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CHINA DAILY

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Spreading inferno



Raging wildfires devour homes on Monday in the county of Uiseong in North Gyeongsang Province, South Korea. Firefighters were battling at least nine wildfires across the country as of Tuesday afternoon, with dry and windy weather conditions hampering containment efforts. The wildfires have killed four people and injured at least 11 so far. YONHAP VIA REUTERS

Deal reached on safe travel in Black Sea

US, Russia and Ukraine conclude talks aimed at reaching a ceasefire in three-year conflict

By HENG WEILI in New York
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The United States announced agreements on Tuesday with Ukraine and Russia to ensure safe passage in the Black Sea and ban military attacks by the two countries on energy facilities. The White House issued separate statements for Ukraine and Russia, summarizing the three days of talks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Some of the points, such as on the Black Sea, contained the same language for both sides.

The statements said that the sides in the three-year-long war have "agreed to ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force, and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea."

Both statements concluded that President Donald J. Trump's "imperative that the killing on both sides of the Russia-Ukraine conflict must stop, as the necessary step toward achieving an enduring peace settlement."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: "We will need clear guarantees. And given the sad experience of agreements with just Kiev, the guarantees can only be the result of an order from Washington to Zelensky and his team to do one thing and not the other."

"If the Russians violate this, then I have a direct question for President Trump. If they violate, here is the evidence — we ask for sanctions, we ask for weapons, et cetera," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told reporters in Kiev.

The Kremlin said in its own statement that the United States also vowed to help restore access for Russian agricultural and fertilizer exports to the world market, reduce the cost of insurance for maritime transportation, and enhance access to ports and payment systems for such transactions.

Zelensky said that the agricultural provision was "a weakening of positions and a weakening of sanctions".

Lifting restrictions on Russia's agricultural exports would also need the approval of the European Union, which currently is not likely, The New York Times reported.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative, originally brokered in July 2022 by the United Nations and Türkiye, sought to guarantee the safe passage of Ukrainian agricultural exports in return for the easing of Western restrictions on

Russia's grain and fertilizer business. Moscow did not renew the deal in 2023, claiming that the West failed to uphold its commitments.

Russia also wants restrictions lifted on the Russian Agricultural Bank and other financial institutions involved in international trade of food and fertilizers, including reconnecting them to the SWIFT payment system.

"We're thinking about all of them right now," Trump said Tuesday of Russia's requests. "There are five or six conditions."

The statements also cited agreements to develop measures to enforce the previously reached 30-day ban on strikes against energy infrastructure.

One potential sticking point in the agreements is where the EU stands.

In a TV interview on Tuesday, Lavrov said that the approach taken by EU leaders on the conflict contradicts Trump's position.

Lavrov said the bloc's continued push for NATO membership for Ukraine stems from former US president Joe Biden's decision to push the EU toward a confrontation with Russia.

"In other words, they are in direct contradiction to the Trump administration," Lavrov said, noting that Trump, along with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and national security adviser Mike Waltz, had "made it clear that preliminary talks are underway on the parameters of the final settlement and that NATO should be off the table".

Lavrov said Biden made "a colossal mistake" by refusing to engage with Russia and insisting that Ukraine join the military bloc, "thereby creating an unacceptable threat for us".

Earlier this month, the UK and France discussed sending a military contingent to Ukraine once a ceasefire is reached.

Moscow called it a pretext for deploying NATO troops in the country, which it said could lead to a war between the military bloc and Russia.

The US and Ukraine also agreed that the United States "remains committed to helping achieve the exchange of prisoners of war, the release of civilian detainees, and the return of forcibly transferred Ukrainian children".

Both statements also said that the US, Russia and Ukraine "welcome the good offices of third countries with a view toward supporting the implementation of the energy and maritime agreements".

WORLD WATCH

By Dennis Munene

How Africa can leverage China's AI expertise

The Chinese artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek has revolutionized technological advancement in the 21st century with its AI-powered tool that achieves high performance at a much lower cost compared to its competitors. This has given impetus to other nations in the Global South, such as those in Africa, to benefit from and advance their role in the development of the fourth industrial revolution.

AI tools and platforms have the ability to benefit the global economy by modernizing agriculture, promoting poverty alleviation, enhancing security in the financial sector, and improving governance, education and healthcare systems.

However, the African continent is at a disadvantage when it comes to the adoption and development of AI due to endogenous challenges such as poor digital infrastructure and inadequate government policies. In October 2023, China put forward the Global AI Governance Initiative, which enables China to provide its solutions and wisdom toward AI development and governance, and this can surely benefit Africa.

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INSIDE
Get Smart, stay safe
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Asia's role as global growth driver in focus

By CHENG YU in Boao, Hainan
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Asian economies, with real GDP growth projected to be 4.5 percent for 2025, will continue to play a crucial role in driving global economic stability and growth, said a report released on Tuesday at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025.

The forum comes soon after the China Development Forum, which ended on Monday, and gathered top government officials and multinational leaders from across the globe. Experts said that the forums' key message is crystal clear, that Asia — spearheaded by China — is reinforcing its commitment to openness and stability, presenting a sharp contrast to the rising economic isolation featured by Washington's arbitrary sanctions and tariffs.

