sales surged to 2.09 billion yuan (\$289 million) in 2025, reflecting strong demand. DFS will capitalize on this by creating multi-category luxury experiences in China, targeting younger demographics through digital campaigns and entertainment-retail fusion. These strategies will drive profitability as China ramps up efforts to boost domestic demand.

ZHANG: With its 1.4 billion population, China's market presents unparalleled potential for baked goods industry growth. We have seen the government make significant efforts to stimulate domestic consumption, which has begun to show positive results from the end of last year. This year, I think the government may continue to focus on building consumption confidence and creating more job opportunities by doubling down on efforts in new technology fields, etc. When people have a sense of security, they tend to spend more. Looking forward, we believe that domestic consumption in China will gradually recover. This will give Bimbo confidence to deepen investment in the China market, helping speed up geographic and category expansion. With the right strategies and plan implementation, in 2025 Bimbo China will improve its profitability to enable the company's reinvestment in the China market for stronger capabilities in innovation and manufacturing.

ZHU: We are optimistic about China's consumption-driven economic growth and its potential to fuel our success. The rising demand for high-quality products, particularly in the premium pet food sector, aligns perfectly with Ziwi's offerings. As pet owners increasingly prioritize their pets' health and nutrition, Ziwi is well-positioned to benefit from this trend. The government's efforts to boost domestic consumption have created a favorable environment for our business. By expanding our product lines and optimizing distribution channels, we expect to achieve further growth in sales and market share. This will not only enhance our profitability, but also solidify our leadership in the premium pet food market. We remain confident in China's consumption potential and its ability to drive our long-term success.

YOOVIDHYA: China's focus on expanding domestic demand and boosting consumption reflects both global economic uncertainties and the country's transition to a new stage of high-quality growth. With a massive and evolving consumer base, China holds tremendous potential for a consumption-driven economy, particularly as demand for premium, functional and health-oriented products continues to rise. As a leading company in the global energy drink industry, TCP Group sees significant opportunities in China's market, where Red Bull is already a trusted and well-established brand. We anticipate that government-led consumption stimulus measures will further enhance market vitality and drive new growth opportunities. We believe that China's resilient consumer market and pro-consumption policies will create a strong foundation for sustainable growth. By deepening our presence, expanding local operations and continuously innovating our product offerings, TCP Group is well-positioned to benefit from China's shift toward a more consumption-driven economy while delivering long-term value to both our consumers and stakeholders.

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

LIU: DFS is committed to China's focus on high-quality development. We are increasing investment in China, particularly in the Hainan FTP, where the DFS Yalong Bay project will open as a seven-star retail-entertainment hub. By partnering with over 700 global brands across fashion, beauty and hospitality, we aim to be a key player in China's luxury sector, contributing to the country's modernization and positioning DFS as a bridge between global luxury and China's evolving consumption landscape.

ZHANG: China's high-quality development and modernization path present exciting opportunities for Bimbo to align with health-conscious consumption, intelligent manufacturing and rural vitalization initiatives. We're enhancing R&D efforts for nutritional products like zero-sugar and high-fiber whole wheat options to meet evolving consumer needs. Chinese modernization also gives us the opportunity to expand our business in the China market quickly. On top of club stores and discount stores, O2O business is also growing faster. We will enhance cooperation with winning channels. On top of this, geographically, Bimbo is aiming to expand beyond eastern and northern China to wider regions through partnerships with suitable distributors. The recent strategic partnership with Jingxitong (a platform under JD.com) helps Bimbo expand its national grocery coverage smoothly. China's compelling market potential and our established operational success reinforce our confidence in this market over the long run.

ZHU: We are highly confident in the tremendous growth opportunities within the Chinese market. China's 14th Five-Year Plan has achieved remarkable progress in promoting high-quality development, which has created unprecedented opportunities for the pet food industry. As China continues to advance along the path of Chinese modernization, the growing demand for high-quality and healthy pet foods presents vast potential for Ziwi. The company will further increase investment in China, optimize our distribution channels and deepen our commitment to the Chinese market. We plan to strengthen our online presence while expanding our offline investments to enhance brand influence and market share. By integrating online and offline strategies, we aim to provide Chinese consumers with a more convenient purchasing experience and solidify Ziwi's leading position in the ultra-premium pet food sector.

YOOVIDHYA: China's commitment to high-quality development and modernization presents significant opportunities, and TCP Group is fully aligned with this vision. Over the past five years, we have invested 4.36 billion yuan. But our vision extends beyond production. We are accelerating digital transformation, enhancing R&D and forging deeper partnerships to align with China's priorities in innovation, sustainability and industrial upgrading. China is not just a key market for TCP Group — it is a strategic hub for innovation and long-term growth. As the country continues to drive consumption expansion and technological advancement, we will deepen our investment, scale our smart manufacturing capabilities and introduce more innovative products tailored to Chinese consumers. Our "In China, For China" strategy remains unchanged, and we are committed to playing an even greater role in China's economic future.

COMMENT

Editorials

Crucial to maintain responsible and pragmatic momentum of ties

Infused with sincerity, the outcomes of the recent meetings Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had with the Japanese side in Tokyo will mark a significant remedial step for relations between China and Japan. One that will have the positive knock-on effect of strengthening regional stability.

It was with a shared historical sense of responsibility that China and Japan broke the ice between them, normalizing diplomatic relations in 1972; and it is with that sense of responsibility and the spirit of pragmatism that they have managed to keep relations on the right development track over the years. Despite this, the development of the ties has never been plain sailing, as it has repeatedly been troubled by the two neighbors' maritime disputes, divergences on historical issues and Tokyo's provocative relations with Taipei, etc.

However, an important reason why bilateral trade has increased more than 300 times since 1972, and remained at a high level of \$300 billion for 15 consecutive years, with the accumulated bilateral investment reaching nearly \$140 billion, is that the two sides have always sought to engage in clear-the-air dialogue whenever their ties have become strained. In this process, their historical bonds and cultural affinity have proved to be of practical value.

By preventing their divergences from defining their overall relationship, they have been able to continually tap into the structural complementarity between the two economies, which has brought tangible benefits to the two countries and the broader region.

With relations having deteriorated under the previous Japanese government, which had committed to one-sided pro-US policy, it was with the same sense of responsibility and pragmatic spirit that the two sides started mending their ties in November after the two heads of state held a meeting in Lima, Peru. In that meeting, the two leaders agreed to endeavor to build a constructive and stable China-Japan relationship fit for the new era. It is under the guidance of this heads-of-state diplomacy that the two neighbors have markedly accelerated their joint efforts to translate the political intentions into reality.

Wang's intensive diplomatic engagement with the Japanese side over the weekend being the latest endeavor in that regard. As well as attending the 11th China-Japan-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Sixth China-Japan High-Level Economic Dialogue, Wang had talks with his Japanese counterpart Takeshi Iwaya, as well as Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, along with other senior officials including Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi and Secretary General of Japan's National Security Secretariat Masataka Okano. He also met with the representatives of several China-Japan friendship groups.

The 20-point consensus the two sides reached in their first high-level economic dialogue in six years, which covers green development, environmental protection, elderly care services, service trade, food safety, supply chains and intellectual property rights protection, among other areas, indicates their shared will to markedly enrich the economic dimension of the China-Japan strategic relationship of mutual benefit, and work together to build a constructive and stable economic and trade relationship that meets the demands of a new era.

That means after months of painstaking efforts, the two sides have rebuilt a three-track model — intensive political engagement, broad economic cooperation and active cultural exchanges — to help stabilize ties. This is based on the four political documents between them, and is an approach that has proved to be an effective booster of ties in the past. This is not only in line with their shared sense of responsibility and the pragmatic spirit that prioritizes the two countries' common interests, but also accords with regional anticipations. For, as Wang said, in the increasingly complex and uncertain international environment, cooperation between China and Japan can serve as a strong countermeasure against the unilateralism and protectionism that have been generating global turbulence.

But for the good of themselves and the region as a whole, the reconciliation of their relations should by no means be a makeshift option in response to the increasing instability in the international situation. Rather it should be the long-term strategic choice of the two neighbors to work together to safeguard peace and security in Asia.

Israel's operations in Gaza must cease

The recent escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip has once again drawn global attention to the protracted and devastating conflict between Israel and Palestine. Israel's decision to break the two-month ceasefire agreement with Hamas and resume its intensive bombing and ground operations in Gaza last Tuesday has plunged the war-torn region into a deeper humanitarian crisis. This move has not only exacerbated the suffering of the Palestinian people but also cast a dark shadow over the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Israel's actions are condemnable. The resumption of hostilities has resulted in hundreds of additional casualties, bringing the total number of Palestinian deaths since October 2023 to over 50,000, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Tragically, more than half of these victims are women and children. This staggering loss of life is a stark reminder of the urgent need for the international community to apply the necessary pressure on Israel and its backer the United States to bring an end to this humanitarian catastrophe.