The "Asian Economic Outlook and Integration Progress Annual Report 2025", which was released on Tuesday, forecast that the share of Asian economies' GDP in the world economy will rise from 36.1 percent in 2024 to 36.4 percent in 2025. In terms of purchasing power parity, a metric comparing economic productivity and standards of living between countries, Asia's share of the global economy is projected to rise from 48.1 percent to 48.6 percent this year.

Such an economic performance means that Asia, as a key driver of the world economy, is set to benefit from global economic stabilization in 2025."

Zhang Yuyan, an academican of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Economies including China, India, Vietnam, the Philippines, Mongolia, Cambodia and Indonesia are expected to maintain a high growth rate of over 5 percent this year, the report said.

Zhang Yuyan, a renowned economist and an academican of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said, "Such an economic performance means that Asia, as a key driver of the world economy, is set to benefit from global economic stabilization in 2025 and will also play a crucial role in contributing to this stability."

The report also said that despite economic uncertainties, including monetary policy shifts in major economies such as the United States

and the European Union, and geopolitical tensions, most Asian stock markets are expected to maintain an upward trend this year.

Amid such growth, China remains the region's most attractive destination for foreign investors. China's vibrant innovation in fields such as artificial intelligence, reflected by DeepSeek, has reinforced its status as a safe haven for entrepreneurship in a world where US sanctions pose increasing risks.

Zhou Xiaochuan, a former governor of the People's Bank of China, said at the conference: "China is responding to global demands with responsibility and courage, continuing to provide stability and certainty to the world. As the year 2025 marks the conclusion of China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), China will further deepen comprehensive reforms and expand high-level opening-up."

"China will adopt a more proactive fiscal policy and a moderately accommodative monetary policy, boost consumption, enhance investment efficiency and expand domestic demand across all sectors," he said.

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MUSIC MAVERICKS SET THE TONE FOR NEXT GENERATION

Classically trained performers modernize, popularize traditional art form

By WEI WANGYU and XIAO XIANGYI

The broken guitar string recoiled like a serpent, the metallic twang echoing through the backstage corridors of a Kuala Lumpur theater. Shanghai-born singer Cao Yang stared at his throbbing fingertip, a crimson bead welling where a callus had been pierced.

It was only three hours until showtime at the Arena of Stars — a 5,000-seat venue filled with fans waiting for a performer who joked that six years ago he

in-depth

couldn't fill a Shanghai dive bar. Cao, 33, is one of a new breed of young Chinese musicians, many of whom are classically trained, cultivating fresh audiences through technology, innovative ideas and the fusion of musical genres. Others are mashing together their musical credentials with massive social media followings to become brand ambassadors for high-end

products and luxury items. Concert halls and opera houses once filled with silver-haired patrons now pulsate with crowds aged under 30.

"I realized classical training gave me tools, not chains," Cao said in an interview with China Daily.

Cao studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and graduated in 2011 with a focus on musical theater. Before that, he had won several talent competitions after studying music theory and classical guitar from a young age.

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Russian officials leave after the conclusion of ceasefire talks between delegations from the United States and Russia on Monday in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY / SPUTNIK

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Despite his pedigree, he describes himself back then as a prodigy who performed in near empty halls. He said he was once dismissed by pop music producers as playing with "museum-piece rigidity".

From 'dive bar' to star

After completing his conservatory studies, he spent two months preparing for the Shanghai music festival where he hoped to kick-start his career. "I walked on stage to dead silence," he recalled. "Not even the waitstaff stayed."

Career salvation came from two unexpected quarters. Director Zhou Xiaolian of the Shanghai Drama Art Center became an unlikely mentor. "Your problem isn't the music — it's believing you are above the audience," he told the young performer.

Then came a game-changing encounter with pop doyen Jay Chou from Taiwan. Cao was performing in *The Secret*, a stage adaptation of Chou's film of the same name, when the superstar noticed him and offered him a contract.

Cao later infused classic songs from the show with pop music rhythms, appealing to millennial fans of the original performance. "They said fusion was sacrilege. Turns out it's salvation," he said.

The 2023 national tour of *The Secret* by Cao's troupe attracted audiences with a large number aged in their early 20s — far younger than the typical show-goers. Over 70 percent of the audience was aged under 34. Data from Jucheng, the production company, revealed the tour grossed over 80 million yuan (\$11 million), with almost all the 59 shows in Shanghai sold out.

Meanwhile, his livestreaming on Douyin invited users to remix his video clips, enhancing his personal branding through his musicals. His livestreaming has generated over 1.2 billion views on Douyin.

His signature single *Weiguang* (glimmering lights) — a haunting blend of ballads and synth beats — also helped catapult him to stardom. Cao's music video of the song, featuring him livestreaming inside his room, has gained the performer 1.5 million followers on Douyin.

Public harmony

When Sun Jingkai returned to China in 2015 after graduating from the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris he became a resident conductor at the Tianjin Symphony Orchestra.

He was aware most ordinary people in China were unwilling to buy a ticket to watch a performance, and he decided to do something about it.

To attract and cultivate bigger audiences, from 2018 he began giving a free public lecture each week at the orchestra venue. For over two years he explained in layman's terms the structure of classical music, especially symphonies.

At the beginning, there were only five attendees in the hall, but the number gradually swelled to a packed house of 200 people. During the COVID pandemic, he gave nearly 200 lectures on the online video-sharing platform Bilibili, which have so far garnered more than 200,000 views.

In 2020, Sun joined the Tianjin Song and Dance Theatre and is now its principal conductor. The 38-year-old conducts various ensembles including folk music, symphonies, operas and ballets.

He has also staged 20 opera performances in Tianjin's streets and alleys and by its Haihe River. A successful performance at the city's Five Greater Avenues area integrated music with the city's architecture and cultural tourism.

"It is not limited to the theater anymore. Both local residents and tourists can enjoy it (the performance), free and open. Music is like movable architecture," he said.

Educational approach

Unlike traditional orchestra conductors, Sun often uses unconventional approaches to bring the symphony closer to the audience.

One of his methods involves talking directly to the audience from the podium, giving details of the composer, the performers and the musical instruments being played. He believes this gives the audience a greater appreciation of the performance.

Sometimes speaking is not enough. During a concert at the National Centre for the Performing Arts last year, he invited a well-known landscape painter to create artworks while he conducted on the stage.

He believes for a performance to resonate deeply with an audience, it's important to employ elements that engage multiple senses.

"I've never seen such a novel performance," Situ Cao, a netizen who attended the concert, commented on lifestyle-sharing platform Xiaohongshu (RedNote).

"It was a feast for both the ears and eyes. Hearing the conductor explaining the creation background and artistic concept of each piece and seeing the artist painting, I felt like I could understand the music and become more immersed."

Sun said educational concerts are popular in Western countries, but are still uncommon in China, adding that he has also given educational concerts on Chinese folk music.

During one performance with the China National Traditional Orchestra last year, he explained the creation and artistic ideas behind famous folk pieces such as *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix* and *The Silk Road*.

Player, piano

Ruan Yangyang's humble origins in a small town in Zhangzhou, Fujian province, have been no impediment



Left: The Harbin Symphony Orchestra performs for a Lantern Festival concert under the baton of Sun in Harbin on Feb 12. Middle: Ruan Yangyang plays the piano during a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York in 2024. Right: Cao Yang plays guitar during his live concert in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Oct 27. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Musicians: Tuning into China's modern pulse

Sun Jingkai conducts symphony concert *Winter Fantasy* in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Dec 21. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Pianist Ruan Yangyang has been trying to showcase the beauty of Chinese music to international audiences.

Cao Yang sings his song *Weiguang* (glimmering light) during his concert tour in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Sept 22.

ment to his rapid rise in the world of classical music, attending a prestigious performance school in the United States and winning multiple international piano competitions.

"I want to bring music to children in rural areas who don't have exposure to it," the 24-year-old told China Daily. "I want them to know that their background doesn't define them. Every experience can shape them into someone special."

Neither of Ruan's parents was musically trained, but they became aware of his talent at a young age. Due to the lack of piano teachers in his hometown, he made weekly trips to another town for his musical education and piano training.

At the age of 9, Ruan was accepted into the Piano Academy at Gulangyu, Central Conservatory of Music, the youngest student to ever be admitted by the academy.

He continued his studies, and in 2017 was one of only two pianists accepted into the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a training ground for the most gifted young musicians from around the world.

He graduated in May 2023 and has won piano competitions in Switzerland, Portugal, Poland and the United Kingdom. He has performed with symphonies on concert stages around the world, including Carnegie Hall in New York.

Ruan also has over 1.5 million followers on social media who he shares his love for music with, which, combined with his waif-like looks, make him a marketer's dream.

He has had collaborations with brands like Land Rover and Kawai, according to his official website, and made appearances at prestigious events such as the Silk Road International Film Festival, and the Tiffany & Co. gala, underscoring his "wide-reaching impact".

At a Feb 16 recital in Shanghai, his program bridged generations with the first five Chopin etudes honoring the classics, and the other seven "anime adaptations" that included *Digimon Evolution* and *Howl's Moving Castle* themes.

A China Association of Performing Arts report noted that young audience are more likely to buy tickets for "hybrid performances" like Ruan provided, rather than traditional formats, with frequent attendees rising, the report said.

Leaving a legacy

Even though their individual journeys have been different, Cao, Sun and Ruan are each looking to leave behind signposts for the next generation of Chinese musicians.

Ruan's idea of "giving back" defines his next project — a chamber music collaboration with his Curtis classmates from around the world. Together, they plan to adapt Chinese folk songs using classical techniques. The goal is twofold: to introduce classical music to those unfamiliar with it, and to showcase the beauty of Chinese music to international audiences.

"I want my foreign classmates to experience the richness of Chinese music. And I want Chinese audiences to understand that Western music isn't just about technique — it's about heart," Ruan explained.

He has already adapted the folk song *Jasmine Flower* into a Chopin-style invention and played it in a practice room at Curtis. "My (former) American classmates think it's exotic," he said. "But I remember the melody as if it had grown inside me."