Israel's decision to halt humanitarian aid and cut off power supplies to Gaza earlier this month had already created dire conditions for the Palestinian population. The latest military offensive has only compounded their suffering. The responsibility for this tragedy of violence lies squarely with Israel, which has chosen to prioritize its political agenda over the lives of innocent civilians and the safety of its own hostages. Even within Israel, voices of dissent have emerged, with President Isaac Herzog criticizing the government's decision to resume fighting while the mission to bring hostages home remains incomplete.

The root of this escalation can be traced to Israel's domestic politics. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reliant on far-right factions within his coalition, has chosen to pursue a hard-line approach that prioritizes territorial control over peace. The recent approval of a "voluntary transition administration" to relocate Palestinians from Gaza to third countries, as well as the establishment of new settlements in the occupied West Bank, underscores Israel's disregard for Palestinian rights and international law. These actions not only violate the principles of justice and fairness, but also undermine any hope for a two-state solution, which remains the only viable path to lasting peace.

China has consistently called for a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution to the Palestinian question based on the two-state solution. The international community should join with it in seeking to pressure Israel to immediately cease its military operations in Gaza and return to the negotiating table. The use of force will only perpetuate the cycle of violence and suffering, and further destabilize the region.

The role of the US in this conflict should not be overlooked. By unconditionally supporting Israel's actions, the US has effectively endorsed the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and undermined efforts for peace. Its unconditional one-sided support only fuels the flames of conflict and hampers the prospects for a fair resolution.

As a responsible global power, China urges all parties to exercise restraint and prioritize dialogue over violence. The international community must work collectively to try and ensure humanitarian aid reaches those in need, protect civilian lives, and revive the peace process. The suffering of the Palestinian people must end, and their legitimate rights and aspirations recognized.

History has shown that violence is not the answer to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Only through mutual respect, adherence to international law, and a commitment to peaceful coexistence can just and lasting peace be achieved. Israel must stop its military operations in Gaza. The international community must act decisively and step up its efforts to bring an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Forum lays ground for stable, prosperous global economy

The China Development Forum 2025, held in Beijing from Sunday to Monday, has once again shown itself to be a pivotal platform for global dialogue on economic growth, innovation and sustainable development. This year's theme was "Unleashing Development Momentum for the Stable Growth of the Global Economy".

The forum brought together over 100 international leaders, including the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, heads of international organizations and renowned scholars, to discuss both pressing global challenges and new opportunities.

It underscored China's commitment to fostering international cooperation amid a complex global economic landscape. Topics such as macroeconomic policies, technological innovation, green development and artificial intelligence were at the forefront. Notably, the forum highlighted China's role as a "stabilizing anchor" for the world economy, particularly through its emphasis on high-quality development.

As the world's second-largest economy, China has consistently championed the construction of an open world economy

based on universal benefits and inclusiveness. This approach injects some much-needed stability and confidence into the global economy.

The forum placed a strong emphasis on innovation as a catalyst for global economic growth. Discussions on AI, digital transformation and the development of new quality productive forces highlighted China's strides in technological advancement. As China transitions from being the "world's factory" to a global hub of innovation, the public goods provided by its new quality productive forces are enhancing its appeal in an open world.

Despite the optimistic outlook, the forum did not shy away from addressing challenges such as the rise of protectionism, geopolitical tensions and the need for inclusive growth. No country can tackle the global challenges and the double-edged sword of the technological revolution alone. The forum gathered the wisdom of all parties to explore ways to address these shared challenges. So, China's efforts to deal with real estate market risks, local government debt and financial

stability were discussed as critical steps toward ensuring long-term economic health.

The forum has demonstrated its role as a bridge between China and the world, laying the ground for a more stable and prosperous global economy, and stands as a testament to the power of a shared vision and collective action in shaping a more stable and prosperous global future.

Currently, the global economy is experiencing a slow recovery characterized by insufficient momentum, imbalanced growth and increasing fragmentation because of escalating geopolitical conflicts, and the entrenchment of unilateralism and protectionism.

Against this backdrop, China remains steadfast in promoting high-quality development and expanding high-level opening-up. By creating a first-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, China is sending a strong signal of investment cooperation and shared opportunities to the world.

—ZHANG XI, CHINA DAILY

Documentary proof of civic hotline's success

Beijing is among the most populated metropolises, with a population of 21.85 million by the end of 2023, which makes grassroots governance difficult. For better management, the municipality has established a 24/7 hotline, with an easy-to-remember number, 12345, that residents can call to voice their grievances. The hotline responders are patient with people's complaints and issues, offering practical help by zeroing in on some responsible government department or public agency that can attend to their problems.

The work the hotline does has been shown in greater detail in *Hotline Beijing*, a

documentary that hit screens on Feb 18. It tells the true stories of those working at the other end of the line from the complainants. Thanks to their patience and perseverance, the residents of Beijing are able to lodge complaints with the authorities any time of the day by just picking up the phone.

The documentary tells seven stories, all based on real incidents, ranging from missing parking lots in a *hutong* to the need to install elevators in old buildings so that senior citizens living on the upper floors of old buildings do not face any problems reaching their apartments.

That's the philosophy behind installing

the hotline, to help address the problems faced by people living in this city, to ensure that every individual's grievances are attended to properly. The interactive relationship between citizens calling the authorities for help and a representative government agency responding in time is the best example of good governance. Not surprisingly, this movie documenting the lives and times of those attending to people's grievances, is in itself a success story. It had generated 76.33 million yuan (\$10.52 million) in revenue through ticket sales as of Sunday.

—ZHANG ZHOUIXIAN, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Muting of 'lie factory' VOA should have come earlier

The way in which Voice of America was muted recently, following the Donald Trump administration cutting its funding, might have been beyond the expectations of its employees. They took it for granted that the "just voice" they try to spread around the world would only be muted by foreign "totalitarian" or "authoritarian" regimes to prevent VOA from fighting for "freedom" and "democracy".

Founded in 1942, the international broadcasting state media network's targeted and primary audience is non-Americans outside the US borders, especially those living in countries without "press freedom".

Although it claims to broadcast "uncensored" information, the content it provides is highly selective, its programs specially designed and its agenda carefully set with the purpose of inciting its audience in the targeted countries and regions to overthrow their own regimes.

During the Cold War, VOA's operations expanded in an effort to fight communism and played a role in the decline of communism in several coun-

tries. VOA continued to serve as a de facto propaganda tool of the US government after the end of the Cold War, and was invariably behind, along with some other US media outlets and internet companies, the "color revolutions" in different countries.

Despite this, with the rise of the internet and social media that markedly diversify people's sources of information, the influence of such government-sponsored destabilizing operations under cover of "media organizations" such as the VOA has declined markedly. More importantly, the improvement of the media literacy of the targeted audience has also accelerated that process.

Particularly, after the series of failed "democracy experiments" trapped some countries, such as Afghanistan, in decades of chaos, even many keen followers of VOA have awakened to the fact it is not reporting for their interest but for the narrow ends of the US government in its geopolitical games.

No wonder those saying that China "revs in" the US government cutting its funding to VOA are also those that try to see the modern world through a Cold War prism

or with the tainted spectacles of ideological prejudice. Overestimating VOA's influence in China, they simply ignore that the Chinese people today are fully confident in their nation's socialist path with Chinese characteristics, and Chinese culture, and they would resolutely resist any external forces' attempts to instigate "peaceful evolution" in their homeland.

Instead of treating VOA as a reliable source of information or a voice of the "free land", many Chinese see it as a "lie factory". As Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a news conference, that some US media outlets are seen that way can only be blamed on "a notorious track record in their China coverage".

Ironically, the White House has fully unmasked the nefarious activities of these media organizations by defending its move to defund the US Agency for Global Media, to which VOA belongs, along with Radio Free Europe, saying it will "ensure that taxpayers are no longer on the hook for radical propaganda".

The latest update on the VOA website was frozen about 10 days ago. Something that should have happened decades ago.

—LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENT

Peter Burnett

China, UK have reasons to boost trade ties

The China-Britain Business Council can trace its roots back to 1954 when a group of 48 business representatives went to China on a journey to start a dialogue and to open markets. Led by the indomitable Jack Perry, this was the first trade mission from the United Kingdom to the newly founded People's Republic of China. The group became known as the icebreakers for their determination to cut through the frozen political landscape of the time and to build business opportunities and foster relationships.

Today's China-Britain Business Council has inherited the same "can-do spirit". We manage operations in the United Kingdom and in China with our staff on the ground in cities across the length and breadth of both countries. We put our members at the very heart of everything we do and we set our priorities according to their needs.

As a business association, the China-Britain Business Council's purpose is to support commerce and investment between our two countries. We want our members to enhance their financial returns and to grow their operations. I believe that business is a force for good. Healthy companies provide secure employment for staff, pay taxes to the Government, pay dividends into pension funds for retirees, support community welfare and contribute to the well-being of their stakeholders, including SMEs in their supply chains. In addition, they build better cross-border understanding through dialogue and visits.