Sun has seen music audiences become younger, as the country invests more in supporting symphonies and building theaters, which has resulted in a reduction in ticket prices.

He has now set his sights on taking classical music to remote areas to tell China's own story.

As the chief conductor at Guizhou Song and Dance Theatre, he conducted the closing ceremony of the 6th West China Convention of Symphony Orchestras in September in Zunyi, one of the country's old revolutionary areas. The well-known symphony *Ode to Mountains and Rivers*, which celebrates the revolutionary era, was performed.

His latest plan is to establish music troupes in the country's "Porcelain Capital" of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province, through collaborations between Jingdezhen Vocational University of Art. He believes combining performances and cultural tourism is a winning idea.

Sun's idea for these "mini symphony projects" involves creating an abridged version of Beethoven's symphonies, as well as experimental small-scale chamber music.

"Music is a global language which can blend cultural and tourism elements," he said.

Cao's counsel to young people, based on his own struggles, is straightforward.

"Stop waiting for permission. I nearly wasted years seeking validation from gatekeepers who thought Mozart and Mandopop couldn't mate. Be the genetic engineer," he said.

For young artists in rural China, and around the world, Ruan's advice is also simple.

"Don't feel inferior because of where you come from. Your background will make you special," he said.

"Be kind to people, and luck will come your way. If you succeed, remember to help others. Learning music is not just about technique — it's about expressing yourself. Don't hide in your corner of the world. Go out and see more."

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TOP NEWS

Report unveils cyberattacks on mobile devices

China urges US to stop large-scale activities endangering cybersecurity, national security

By CUI JIA
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United States intelligence agencies have been secretly collecting data from cellphone users around the world by using hacking tools to access SIM cards and operating systems, and they also target Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, GPS and mobile networks to track users without their knowledge, according to a newly released cybersecurity report.

Such large-scale and long-term activities have seriously endangered the cybersecurity and national security of countries around the world, according to the report, titled "Mobile Cyberattacks Conducted by US Intelligence Agencies", which was published on Tuesday by the China Cybersecurity Industry Alliance.

At the same time, US intelligence agencies have targeted data centers of major internet and information technology vendors, and even the entire mobile industry ecosystem, the report said, adding that they extensively steal personal data, account credentials, device information, communication links and geolocation data.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said at a regular news conference on Tuesday in Beijing that it is worth noting that the report revealed that the US is the world's primary country conducting network attacks through the supply chain and mobile operators.

"Over the years, the US has been accustomed to crying 'stop thief' on supply chain security issues, manipulating double standards, and vigorously hyping the so-called '5G supply chain security issues', while cooperating with major internet companies or equipment suppliers in its own country to preinstall back doors in global information equipment products, serving its own network attack activities," Guo said.

The report gathered a large number of disclosures and analyses from the industry and academia on the network intelligence activities carried out by US intelligence agencies against mobile smart terminals, so that precautionary measures can be taken.

The "2023 Facts and Figures" report released by the International

... the US has been accustomed to crying 'stop thief' on supply chain security issues, manipulating double standards, and vigorously hyping the so-called 5G supply chain security issues."

Guo Jiakun,
Foreign Ministry spokesman

al Telecommunication Union in November 2023 said that the mobile phone ownership rate among the global population age 10 and above is 78 percent, and the coverage of mobile broadband with 3G and above in the total global population is 95 percent.

According to the China Cybersecurity Industry Alliance report, by exploiting SIM card vulnerabilities, US intelligence agencies enable their attacks to bypass mobile operating systems and device brands to track user locations and intercept phone calls.

Technically, all brands and models of cellphones and wearable devices with SIM cards, regardless of the operating system installed, can be exploited as long as there is a vulnerability in the inserted SIM card.

In addition, US intelligence agencies have further strengthened their surveillance and intelligence acquisition capabilities in the area of mobile networks through the use and control of commercial spyware. For example, through the use of the Israeli spyware Pegasus, the US has carried out wiretapping on a number of heads of state and political figures, including those of France and Pakistan, the report said.

Guo added that it is believed that the report will help the international community see the true face of the US. China urges the US to immediately stop such actions, especially the use of the global supply chain to carry out malicious cyber activities, and to give an explanation to the world in a responsible manner, he said.

Life amid conflict



A woman carries firewood and her child on Monday as she walks through a muddy road on the outskirts of Rubaya, which is controlled by M23 rebels, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

ZOHRA BENSEMRA / REUTERS

Honoring the dead



Government officials attend an event on Monday in the Serbian capital of Belgrade to remember the victims of the NATO bombardment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 26 years ago. FREDRAG MILOSAVLJEVIC / XINHUA

Apple CEO hails nation's innovation capabilities

By MA SI and HU YUMENG

Chinese software developers' creativeness is "second to none", and more Chinese mobile applications will succeed globally with greater international influence, Apple CEO Tim Cook said on Tuesday in an interview with China Daily in Beijing.

Cook's praise highlights that China is not only a big market and manufacturing powerhouse for Apple's consumer electronics, but also a major source of innovation for the company's software ecosystem, experts said.

Boasting a growing number of well-educated and creative young people, China will be of greater appeal to global tech giants in the future, they added.

During the interview, Cook said: "I predict that more Chinese apps will become popular overseas, because the creativeness of Chinese developers is second to none. I just see more and more success coming out of China."



Tim Cook

The global influence of Chinese apps is on the rise, he said, adding that software developers in China have such great passion that it is "unbelievable".

Pan Helin, a member of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology's Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, said, "Chinese developer teams, whether large or small, are setting their sights on the global stage for growth opportunities."

"From day one, they are targeting the global market. This stands in contrast to the past, when they did not dare to explore overseas markets until they had succeeded domestically," Pan added.

Li Songlun, CEO of Kuro Games, a Chinese game developer, said its game *Wuthering Waves* has received immense attention. Upon

its official launch, the game topped the download charts on the Apple App Store in 107 countries and regions worldwide.

"Great games transcend boundaries, and we remain committed to delivering an even better gaming experience to our global community," Li said.

On Monday, Apple announced a new investment fund, with a pledge of 720 million yuan (\$99.2 million), to expand clean energy production in China, reinforcing its commitment to transitioning its global supply chain to 100 percent renewable energy by 2030.

The move is designed to launch the second China Clean Energy Fund, building on the success of its inaugural program in 2018.

With Apple's anchor investment, the new fund aims to add about 550,000 megawatt-hours of new wind and solar capacity annually to China's power grid, a figure that is expected to grow as additional investors join, according to the company.

Cook said that two-thirds of Apple's supply chain in China already runs on renewable energy.

Currently, over 80 percent of the company's top 200 suppliers have a manufacturing presence in China.

Jeff Williams, Apple's chief operating officer, said: "Our suppliers in China are driving world-class advancements in smart and green manufacturing. ... I'm excited about the future and what the next 30-plus years will bring in China."

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that China possesses unmatched manufacturing capabilities, and the country's focus on innovation-driven growth strategies will further enhance its significance in fueling the expansion of global technology leaders, including companies like Apple.

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AI: Collaborative efforts prioritize bridging digital divide

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Further, pushing for equality and inclusiveness, President Xi Jinping said at the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in November, that AI should not be a game of the rich countries and the wealthy. For Xi, the benefits of AI contribute to shared prosperity.

To compete with key players in the AI sector, unlock its digital future and ensure there is equality and inclusivity, Africa needs more cooperation with countries such as China.

To this end, under the 10 partnership actions proposed at the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China and Africa plan to jointly build a digital technology cooperation center and undertake 20 digital infrastructure projects and digital transformation demonstration projects in Africa within a period of three years from 2025 to 2027.

The two sides also plan to bridge the AI and digital divide, enhance AI capacity building and promote

exchanges in governing cross-border data flow. This will spearhead the Initiative on China-Africa Jointly Building a Community with a Shared Future in Cyberspace, proposed in August 2021.

The collaboration between China and Africa will enable the continent to bridge socioeconomic gaps, empower marginalized communities and foster inclusive growth through AI techniques.

To effectively leverage China's expertise and the 2024 FOCAC Summit partnership agenda, first, Africa needs to embrace more homegrown AI models and solutions. Africa is home to over 3,000 different tribes speaking over 2,000 languages. Swahili is the most widely spoken language in Africa, with over 200 million speakers, followed by Yoruba and Igbo. Arabic is also a common language. Using more native languages to develop AI platforms will ensure far-reaching benefits for various communities compared to the usual English interface and commands.

Second, as DeepSeek and other similar models have demystified the narrative that developing AI models is costly, AI developers in Africa can learn how the Chinese managed to build a platform that has transformed the world at a low cost, and use that knowledge for homegrown AI developments.

Third, Africa has been a victim of sharp power, where AI technology has been used to promote misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, negatively impacting its governance system. The deliberate weaponization of information through AI to suit propaganda narratives and agendas has led to preconceived opinions, resulting in deeper societal polarization. But China has managed to use AI for positive change. Africa needs to leverage China's knowledge of enhancing governance and laws to ensure safe application of new technologies, and enhance personal privacy protection, especially within its communication, health and financial sectors.

Last but not least, Africa can leverage China's support for AI to solve the continent's youth bulge and unemployment challenges. The average youth unemployment rate in Africa now stands above 20 percent. This has led to increased poverty, social exclusion and social unrest, hindering economic development and stability across the continent. However, through education and skills development, young people in Africa can maximize AI opportunities on the continent and spearhead Africa's renaissance dream.

As the world continues to advance the fourth industrial revolution, China-Africa cooperation presents a transformative opportunity for the continent to harness and benefit from AI and China's AI expertise.

The author is the executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Nairobi-based Africa Policy Institute. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Forum: Experts call for more open, cooperation-based world economy

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Notably, the report highlighted that the trade war, which was initiated by the US in 2018, has not improved the US' standing in global manufacturing value chains.

Instead, the gap between China and the US in this sector has widened. Global intermediate goods trade

has become more dependent on China than on North America. In 2023, the dependency on China stood at 16 percent, compared with 15 percent for North America, the report said.

Lin Guijun, former vice-president of the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said: "The latest US tariffs

have an impact on all major trade partners, not just China. Other nations are reacting in a fragmented and weak manner, lacking coordinated responses."