My personal journey to China started in 1995 when I went to Hong Kong on a three-month employment secondment. I stayed until July 2024. My life has therefore been shaped by the economic growth and business opportunities of China, including, of course, the special role of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

When I landed in Hong Kong's Kai Tak Airport all those years ago, China's GDP was about \$730 billion. The UK's was nearly double that. Today, China is the second-largest economy in the world, with 16.7 percent share of global GDP, and the UK is the fifth-largest, with 3.4 percent share of global GDP.

China's economic journey from 1995 to 2024, throughout my stay in Hong Kong, has been nothing short of extraordinary and, in my view, unprecedented in history.

China's growth forecast for 2025 may not be quite as stratospheric as in those early days when I arrived in Hong Kong, but the scale and diversity of business remain hugely attractive. Today, I see a vast market with a large middle-income group and immense opportunities for investment and exports for all CBBC members whose products, brands and capabilities are much sought after in China.

The high-quality and efficiently manufactured products of China should also find a natural export home in the United Kingdom.

The capital generation of the Chinese economy means the UK would be a natural beneficiary of Chinese investment, and the British markets would welcome capital to support new industries, jobs and economic well-being.

The UK should also recognize the extraordinary pace of development in technology in China. DeepSeek's AI capabilities, its chatbot in particular, demonstrate China's private sector is developing advanced technologies much more efficiently and at much lower costs.

UK-China trade now amounts to some £114 billion (\$147.63 billion). Chinese enterprises have created 68,000 jobs and China's export market supports another 400,000 jobs, in the UK. In the context of China's huge population these numbers may not appear significant but for the United Kingdom they make a difference. Moreover, these are the jobs that can be directly traced to Chinese trade. There are many more, part of complex supply chains, that are also indirectly supported by the Chinese export market.

But we can do better. The UK's goods exports to China rank behind countries such as Germany, France, Australia and Canada. From branded luxury products, to household essentials, to pharmaceuticals, to machinery and equipment, to chemicals, to food products, to cars and so on,

the UK has expertise that resonates among customers in China. UK companies can focus on extending their capabilities to gain a larger share in China's domestic market.

British services exports fare better than goods. British banks, insurance companies, pension funds, law firms, consultants, accountants, hotel operators and cultural and creative industries are, in many cases, market leaders among foreign companies operating in China.

Dialogue has already begun. In January, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, co-hosted the "Economic and Financial Dialogue" with Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng in Beijing, the first such dialogue to be held since 2019. The outcome statement from that EFD included sixty-nine paragraphs and many new initiatives for the two sides to work on together.

The China Development Forum gath-

ers in Beijing this Sunday and Monday and many of our members are represented by their CEOs. The United Kingdom's commercial commitment to China is evidenced by the strength in numbers and a clear intention to do more business, both domestically and cross border.

At the core of the CDF is the determination to foster dialogue between businesses and between business and government. We are never sure what may emerge as outcomes from the CDF but we do know people will meet, share a coffee or tea together, perhaps conclude a deal or two, and create some lasting friendships. This is important and a reminder of the original 48 icebreakers who made the long-distance journey from the UK to China in 1954 for precisely the same reasons.

The author is the chief executive officer of the China-Britain Business Council. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



LIMIN / CHINA DAILY

Dan Steinbock

Boao facilitates Asia's cooperation facing tariff threats

Scheduled for March 25-28, the Boao Forum for Asia will be held at a time of extraordinary challenges and opportunities. Ever since its launch in 2001, the forum has both reflected and shaped vital structural shifts, including China's entry into the World Trade Organization (2001), its "peaceful rise" (from 2004), overcoming the global financial crisis (2009), antidotes to the US tariff wars (2018), and the China-proposed Global Security Initiative amid external attempts to divide Asia (2022).

For the past two decades, the forum has been promoting regional economic integration by helping to bring Asian countries closer to their economic goals, even against economic headwinds.

More than half a decade ago, the tariffs imposed during Donald Trump's first presidency on almost \$400 billion worth of Chinese goods affected more than 90 percent of Sino-US trade. Today, the first round of the US' tariff war against Canada, Mexico and China alone will affect trade worth more than \$1.3 trillion.

As evidenced by US President Trump's threats to launch new tariffs and consequent reversals, economic rationality has given way to geopolitical saber-rattling. Unchallenged, these measures will further escalate trade tensions, disrupt trade flows, and impair complex and integrated supply chains in Asia.

Vietnam and China's Taiwan island are most exposed to higher US tariffs because of their high export-to-GDP ratios with the US (30 percent and 15 percent respectively). Apart from Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Republic of Korea, Asian economies with large trade

surpluses with the US — the Chinese mainland and China's Taiwan island, Vietnam and Japan — also risk facing further US tariffs.

As the Trump administration's tariffs move from countries to target sectors, including semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, steel and aluminum, over a quarter of exports from the ROK, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and China's Taiwan island is likely to be affected. Worse, Trump has vowed to take "reciprocal tariff" measures on imports from every country that taxes US products. Additionally, the US administration could resort to non-tariff measures including charging value-added tax, tightening import regulations, and tweaking the currency exchange rates.

Devoid of any economic rationale, such actions would impose on the world US-style deregulation, privatization and dollar manipulation.

Being targeted by unwarranted and likely illicit tariffs by the US is the negative "shared future" of Asia. But no threat comes without a silver lining.

Asian countries and regions can deepen regional integration and strengthen trade ties with countries other than the US, particularly in the Global South, to offset the effects of US tariffs.

Asian economies can deepen inter-regional integration with the European Union. The greatest economic growth opportunities are in emerging Asia and other parts of the Global South, as intra-regional trade in Asia has increased by 43 percent over the past four decades. More than half of Asian trade is regional, with foreign direct investment showing a similar trend.

Further, increasing trade diversification fosters complex and globalized supply chains. But in its misguided tariff wars, the US, keen to reduce its reliance on Chinese pharmaceuticals, has bought from countries like India. But the Indian companies, which supplied almost half of all generic prescription medicines to the US in 2022, purchase the bulk of their pharmaceutical ingredients from China.

The cost of tariffs is typically borne by supply chains and end buyers. The West, especially the US, has been making efforts to "reshore" multinationals and major industries. But that's a costly game, for it severely penalizes businesses and consumers. The tariffs on goods from Canada, Mexico and China alone will cost an average US household an additional \$1,200 a year.

As the global trade in goods flattens, the flow of services in Asia is surging; the service sector now employs more than twice as many workers as in 1990. According to the International Monetary Fund, Asia's labor productivity in financial services is four times higher than in manufacturing, and twice as high in business services.

Finally, Asia is benefiting from the dramatic acceleration of digitalization and artificial intelligence, and sustainable development.

The above are but a few promising signs for Asia.

Besides, a month ago, President Xi Jinping gave a strong push to the private sector by holding a meeting with the founders and CEOs of tech giants such as Huawei, BYD, Will Semiconductor, Uniree Robotics and Xiaomi. These Chinese tech giants are both scaling up innovation and trendset-

ting Asia's shared future in advanced services, digitalization and AI, and sustainable development.

As for green technology, China is already moving to fund the country's climate transition through a variety of innovative financing mechanisms. With its pivotal role in the global economy, it is expediting the process of green transition and offering new development potential.

Aside from pioneering high-tech and equipment manufacturing industries in electric vehicles, solar cells and industrial robotics, China is fostering "industries of the future", including bio-manufacturing, quantum technology, embodied AI, and 6G. And China's DeepSeek, which along with other Chinese companies, has developed sophisticated generative AI models at a much lower cost, sidelining leading US artificial intelligence companies in January.

Spurring the expeditious adoption of AI, China is helping AI technology play a bigger role in global economic growth. The greater the regional integration, the stronger will be the acceleration effect across Asia, which today "contributes over 50 percent of global growth", as IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said recently.

In promoting such a shared future, the Boao Forum for Asia could prove historical, since what happens in Asia doesn't stay in Asia.

The author is founder of Difference Group and has served at the India, China and America Institute (US), Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (China) and the EU Center (Singapore). The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily. kangbing@chinadaily.com.cn

Better-paying jobs can ignite students' passion for STEM

While taking a walk after a late lunch to get some exercise and to enjoy the winter sun, I noticed the middle school in my community had changed its name. For many years, it was named after the university it was affiliated with. Now it's called Science and Technology Branch of Beijing Middle School — considered by many to be the best senior high school in my district.

The neighborhood should be happy after finally getting a "good school". But what caught my attention were two Chinese characters in the name, *ke ji*, which mean science and technology. They indicated the school, apart from having the required curriculum, will focus more on teaching science and technology.

On checking further, I found out the new school is part of my district's efforts to promote science and technology education. The school is to be guided jointly by the Beijing Middle School Educational Group and five nearby universities. Being a branch of the district's "best school", it should impart high-quality education, with the five universities giving students access to their labs and arranging for lectures by their professors. The target is to rear talents interested in science and technology.

Determined to build the country into an innovation-driven economy, the Chinese leadership is leaving no stone unturned to lure talents to the science and technology sector. The central and provincial governments have been holding annual award ceremonies for scientists and engineers to acknowledge their contributions to the development of the country. Attractive bonuses are being offered, and special treatments in housing and healthcare provided to top-notch scientists, in an effort to popularize science education even in primary schools. More important, the central government has been increasing the budget for science and technology from year to year.

Given the importance of the advancement of science and demand for engineers to support China's huge manufacturing sector, the country requires more scientists and engineers.

Such efforts are being made to ensure more and more students become interested in science and technology.

During my generation more than four decades ago, more than 70 percent of university students majored in science and technology. At that time, if one asked primary school students what their career dreams were, 90 percent were likely to say their dream was "to become a scientist or an engineer". Now the answers vary, with many kids choosing disciplines that will earn them more money.

Statistics from 2019 show that in China, about 45 to 48 percent university students majored in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) with the rest doing so in the liberal arts. Although China still ranks higher in terms of STEM college graduates than the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and France — all below 40 percent — the rapid decrease in the number of STEM students should be worrying.

Given the importance of the advancement of science and demand for engineers to support China's huge manufacturing sector, the country requires more scientists and engineers. Some observers say the decreasing number of STEM graduates is the result of the unsatisfactory teaching quality in universities, the shortage of cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary courses, inefficient guidance in selection of majors and some professors' inability to make courses interesting.

There may be many other reasons for the decline in the number of STEM graduates. But, to me, the best solution is to take measures to make jobs for STEM college graduates more respectable and better paying.

Only a small percentage of STEM college graduates can land a good job in a big company or university or get a chance to conduct research. Others have to forget about their majors and compete with the liberal arts and commerce graduates for jobs in the sales, marketing or civil service sectors.

Many workshops and construction sites are short of engineers, but their poor working condition and unsatisfactory pay stop many STEM college graduates from taking up such jobs.

Scientists and engineers should be accorded more respect and given better pay as recognition for their contribution to the country's development or to encourage them to build the country into an innovation-driven economy. Only when these steps are taken can STEM become more popular, and the country be able to get more talents in science and technology — and my community school have a better chance of attracting talented teenagers.

GLOBAL VIEWS

CAIFANG

Full life-cycle focus

China needs high-quality, multipronged population development strategies in its modernization drive

China's population development strategy is aligned with strategies to enhance people's well-being and talent training in terms of the goals, approaches and pathways. By pursuing a high-quality and multipronged population development plan, China has improved people's well-being and the basic public service system, while addressing the challenges of the demographic changes.



In July 2024, the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted a resolution on comprehensively deepening reform to advance Chinese modernization, which calls for instituting a system for the provision of "full life-cycle population services to all" and makes the system the basic requirement for population development policies.

Many countries have implemented various subsidy policies to cope with problems such as population aging and declining fertility rates. But experiences have shown that subsidy policies alone are not always effective, and a comprehensive policy package involving economic and social goals, and macro and micro incentives should be put in place to address the problems.

In a bid to have the desired fertility rate, China proposes to build a childbirth-friendly society and continuously improve and optimize its population policies in response to the country's demographic changes.

Fertility rates, or the number of children per woman, around the world vary widely, from as high as five in Burundi to as low as 0.8 in the Republic of Korea and close to one in China. In developing countries, declines in fertility rates have become a definite trend. Many countries with high fertility, however, have experienced failure in restoring their fertility rates to 2.1. Despite that, there are lessons from some countries showing that the very high Human Development Index (above 0.8), coupled with a high level of gender equality, will bring about a turning point for fertility rate recovery.

China's HDI has reached 0.79 and is pro-

gressing toward the level that allowing fertility to increase, and gender equality in China is also highly recognized in the world. The HDI measures three factors: per capita gross national income (GNI), education and health. From 1990 to the present, China is the only country to have moved from low to high human development, primarily driven by the rapid growth of its per capita GNI. As economic growth enters a new normal with stabilized per capita GNI growth, improving human development will require significant advancements in education and health. This is in line with the comprehensive improvement of the population quality, which serves as one of the foundations for building a childbirth-friendly society.

Population aging and the decline in fertility rate are the main challenges that the population support policy system aims to tackle. These are not two separate issues, and need to be viewed from the "full life-cycle" perspective. That's why improving population development strategies are aligned with the goals of providing universal and adequate coverage of basic public services for all people.

In population dynamics, there is an "echo effect". Today's aging population is the echo of a long period of low fertility rates in the past. In this process, a baby boom, followed by a surge in demand for schooling, employment and retirement, ends up with a rising proportion of the elderly in the total population.

The "echo effect" has significant implications for the future. When making decisions for population support policies, elderly care, employment and education demands in the future must also be factored in. To encourage childbirth, policies should not just focus on childbirth itself but should provide support for all subsequent stages. A full life-cycle approach can ultimately achieve a more desired level of fertility.

Employment is a key factor that cannot be ignored. China's employment challenges have gradually evolved into structural contradictions, which are evidenced by the mismatch between job vacancies and unemployed workers. While constraints on overall employment are easing, structural

contradictions are expected to continue to grow.

Various factors contribute to structural contradictions. For example, technological advancements and industrial restructuring require new skills, which may lead to lay-off of some workers or the need for training. Another factor is institutional defects, such as the household registration system and policies that hinder labor mobility.

Population structure is also a factor that leads to structural employment contradictions. Securing employment requires functional human capital, a combination of technical skills and cognitive abilities. Human capital can be acquired in two ways: education, which gives an advantage to the younger workers who are more educated; and work experience, where the older workers are more favored as experience can only be gained through working. But the middle-aged workforce is best positioned to integrate the strengths of both.

However, China's labor force is seeing a key demographic shift, where both ends of the age spectrum are expanding. As a result, the age structure imbalance of human capital will pose greater employment challenges, where both young and older workers tend to encounter greater difficulties in finding a good job.

Therefore, the population structure will have impacts on future employment, and addressing employment issues — particularly structural employment contradictions — also involve employment assistance to the two age groups: the young and the old.

China has become an aged society and is expected to be a highly aged society by around 2032. This means that China's first step-modernization by 2035 will be accompanied by rapid population aging and characterized by the feature of "growing old before getting rich".

China's decline in fertility rate and population aging are occurring before the modernization goal is accomplished, which poses new difficulties and challenges that must be proactively addressed. Therefore, efforts need to be made to slow down the population aging process by increasing fertility rates.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to adapt to the aging trends in the short term and to tap



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

into the potential of the elderly population, both as a labor force and as consumers.

China's economy has great growth potential, which provides sufficient resilience to address the challenges from "growing old before getting rich" and improve elderly care. It is estimated that China's elderly population will continue to increase from around 14 percent to 24 percent before 2035, during which time China's potential of economic growth will be significantly higher compared with other countries at about the same stage of development.

Therefore, economic development must be leveraged to support the population development and the basic public service system.

China's rising dependency ratio has reduced the demographic dividend and brought about some changes. Specifically, while the old-age dependency ratio is

increasing, the child dependency ratio has declined over a certain period, which provides a window of opportunity in strengthening population supports.

For example, the falling number of primary schools and kindergartens has freed up relevant resources. This means that preschool and primary school education need to be better coordinated, and the years of compulsory education needs to be appropriately extended. And more resources are needed to boost elderly care.

The author is chief expert at the National High-end Think Tank under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. 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.

YUWADEE KARDKARNKLAI

Cultural connections

Archaeological findings in Thailand offer means to strengthen links between ASEAN and China

On Feb 4, the Thai Cabinet approved the implementation of a cooperation project between the Thai and Chinese governments to construct the high-speed railway from Nakhon Ratchasima to Nong Khai, with a budget of about \$10 billion. It is expected that the construction of the 357-kilometer railway will begin this year, with the goal of commencing service in 2031.



Many parties agree that the Thai government must expedite the construction of the high-speed railway between Thailand and China so that it can serve as a fresh impetus for economic and social development in Thailand, China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region.

Thailand's GDP growth rate was only 2.5 percent in 2024, according to the National Economic and Social Development Council. Thailand needs to find new tools to stimulate the economy. Recently, Supavut Saitheua, chairman of the NESDC, stated that Thailand should develop from its own strengths.

Currently, the industries where Thailand holds a competitive advantage include tourism, food production and logistics. To build on these advantages, Thailand should pursue cooperation with China under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI framework that China has proposed includes support for exchanges between people, fostering in-depth dialogues on civilizations with participating countries, and establishing a network of cities along the overland and maritime Silk Road routes.