Zhang, from the CASS, said: "While international cooperation once aimed at mutual benefit, many nations have shifted toward a zero-sum game, and with the US' new

trade measures, the situation has now worsened to a negative-sum game, where countries accept their own losses as long as their rivals suffer even more."

"But the world needs a more open economy based on cooperation and shared prosperity. True success comes not just from personal gain but from lifting others up as well," he said.

With the theme of "Asia in the Changing World: Towards a Shared Future", the four-day event has attracted nearly 2,000 participants from more than 60 countries and regions, according to the forum's organizing committee.

Claus Rettig, president of German specialty chemicals giant Evonik Asia Pacific, who is attending this

year's forum, said: "We have unwavering confidence in China's growth. The Asia-Pacific region is one of Evonik's fastest-expanding markets, and China sits at its core with the largest market share."

"China is the world's top chemical market, backed by a robust infrastructure and a deeply integrated supply chain," he added. "We see China's economic strength as a solid foundation for growth and remain committed to expanding our investment here."

CHINA

First disease predicting facility being constructed

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
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Construction began for a first-of-its-kind scientific research facility for human cell lineage in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, on Tuesday. The facility is expected to generate a range of innovative scientific and technological achievements in reagents, instruments, software and data.

With a planned construction period of four and a half years and a building area exceeding 50,000 square meters, it is the first national-level large-scale scientific facility in the field of life sciences in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

"The facility aims to predict diseases and screen drugs by decoding the cell lineage," said Sun Fei, associate director of the Guangzhou Institutes of Biomedicine and Health of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The cell lineage refers to a dynamic evolutionary process of cells, which are the basic units of life, from a single fertilized egg through proliferation, differentiation and aging, according to the institute.

By focusing on developing innovative technologies and devices such as sample preservation, spatial multi-omics and advanced imaging as well as integrating cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, the facility will create a digital cell lineage covering the cells' development, disease and aging process in a three-dimensional way.



The facility aims to predict diseases and screen drugs by decoding the cell lineage."

Sun Fei, associate director of Guangzhou Institutes of Biomedicine and Health

"It's like compiling a detailed cellular genealogy for life, allowing scientists and even the public to clearly trace the past and present of each cell," said Sun, also chief commander of the project.

Mapping the spatiotemporal evolution of cells throughout the entire human life cycle, the facility will develop a digital cell artificial intelligence model and a digital physiological human model, which will innovate a new paradigm for biomedical testing and open up new pathways for biomedical research and development.

Through retracing, simulating and predicting the evolution of disease cell lineages, the facility can accurately identify key points of pathological changes and construct a high-precision digital physiological human model from the single-cell level.

It can also conduct toxicity testing and drug trials on digital human models, expected to overcome the current difficulties in drug research and development, according to the institute. One of the fundamental reasons for the low success rate of innovative drug research and development is that the process relies on animal models, which cannot fully replicate human biological responses, the institute said.

Currently, a global innovative drug research and development project can cost 10 years and \$2.6 billion on average, with a clinical success rate of less than 10 percent.

"In the future, the facility is expected to create a digital patient that integrates the cell information from real patients. By simulating the effects of different treatment methods on the digital patient, personalized treatment strategies can be made," said Chen Jiekai, a researcher with the institute.

The facility will enhance the integration of AI and data resources, develop innovative models, collaborate closely with leading enterprises and accelerate the translation of research outcomes into clinical applications, according to Chen.

Located at the Guangzhou International Bio Island, the facility will help attract top global scientific talents and teams to converge in Guangzhou and drive the development of human cell lineage research, Chen said.

Flocking to photograph



A spectacular flock of birds attracts scores of photographers who came to capture the scene at the Wolong Lake scenic area in Shenyang, Liaoning province, on Monday. At this time of the year, migratory birds are returning north. Birds were seen soaring in the sky, presenting an ever-changing "bird wave" landscape. The area is an important resting place for birds migrating in East Asia, where 238 species rest, nest and breed. YAN DONGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

US military presence near China documented

Beijing-based think tank releases report describing activities targeting country

By ZHAO LEI
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1,000 sorties

The United States maintained an active military presence in the South China Sea and frequently carried out provocative activities near China throughout last year, according to a new report.

"In 2024, the US military intensified its military deterrence against China by maintaining high-intensity operations in the South China Sea and surrounding areas, including close-in reconnaissance, transits through the Taiwan Strait, forward deployment, strategic patrols, combat exercises and battlefield preparations. Specifically, it conducted approximately 1,000 sorties of close-in aerial reconnaissance using large aircraft, while ocean surveillance and survey ships logged 706 ship-days of operations — a significant increase compared to 2023," according to the report, which was released on Monday by the Beijing-based think tank South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative and focused on US military activities in the South China Sea in 2024.

The report says that the US Navy deployed its carrier strike groups to the South China Sea eight times last year. The deployments were apparently meant to promote the US military's presence in the region.

In addition, at least 10 attack submarines, two cruise missile submarines and one ballistic missile submarine, all of which are nuclear-powered, were found operating in the South China Sea

and adjacent waters throughout the year, signaling the US military's clear intent to sow deterrence and intimidation, the report says.