In the past four to five years, since Anek Laothamatas assumed the role of minister of Thailand's Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, he has initiated, promoted and supported in-depth research on the Suvarnabhumi civilization. This research has involved Thai and international archaeologists and researchers working together to excavate and study the area, uncovering abundant evidence from the Suvarnabhumi period. This has enabled the Southeast Asian



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

region to trace its history back approximately 2,000 to 2,500 years, revealing that the area, particularly the southern region of Thailand, was once a prosperous center of international trade connecting the western and eastern parts of Thailand's southern peninsula. Numerous artifacts, including ancient artifacts, coins and

beads from the eras of ancient Greece, Persia, India and China, have been discovered.

The Suvarnabhumi civilization linked major civilizations on the eastern side of the peninsula, namely China, with those on the western side, such as India, Persia, Greece and Rome. In this way, it was simi-

lar to the Silk Road, which China has used as a historical foundation for its BRI. At the same time, the Suvarnabhumi civilization has a historical connection with Chinese civilization through maritime trade along the ancient Maritime Silk Road. The ASEAN members could leverage this shared history to develop and promote the Suvarnabhumi civilization, making it more widely recognized, bringing the past to serve the present to create economic value by attracting tourists from China and around the world, as well as fostering academic collaboration to study the Suvarnabhumi civilization in deeper and broader contexts.

Leveraging the Suvarnabhumi civilization as a basis for Belt and Road cooperation will not only enable the ASEAN members to engage with China across various dimensions but will also foster greater collaboration among the ASEAN members themselves. The role of the Suvarnabhumi civilization as a bridge connecting East and West could extend to creating partnerships in ancient cultural archaeology and academic exchanges with other countries, such as India and those that were part of the Persian civilization.

Importantly, it is also possible to initiate collaboration in connecting cities that share a history with the Suvarnabhumi civilization. This could help extend cultural collaboration into economic development efforts in international tourism. An example of such an initiative can be found in South America, where six countries — Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru — collaborated in 2014 to have the Inca Roads, an age-old network of tourism and transportation among one of the most significant ancient civilizations on the continent, listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as a world heritage site. This initiative represents a cross-border tourism collaboration that fosters a friendly atmosphere and reduces hostility among the participating countries.

Similarly, within the framework of the BRI, a cross-border cultural tourism initiative based on the sites of the Suvarnabhumi civilization as revealed by archaeological discoveries in various cities in Thailand and

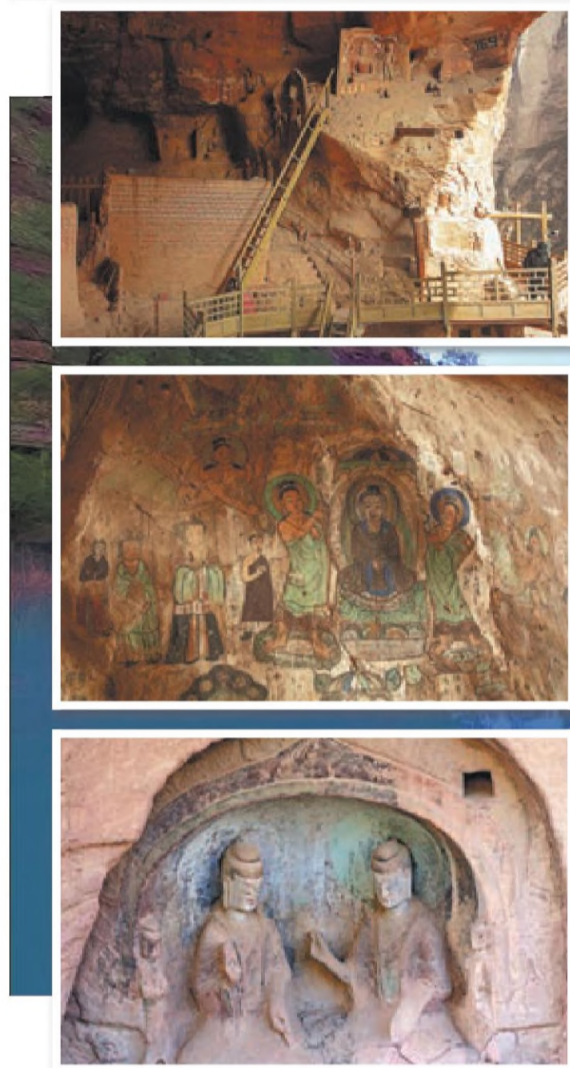
other ASEAN members can be established. This initiative could connect through both sea and land travel. The sea routes could involve cruise tourism, potentially linking to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. For example, travelers could start their journey from South China and visit historical sites of the Suvarnabhumi civilization along the coastlines of the ASEAN members on both the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea, as well as navigate through the ancient canals of southern Thailand's peninsula, ultimately ending in India.

On the land side, there is an opportunity to encourage tourists from China to explore and study the sites of the Suvarnabhumi civilization in the northeastern and central regions of Thailand through the high-speed rail project between Thailand and China under the BRI. This is particularly true for tourism in the inner regions, where many areas have histories and narratives believed to date back to the era of the Suvarnabhumi civilization. These routes could also connect to the southern peninsula, which is home to numerous archaeological sites and artifacts that are contemporary with the Suvarnabhumi civilization. Currently, scholars are beginning to discover more evidence in places such as Khao Sam Kaeo in Chumphon Province and Chaiya in Surat Thani Province, among others.

This initiative could introduce an innovative aspect to the Belt and Road project, fostering tangible cultural cooperation between China, Thailand and the ASEAN members. It could serve as a platform for in-depth discussions on the region's shared history, particularly the Suvarnabhumi civilization. Furthermore, the initiative aims to establish a network of tourism cities along the Suvarnabhumi route, connected to the modern Maritime Silk Road. This would promote cultural tourism and economic cooperation, shifting the focus from mere economic engagement to strengthening relationships through cultural exchanges.

The author is director of the Klangpanya Institute, a Thailand-based think tank. 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.

CULTURAL HERITAGE



Treasured legacy worth protecting

Work ensures Bingling grottoes continue to shine for future generations, **Cheng Yuezhu** and **Ma Jingna** report in Linxia, Gansu.

Left from top: Bingling Temple's Cave 169 was transformed from a natural cave in the cliffs; murals inside Cave 169; Niche 125 shows two Buddha statues. **Above:** Bingling Temple Grottoes in Yongjing county, Gansu province, is set amid riverside mountains. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

For those traveling to the venerable Bingling Temple Grottoes, the journey itself is an experience. The temple is in Yongjing county, Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture, Gansu province, just beside the Liujiuxia Reservoir on the upper reaches of the Yellow River.

The recommended way to reach the temple is to take a shuttle boat from one of the reservoir's piers, which allows visitors to see the natural spectacle of the clear green water of the Yellow River merging with the yellow murk of the Tao River.

As the boats draw near, the mountains on either side close in, revealing a red sandstone Danxia landscape. Because of the varied shapes of their peaks, the mountains are referred to as a "stone forest" and have inspired people to imagine them as characters with their own stories.

The natural setting made this an ideal site for Buddhist practitioners in search of solitude and tranquility.

The mountains form the backdrop for Bingling Temple Grottoes. For more than a millennium, people carved stories and beliefs into the mountains with a level of craftsmanship on par with nature's grandeur.

"Cave 169 is the earliest known grotto in China with a precise historical inscription, written in the first year of the Jianhong era, which is today's 420," says Liu Zongchang, deputy director of the Bingling Temple Cultural Heritage Preservation and Research Institute's research office.

"It is an important chronological

reference for the study of early Chinese grottoes. The style of sculpture and the imagery in the cave allow scholars to trace the route of the spread of Buddhism in ancient China."

For around a century, the cave was sealed off from the world. Both its construction by ancient craftsmen and rediscovery by experts in the last century were feats.

The cave is located in the cliffs above the temple's biggest Buddha statue, 40 meters above the riverbed. Visitors must climb several flights of wooden stairs beside the statue to reach it.

Unlike most grottoes deliberately carved out of the rock, this one began as a natural cave, with craftsmen modifying and reinforcing its walls, and carving niches where they saw fit.

"The wooden structures at Bingling Temple, including the walkway to Cave 169, were destroyed during the wars of the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)," says Cao Xuewen, deputy director of the Bingling Temple Cultural Heritage Preservation and Research Institute.

It wasn't until after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 that efforts were made to restore the grottoes. In 1955, the institute was established for their preservation, and in 1961, the site was designated as a national key cultural heritage protection unit.

During the preliminary field study in 1951 and official investigation in 1952, experts were unable to reach Cave 169, and could only observe it through binoculars.



Left: Cao Xuewen, deputy director of the Bingling Temple Cultural Heritage Preservation and Research Institute. **Right:** Liu Zongchang, deputy director of the institute's research office. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



In 1963, the Gansu government assembled a team of leading archaeologists for a 50-day survey. With the help of nearby villagers and the temple's monks, the team erected ladders and put up ropes, and were able to climb into the isolated cave.

"Inside they discovered the earliest dated inscription in a Chinese grotto — a groundbreaking find that ushered in a new era of grotto archaeology," Cao says.