Meanwhile, the frequency of bomber incursions into the South China Sea increased significantly, with crews conducting frequent drills on "north-south coordinated maneuvers" and "distributed combat operations", according to the document.

The report notes that since 2009, the US military has continuously escalated the frequency and intensity of its China-targeted activities in the South China Sea.

Though the Red Sea crisis and other regional developments such as the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts have diverted the US' naval and air forces, the US still keeps a high-intensity military presence in the South China Sea and adjacent areas, it adds.

The report also points out that in 2024, apart from bomber operations and marine surveillance/survey ship deployments, the number and frequency of US military hardware operating in the South China Sea showed limited growth and had neared their

operational ceilings.

"The US extensively strengthened its exercises and strategic and tactical deployments targeting the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. Such efforts were based on its continued deployment of forces on the Philippines, which it regards as a major pivot," it says.

The report stresses that during peacetime, a country conducting thousands of annual close-in reconnaissance sorties and hundreds of targeted exercises in another nation's adjacent waters clearly violates the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the "peaceful use of oceans" provisions under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In conclusion, it says that the Trump administration is pursuing a global strategic retrenchment, yet it will not alter the US' strategic community's consensus that the Indo-Pacific remains the top priority for US military efforts and that China is its most significant strategic competitor.

However, even if the Red Sea crisis subsides or a Russia-Ukraine ceasefire is achieved, the number of naval and air assets the US can redeploy to the Indo-Pacific will remain constrained, the report says. This is because as much as 60 to 70 percent of US conventional naval and air forces available for overseas deployment are already stationed in the Western Pacific, and the scale of further enhancement will be very limited.

Consequently, the US military is very likely to use more unmanned platforms and autonomous weapons systems in the South China Sea and adjacent areas in the future to meet the additional needs of forces, according to the report.

Scholar makes 25th Shu Road expedition

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu
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For Hope Justman, an 82-year-old scholar who has explored several historic paths across the globe, the ancient road system *shudao* (road to today's Sichuan province) dating back over two millennia remains her favorite.

A resident of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Justman recently concluded her 25th trip on Friday along the *shudao*, or Shu Road, a path she first stepped onto in 2001.

Shu is short for Sichuan, and was its ancient name as well. The ancient Shu Road is a system spanning more than 1,000 kilometers, connecting today's Xi'an in Shaanxi province and Chengdu in Sichuan, over the Qinling and Daba mountains. It was built as early as 2,300 years ago.

This year, Justman and over a dozen of her friends embarked on a journey starting from Pu'an township in Jian'ge county. They passed through iconic landmarks of the *shudao*, including the Cuiyunlang Corridor, Jianmen Pass, Zhaohua ancient town and Mingyue Gorge, covering a distance of over 300 kilometers.

They also experienced local intangible cultural heritage and folk culture, such as Gaoguan shadow puppetry and Malu embroidery.

Leading the group with a trekking pole in her hands, Justman shared the history of the Shu Road all along the way while noticing recent improvements.

"The newly added road signs, restrooms and parking spaces make it more convenient to hike here," she said.

In the Cuiyunlang section of the *shudao*, Justman was delighted to find that each ancient tree now has a QR code on its plaque, which, when scanned, reveals details such as its ID number, age and health status.

Local authorities said the Cuiyunlang section is home to 7,778 ancient cypress trees with an average age of 1,050 years, the oldest tree being approximately 2,300 years old. Each tree has an electronic ID and is cared for by dedicated workers.

Justman also visited the three cypress trees she had personally planted, loosening the soil and watering them.

Justman's fascination with the *shudao* began in her college days. At age 20, she saw a Tang Dynasty



This place is exactly like the ancient painting — it feels as if I had stepped right into that painting."

Hope Justman, 82-year-old scholar from the United States

(618-907) painting titled *Emperor Minghuang's Journey to Shu* at an exhibition in Boston, Massachusetts, in which a plank road clinging to the steep cliffs left a lasting impression on her.

In 2001, she read an article about the ancient *shudao* and confirmed that the plank road was real, so she made up her mind to explore it.

"This place is exactly like the ancient painting — it feels as if I had stepped right into that painting," she said, standing at the Mingyue Gorge plank road.

Gazing at a swiftly passing train on the Xi'an-Chengdu high-speed railway in the distance, Justman marveled that the *shudao*, once described as "harder than climbing to the sky" by Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai, has become a smooth path.

Over the years, Justman has documented her hikes along the *shudao* through words, photos and videos. To share its story with the world, she has published a book, created a website and produced documentaries about it.

A San Francisco resident surnamed Chen, who joined Justman to visit the Shu Road for the first time, said she is surprised at its remarkable preservation and beauty.

"You can feel the locals' tremendous effort in preserving it," she said, adding that it has helped her understand Justman's determination to visit the ancient road.

Pu Huaping, Justman's old friend who is the vice-president of Zhaohua district's *shudao* and Three Kingdoms (220-280) culture research association, presented her with a Chinese calligraphy piece titled *Migratory Bird of Shudao*, symbolizing her enduring connection to the ancient roads.

Pu said he admires Justman's perseverance in exploring the Shu Road, noting that her efforts have raised its profile, and her insights and suggestions for its further preservation are invaluable.