The inscription is a testament to the time when Linxia was the capital of the Western Qin state, which was founded by a branch of Xianbei nomads. The state lasted less than 40 years under four rulers, and faced threats from powerful rivals.

This left its people longing for peace and stability, and the ruling family's belief in Buddhism encouraged the religion to thrive.

In 420, the then ruler declared his successor and changed the era's name to Jianhong. To mark the event, high-ranking officials, royalty, and esteemed monks made donations to renovate the temple, resulting in the inscription and images of them being preserved in the murals.

The grottoes continued to be expanded for more than 10 dynasties until the Qing Dynasty. Today, the site comprises 216 numbered caves and niches, some 800 statues, 1,000 square meters of murals, 56 pagodas, and 438 registered cultural artifacts.

Since ancient times, the Linxia region has been inhabited by different ethnic groups. This multiethnic presence created a thriving cultural environment and provided the conditions for the spread and development of Buddhism.

Artwork in the grottoes reflects

influences from the two main Buddhist schools in China: the Tibetan tradition and the Han Chinese tradition.

"This region was a key junction on the ancient Silk Road, and a waypoint along the Tang-Bo Ancient Road that ran across the western regions of China, so it was an important hub with developed trade and flourishing Buddhist traditions," Liu says.

In 2014, the Bingling Cave-Temple Complex was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list as part of the Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor, a joint application by China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

In 2017, the institute was placed under the unified management of the Dunhuang Academy in Dunhuang, Gansu province.

The geological conditions pose both advantages and challenges for the grottoes. For example, the sandstone of the mountains is fine and soft, which makes it easier to carve detailed reliefs, but also makes it prone to weathering and crumbling, especially when exposed to water.

Liu says that in around 15 years of working at the temple, two heavy rainstorms in 2012 and 2018 posed a danger to the grottoes. In 2012 particularly, mud and sand blocked the drainage system, and more than 20 staff members worked all night to scoop out water.

"We have been continually reinforcing the mountains to prevent rockfall, and whenever it rains too heavily, we close the grottoes and reopen them when the weather clears up," Liu says.

In recent years, a series of conservation projects sponsored by national- and provincial-level funds have been undertaken to protect and restore the grottoes.

A comprehensive monitoring and warning system has been installed to address the protection, use, and management of the grottoes, with a digital platform to monitor aspects such as the overall environment, the environment inside the caves, cultural artifacts, and the number of visitors.

Ongoing preservation projects include restoring the murals and statues that have deteriorated, dealing with hazardous rock formations, as well as digitalizing heritage.

Contact the writers at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn

By **ZHENG CAIXIONG**
in Guangzhou
zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn

An ancient walled city recently unearthed in Dongguan, Guangdong province, offers further proof that the metropolis, located at the mouth of the Pearl River, was an important coastal defense town and node on the ancient Maritime Silk Road during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Cao Jing, director of the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, said that the walled city, which is over 600 years old, covers an area of more than 3,000 square meters, and many artifacts have been found on the site, which is located in urban Dongguan.

It is among the largest single archaeological project in Guangdong in recent years.

Cao said the remains date from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) to the early 20th century, and traces have been found as deep as 3 meters below the surface.

The city wall foundation, roads, drainage channels and other facilities of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1644-1911) have also been cleared, while important remains such as building foundations and domestic water wells have also been

Digging up a gateway to history



Porcelain produced in kilns in southern China and architectural components were found at the site of a recently unearthed city wall in Dongguan, Guangdong. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

discovered, she said.

According to Cao, the overall condition of the city wall foundation is fairly good. It has a curved construction and about 100 meters have been cleared.

"Based on studies of the strata, building materials and nearby historical architecture, this section of the city wall should have been built during the Ming Dynasty," Cao said.

"According to Dongguan county annals from different dynasties, the wall was built by the commander of the Nanhai (South China Sea) Garri-

son, Chang Yi in 1384, and it was repaired and rebuilt multiple times during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

"Based on the findings, we have concluded that the wall should be the Nanhai Wei City Wall, or the South China Sea Garrison Wall, dating to the Ming Dynasty."

The word *wei* means fort and was the principal level of the three-layer Wei-Suo-Zhai (fortified village) system of military units set up in strategic locations along the frontiers during the Ming Dynasty, equiva-

lent to a contemporary military garrison headquarters.

Cao said the excavation of the site has significant academic value.

"As the core fortress of three-level defense system of the Guangdong coastal defense system during the Ming Dynasty, Nanhai Wei performed the dual function of military command center and coastal defense outpost in Guangdong's mid-route coastal defense system."

Cao also said that the scientific disclosure of urban defense remains provides a glimpse of their spatial

pattern and of Ming Dynasty construction regulations, an important advancement in the study of the Ming and Qing coastal defense system, adding that it is also of great significance for studies of the architectural and social history of the period.

Meanwhile, the discovery at the site of porcelain produced in notable kilns in southern China, including Qishi, Longquan, Jingdezhen, Jianyao and Baima, reflects the fact that Dongguan was an important transit and distribution center for

domestic and foreign trade in the southern coastal area from the Song to the Ming and Qing dynasties.

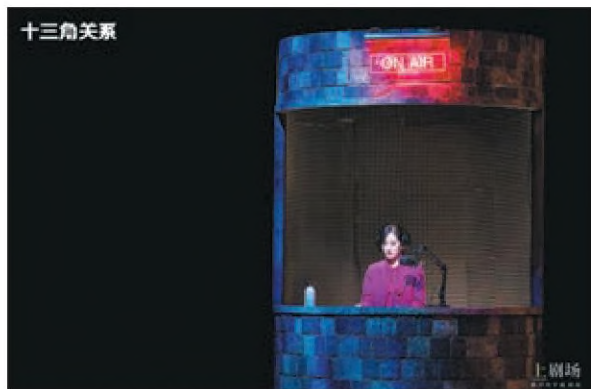
Numerous architectural components and everyday objects dating from the Song Dynasty to the early 20th century have been unearthed, a total of 360 small pieces and 90 boxes of different fragments, Cao said, adding that this is testimony to the importance of Dongguan as a node on the Maritime Silk Road, and greatly supplements the study of ancient maritime and land transportation and trade history.

The excavation was undertaken between May and December last year.

Wu Yiting, head of the Publicity Department of the Dongguan Committee of the Communist Party of China, said that when the Nanhai Wei City Wall site was found, the city government immediately canceled an urban infrastructure project to continue excavations and protect cultural heritage from damage.

Archaeological discoveries have confirmed the importance of Dongguan as the "first gateway to Guangdong province" in the South China Sea coastal defense system during the Ming Dynasty, and its illustration of the construction and urban development of Dongguan possesses significant historical, cultural and academic value.

LIFE



Left: *Menage a 13* was the first play Stan Lai staged in Huichang, Jiangxi province, in 2015. Middle: This year's *Menage a 13* will feature actress Xie Na. Right: Greek theater director Theodoros Terzopoulos will stage *Oresteia* at the Huichang Theatre Season 003. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

It's been a decade since theater director Stan Lai first brought a play to his father's hometown, in Huichang county, Jiangxi province. What started with just one production a year has grown into a much larger vision, and the Huichang Theatre Village has been established, giving around 700 performances in its first year.

The village hosts two theater seasons per year and from May 23 to June 2, the Huichang Theatre Season 003 will bring together international stage artists for more than 370 performances.

This year's event will be more international, especially since a residency program was launched to encourage global theater artists to settle in the village and draw inspiration from the environment.

Among these artists is leading American experimental theater director Robert Wilson, who was invited as a resident artist during the second edition of the event, hosted from Nov 21 to Dec 1 last year.

"He's not just staging one of his plays — he's creating a production right here. We've selected the performers according to his instructions, and he'll stay in Huichang for a month of rehearsals," Lai said at the theater season's media conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

The production is the Chinese language version of *Hamlet-machine*, a classic play directed by Wilson and written by German playwright Heiner Muller, that has been staged in English, German and Italian. The Chinese edition will have its world premiere during the theater season, making it the first international production created on-site at the village.

Greek theater director Theodoros Terzopoulos, a founding member of international theater exchange organization Theatre Olympics, is bringing his rendition of *Oresteia*, the only surviving complete ancient Greek trilogy. Huichang will be the play's only stop in China.

In his recurring lecture series, Lai will give a special session on Greek tragedy, and invite Terzopoulos to a dialogue discussion.

At the theater village's public areas, visitors will see a variety of open-air performances by domestic and international troupes, including French aerial company Gratte Ciel, which appeared at the 2024 Summer Olympics opening ceremony.

Also from France, Les Grandes Personnes will bring giant puppetry to the village. As the festival

Village savors its leading role

Theater seasons help community stage various plays and attract domestic and international talent, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.



Above and below: A media conference was held in Beijing on Wednesday to announce Huichang Theatre Season 003.

coincides with Children's Day, a series of special workshops will engage local children in collaborative creations.

Lai is going to stage two productions of his own for the theater season. One of them is a new rendition of *Menage a 13*, the same play he staged in Huichang back in 2015.

Born in 1954 and then from 1966 based in Taiwan, it was not until the 1980s that Lai got back in touch with his uncle in Huichang. In 1997, he finally visited the county.

"The journey was very tough. Then I thought, if I could bring my productions here, so the residents had the chance to see performances of the same high quality as those in Beijing, Shanghai, and abroad, what kind of impact would it have? It became my own personal social experiment," Lai says.

In 2015, he was able to begin realizing his vision and staged *Menage a 13* there.

"*Menage a 13* is a comedy that addresses topics like marriage, family, and parent-child relationships. It has a somewhat absurd sense of



"The theater village project began as a dream, a simple, naive idea. After 10 years, the biggest change is that the theater village has opened."

Stan Lai, theater director

humor. So 10 years ago, I was a little concerned about staging it in this small county," says Ding Nai-chu, theater producer and Lai's wife.

"But after the performances, I was relieved to see an overall positive reaction. The audience seemed to accept it quite well."

A decade later, the same production returns, now featuring a new cast, including actress Xie Na and actor Chu Chung-Heng.

Over the following years, Lai continued to stage more of his work in Huichang. Receiving positive feedback, he thought it was possible for him to give back more to the county, and started envisioning this theater village.

With support from local government, Lai and his team redesigned the area around his family's ancestral home to establish a comprehensive performing arts complex.

While preserving the area's historical architecture, four indoor theaters were built or repurposed from old buildings, such as a former printing factory and an ancestral hall, along with several plazas for open-air performances, including the Lai Family Mansion Plaza, a square in front of Lai's ancestral home.

This year, Lai's new production *Beckett in the Lai Family Mansion* will be staged inside the house.

Influenced by Irish writer Samuel Beckett's work, Lai created *Footfalls*:

Beckett in the Ancient Chinese Garden in 1989, and directed *Waiting for Godot* in 1999 and 2001. After 24 years, Lai pays tribute to Beckett once again with the site-specific play at his ancestral mansion.

"This year, we've also established a theater troupe, Actors Company, especially for the village, hoping that the village will have performances all year round, rather than only during the theater seasons," Lai says.

Theater practitioners from around the country have joined the troupe and begun studying under Lai and rehearsing his classic work. On Sunday, the troupe gave their debut performance, a new version of Lai's play *Circle Story*.

"The theater village project began as a dream, a simple, naive idea. After 10 years, the biggest change is that the theater village has opened. I feel a sense of accomplishment, but it's still very early on," Lai says.

"We are working on building a creative cultural ecosystem. Our poster is of a banyan tree with a light bulb as its roots. The light bulb goes deep into the soil and illuminates it. Changes are only beginning to take place on the ground."

The village officially opened with its first theater season which ran from Jan 5 to 14 last year. Official statistics show that, by presenting 354 performances, the event attracted 1.24 million visits, with a peak of over 200,000 in a single day.

Over the course of the year, the village hosted 698 performances given by 65 theater troupes from China and abroad, leading to 6.6 million visits, which boosted the county's tourism revenues.

According to Yu Kai, deputy head of Huichang county, the county government continues to strengthen the cultural brand of the theater village this year, enhancing support facilities, organizing high-quality theater events, developing the Hesheng Institute of Theatre Technology, and working toward obtaining a national 4A scenic area recognition for the theater village.

"This project aligns with our goal of strengthening the cultural foundation of our county — to make culture a driving force for its development and for the residents' well-being. We hope it will be a place where creators, performers and other theater practitioners realize their dreams, and where visitors can see a broader world," Yu says.

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn

Publishing sector must start new chapter in AI era

By YANG YANG
yangyang@chinadaily.com.cn

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence is reshaping industries globally, and the publishing sector is no exception. A recent symposium in mid-March on "AI and Publishing Integration" in Beijing's Sanlian Taofen Bookstore invited industry leaders to explore how AI technology, particularly AI-generated content (AIGC), is transforming content creation, distribution, and copyright management while presenting challenges and opportunities for publishers.

Starting with DeepSeek, Jiang Zhanfeng, head of the Beijing Normal University Audio-Video Digital Publishing House, says that AIGC is fundamentally restructuring the publishing industry, impacting content creation, publishers' roles, digital platform operations and overall uses.

It also raises questions such as copyright, delineation of responsibility and information security, he adds.

An example is ancient Chinese book collation (including digitization), which involves punctuation, annotation, emendation, translation, and other steps, which tend to cause intellectual property disputes.

"The problem with AI-generated output is in that it might be highly similar, making it difficult to distinguish between independent collation, reference and plagiarism," says Hong Tao, the general manager of the Zhonghua Book Company Gulian (Beijing) Digital Media Technology Co.

Credibility concerns and ethical security issues are also challenges brought on by AIGC, says Chen Yonggang, director of the People's Medical Publishing House's digital center.

To tackle these challenges, the publishing industry must shift from merely producing content to becoming creators of a knowledge service ecosystem. This involves upgrading to provide high-quality interactive knowledge services to users through the integration of



A mid-March symposium on "AI and Publishing Integration" in Beijing invited industry leaders to explore how AI technology, is transforming the publishing scene. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

books, professional knowledge bases and vertical intelligent agents, Chen says.

Zhu Jishun, president of Centrin Ecloud Co Ltd, a publishing database platform, echoes Chen's thoughts.

He says the essence of artificial

intelligence lies in reasoning through facts and models. While AI excels in memory storage and speed, it cannot surpass humans in creative tasks like writing literature.

He suggests that publishers leverage their content strengths by transforming physical books into

knowledge service platforms, fostering cultural and creative products and protecting their professional knowledge bases.

By establishing an enterprise resource planning system grounded in data and integrating AI technology for intelligent applications, the industry will enhance processes like editing, printing, and distribution, he says.

Publishers can also use AI to break through traditional frameworks and find new growth points. For instance, the Zhonghua Book Company is expanding its business into cultural heritage, cultural tourism and creative industries.

However, in using AIGC, publishing houses must maintain their autonomy and independence and stand firm on their brands, Jiang warns.

As AI impacts industries, it is also changing readers' behavior and they are no longer obtaining definitive knowledge from books but are turning to "unreliable" sources for "illusory knowledge", which may lead to high-quality content in the publish-

ing industry going unnoticed, says Xu Shengguo, director of the Publishing Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Press and Publication.

On the other hand, AI presents opportunities, with knowledge and wisdom becoming the core and soul of the intelligent era. He says that although publishing may seem headed towards "death", it is actually ushering in new development opportunities.

However, Du Jia, general manager of the Beijing Chinese Online Reading Company, says that in the AI era, publishing houses still need to focus on selecting quality works.

As the continuous lowering of the threshold for creation leads to a surge in writing, selecting quality work becomes crucial for the publishing industry, he says.

While the industry has always been authoritative, providing creative tools and services, it needs to select quality work from a vast pool of content, endorse them through rigorous processes, and promote them vigorously in the future.

This will be the direction for the development of publishing industry in the AI era, he says.

LIFE

Cultural products boost understanding

Video games, films and science fiction provide surprising bridges of understanding between China and the West, academics say, reports **Yang Feiyue** in Wuyishan, Fujian.

In a world where globalization is increasingly under threat and nationalism is on the rise, emeritus professor Robert Chard from the University of Oxford, recently offered a refreshing perspective "Cool China" to address the issue.

With decades of experience as a Sinologist, Chard, who is also a visiting professor at the Peking University's Department of History, highlights the growing disconnection between Western and Chinese cultures, while pointing to unexpected bridges — like video games, films and science fiction — that are reshaping how the world sees China.

"The (distrust) problem mostly stems from many Western countries not having enough understanding of other cultures," Chard observes.

Games like *Black Myth: Wukong* have introduced global audiences to Chinese stories and history, Chard says.

"I've seen their reviews. They find the game technically impressive, with engaging and captivating content. When they encounter something they don't fully understand, like who Sun Wukong is or what the story is about, they look it up online to learn more," Chard adds.

He also recalls seeing two British children play a video game set against the backdrop of the Three Kingdoms period (220-280) and thus come to know many Chinese historical figures.

"China holds a significant advantage due to its long history and incredibly rich cultural heritage. This cultural wealth has multilayered value and charm for the entire world," he says.

Chard is among more than 100 scholars who engaged in dialogue to respond to contemporary challenges at the Wuyi Forum in Wuyishan, Nanping city of Fujian province on Saturday.

It was hosted by the Renmin University of China and the Nanping government and aimed to facilitate in-depth research, promotion and interpretation of the new ideas and judgments about cultural development in the new era put forward by President Xi Jinping, especially the significance and contemporary value of the "two integrations".

In 2021, Xi proposed the concept of integrating the basic tenets of Marxism with the best of China's traditional culture. It was the first time this integration was placed on an equal footing with that of integrating Marxism's basic tenets with China's specific realities.

The emphasis on "two integrations" is understood to provide sound answers to major questions of our times.

The Wuyi Forum brought together experts to delve into the essence of the "two integrations", which represents not only a fusion of civilizational heritage with innovation but also a harmonious advancement of cultural preservation and contemporary creativity, as well as the resonance between academic inquiry and practical development, says Zhang Dong-



A park dedicated to Zhu Xi (1130-1200), a renowned Chinese philosopher considered an outstanding representative of Confucian culture, in Nanping city, Fujian province. WANG DONGMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

gang, Party secretary of Renmin University of China.

It aims to offer a broader perspective and more innovative thinking to expound on the essence of Chinese civilization and decode its cultural genes, Zhang adds.

Qin Xuan, dean of the Academy of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, Renmin University of China, emphasizes that the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics provides momentum, not resistance, to the world and human progress.

"Socialism with Chinese characteristics has enabled a nation comprising one-fifth of the world's population to achieve a historic journey — from standing up, to becoming prosperous, and then to growing strong. This has made a significant contribution to humanity," Qin says.

He stresses that socialism with Chinese characteristics has demonstrated the vitality of socialism to the world and expanded the pathways for developing countries to achieve modernization.

This is a path that centers on the people and prioritizes their interests. Only by adhering to a people-centered approach and fully leveraging the creative spirit of the public can modernization gain inexhaustible momentum, Qin says.

"China's development brings positive momentum to the world and the advancement of humanity," he adds.

Young-Seo Baik, emeritus professor at Yonsei University, South Korea, and an expert in East Asia and China's modern and contemporary history, highlights the enduring relevance of East Asian



From top: The Cross-Strait High-Level Academic Consortium on Chinese Civilization is inaugurated at a recent forum in Nanping, Fujian. A graduate school for fine traditional Chinese culture research and training is unveiled. Above from left: Emeritus professor Robert Chard from the University of Oxford; Qin Xuan, dean of the Academy of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, Renmin University of China; Emeritus professor Young-Seo Baik from Yonsei University, South Korea. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China holds a significant advantage due to its long history and incredibly rich cultural heritage. This cultural wealth has multilayered value and charm for the entire world."

Robert Chard, emeritus professor from the University of Oxford

classical thought in addressing global challenges at the forum.

He suggests that the world should seek new paths for modern civilizational transformation from classical Chinese thought.

"To achieve the coexistence of tradition and modernity, we need to introduce the perspective of civilizational exchange," he says.

Baik points out that the Harvard professor Michael Puett's popular work *The Path: What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About the Good Life* highlights how ancient Chinese philosophers like Confucius and Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu) have offered practical guidance for living a good life, which focuses on honing one's instincts, training emotions, and continuously improving personal cultivation to respond morally and appropriately to various situations.

"Such responses can also have a positive impact on those around us," Baik says.

He adds that Puett's approach resonates with Western audiences

by connecting ancient wisdom to modern daily life.

He proposes integrating Chinese philosophy into daily life to break rigid self-perceptions and reshape interactions between individuals and the world, and combine Neo-Confucianism with institutional innovation to explore how traditional culture can better drive reform and development.

Yang Huilin, former vice president of Renmin University of China, says that every tradition contains both "enduring ideas" and "mutable, shared elements".

"I believe there is a profound potential for dialogue between Chinese thought and Western scholars, offering a wealth of intellectual resources," Yang says.

He emphasizes that "mutual reference" and "mutual interpretation" allow civilizations to move toward and complement each other despite their differences. This approach points to a future where civilizational exchange transcends barriers, mutual learning overcomes conflicts, and inclusiveness surpasses superiority.

In dialogical research that emphasizes dialogue and interactions between different perspectives, disciplines, or cultures, Yang says that tracing and reconstructing the theoretical tools and problem sources of both Chinese and Western traditions is a fundamental task for resolving the debates between ancient and modern, East and West.

At the forum, the Cross-Strait High-Level Academic Consortium on Chinese Civilization was officially inaugurated, led by Renmin University of China and co-founded with more than 20 universities. It aims to advance Chinese cultural heritage, support the Belt and Road Initiative, and promote cross-strait integration.

Additionally, a graduate school for fine traditional Chinese culture research and training was established to promote talent cultivation, academic research and exchanges in the fields of Chinese civilization.

Sharing his experiences with Chinese and Western students, Chard says that many Chinese students possess a far deeper understanding of Western civilization than Western students do of Chinese civilization.

To further popularize Chinese knowledge in Western societies, Chard encourages Chinese humanities scholars to take on greater responsibility.

This includes using non-traditional channels such as popular books, films and games to translate China's millennia-old wisdom and modernization stories for a global audience, while strengthening academic exchanges between China and the West.

He calls upon all Sinologists to train the next generation to bridge cultural divides.

"I hope the West can recognize that China is a very cool, fascinating, and highly worthwhile civilization to learn about," he says.

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Convention with cutting-edge technology will be out of this world

By **YANG YANG**
yangyangs@chinadaily.com.cn

Visitors to the China Science Fiction Convention 2025, to be held from Friday to Monday at Beijing's Shougang Park, will be greeted by a dazzling blend of cutting-edge technology and boundless imagination.

The event's opening ceremony will set the tone with a fusion of virtual reality, immersive 3D projections, and a lifelike bionic robot named Huanhuan engaging in witty banter with a human host.

Among the crowd-pleasers will be an 8-meter-tall sci-fi themed installation at the No 3 Blast Furnace South Square. Covering about 70 square meters, it combines elements of space exploration and ecology, offering a visually stunning blend of science fiction and trendy culture that's set to become a per-

manent "internet-famous photo spot" in western Beijing.

The Baidi (literally white emperor) aerospace fighter — a star exhibition from the Chinese sci-fi IP "Nantianmen Project" — will attract crowds eager to explore its sleek design and futuristic lore. Such spectacles exemplify the convention's theme — Science Dreams, Creating the Future — and offer a tantalizing glimpse into humanity's next frontier.

Now in its ninth edition, the China Science Fiction Convention has evolved into a premier platform bridging science fiction, technology and culture since its 2016 debut.

Hosted by the China Association for Science and Technology, this year's event will transform Shougang Park, a former steel mill turned cultural hub, into a playground where industrial grit meets sci-fi glamour.

Ni Zhiyu, head of the science popularization department of the China Association for Science and Technology, says that the China Science Fiction Convention aims to inspire innovation consciousness and a scientific spirit across society, nurturing the soil for innovative culture.

Beijing's commitment to nurturing its sci-fi industry has gained remarkable fruit. Since 2020, the city has rolled out three rounds of policies to boost innovation, resulting in a thriving ecosystem.

The capital now hosts nearly 800 hi-tech enterprises, which generated 48 billion yuan (\$6.61 billion) in revenue by the end of last year, accounting for 40 percent of China's total sci-fi output.

In the last four years, the convention has introduced about 10 industrial policies, published more than 30 professional reports,

organized nearly 100 professional forums, and facilitated the implementation of some 100 projects, drawing global sci-fi enthusiasts, tech innovators, and industry leaders.

Shijingshan district, the sector's core, has emerged as a powerhouse with more than 230 companies, nearly a third of Beijing's total, spearheading advancements in artificial intelligence, gaming and immersive storytelling. The district has established more than 10 common technical service platforms such as light field imaging, 3D cloud rendering, and 5G+artificial reality development, focusing on enhancing the collaborative capabilities of the industrial chain.

Having implemented 35 science fiction special projects such as "Intelligent Creation Technology Research and Application for Scene-

by-Scene Scripts for Science Fiction Films", the district has achieved accelerated upgrading of key core technologies, and ensured autonomous control of technologies like spatial audio.

In addition, it has been promoting the demonstration and use of new products, established more than 20 science fiction application scenarios, including the No 1 SoReal Science Fiction Park and the Migu Metaverse Digital-Real Integration Base, and built the country's first digital experience complex, creating a new "store in the front, factory in the back" model in Shougang Park.

This year's convention will be noted for its integration of academia, industry and public engagement. Eleven high-profile forums will tackle topics like sci-fi and artificial intelligence, life sciences and futuristic transport, featuring luminar-

ies, including authors Liu Cixin and Wang Jinkang alongside some 40 international experts.

For casual attendees, the real magic will be in the hands-on experience.

The 2025 Fantasy Adventure Season will offer something for all ages: aviation-themed exhibits to spark curiosity about space exploration, student tech projects to showcase youthful ingenuity, and virtual reality zones to transport visitors to alien worlds. Generative AI will dazzle with hyperrealistic digital humans, while interactive installations will merge industrial heritage with cosmic wonder. Beyond the flashy tech, the convention will prioritize accessibility. The Sci-Fi innovation journey highlights Shougang's blend of historic architecture and futuristic installations, while themed fashion shows and robot exhibitions will add a dash of glamour.