Hope Justman (front left), an 82-year-old scholar from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, hikes on the ancient Shu Road in Guangyuan, Sichuan province, on March 19. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Nation allays fears over potential international data breaches

By LI SHANGYI
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China has stressed that its submarine cable enterprises have consistently maintained a strong record in network security and will not access any data transmitted through the international communication infrastructure, according to a report released on Tuesday.

The report, published by the Industry and Planning Research Institute under the China Academy of Information and Communication Technology, comes amid growing concerns from the United States about the security of global telecommunications infrastructure, including undersea cables.

Submarine cables, made of optical fibers and laid on the seabed, carry about 99 percent of global data traffic. While China entered the sector later than some coun-

tries, the report highlights its rapid development of a comprehensive industrial chain covering production, construction, operation and maintenance.

Chinese enterprises have developed key components, such as repeaters and branching units, with pressure and corrosion resistance that can ensure operation for up to 25 years at depths of 8,000 meters, the report says. A major milestone cited was the development of the industry's first 32-fiber pair submarine cable system, designed to meet the increasing demand for international bandwidth.

Chinese submarine cable manufacturers and system integrators adhere to neutral and open technology solutions and do not consider surveillance technologies a future direction, the report says. Companies comply with the inter-

national "Open Cable" standard, allowing submarine cable systems built by Chinese enterprises to be compatible with terminal transmission equipment from other countries, including the US and France.

China's HMN Technologies Co has built more than 100,000 kilometers of submarine cable systems worldwide, taking on over 140 projects in more than 70 countries and regions, the report says.

After completing a submarine cable project, Chinese enterprises deliver the equipment and network management systems to operators for management and operation and do not access any transmitted data, the report adds. It also stresses that data security is ensured through encryption technology, enhanced detection measures and improved physical protection.

China has strengthened legal frameworks to safeguard submarine cables, defining responsibilities and improving enforcement to protect the infrastructure. The International Cable Protection Committee estimates that about 200 submarine cable failures occur annually, with over 80 percent caused by anchoring, fishing and other human activities.

The report follows heightened scrutiny from the US, where officials have raised concerns over potential security risks associated with undersea cables. In October, a bipartisan group of senators urged then US president Joe Biden to review the security of global undersea communication infrastructure, citing possible threats from China and Russia. In September, reports emerged that the US was encouraging Vietnam to avoid partnerships with Chinese

firms for new undersea cable projects.

China, which sees submarine cables as a key pillar for building a "community with a shared future in cyberspace", said its enterprises have provided cost-effective alternatives that accelerate global infrastructure deployment and reduce internet access costs for developing nations. The report urges governments and international organizations to strengthen cooperation in submarine cable construction and protection to improve global network services and digital products.

The Chinese government and its submarine cable enterprises will continue working with the international community to expand global communication infrastructure, ensure security and contribute to technological development, the report says.

CHINA

Beekeeper to use honeyed words on livestreams

Zhao Yanjun seeks to expand rural business via e-commerce channels

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
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When Zhao Yanjun quit his e-commerce job in 2015 to return to his hometown in the countryside, all for the dream of becoming a beekeeper, he had little idea that just a few years later he'd turn back to e-commerce to sell his honey.

Tens years on from leaving Guangzhou, Guangdong province, to return to Luokeng township, Zhao's beekeeping business has become a local success and the buzz about it is spreading.

The 35-year-old manages six large-scale apiaries with over 6,000 bee boxes. Last year, he earned a profit of more than 600,000 yuan (\$85,000).

"Luokeng has many high-quality agricultural products such as tea, honey and mushrooms, but many people are not aware of them," said Zhao while discussing his plans to start livestreaming to promote sales further afield.

"The climate in the mountains is suitable for beekeeping, and honey can be harvested all year round," he said.

"The flowers bloom early in spring, while the winter is not as cold as in the north, making the honey production relatively stable throughout the year."

Zhao's apiaries adopt a free-range model, allowing the bees to fly freely to collect large quantities of pollen.

"As long as the quality is guaranteed, I don't need to worry about whether my products will sell or not," he said, adding that honey is a health supplement product with a wide consumer base.

Zhao has already sold his honey in Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities, but said there is further room for growth via e-commerce, adding that he expects to be able to produce 20 metric tons of bee products annually in the near future.

The beekeeper is also teaching local farmers how to keep bees.

"I studied marketing at school, and now in an era of rapid e-commerce development, I can utilize my



Zhao Yanjun tends one of his beehives at his farm in Luokeng, Shaoguan, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

knowledge to improve the market presence for agricultural products from my hometown," he said.

"Beekeeping has become a major sideline business for many local farmers. They can generally earn around 40,000 to 50,000 yuan a year from it," said Zhao.

Zhao's apiaries have even been listed as a local demonstration base for beekeeping, and an endeavor

that can enable local farmers to shake off poverty.

Huang Jiawen, the Party secretary in Zhao's village, said he is a young man with a pioneering and innovative spirit.

"Zhao is a major beekeeper in the village. He often teaches villagers beekeeping techniques and assists them in selling products," Huang said.

"The climate in the mountains is suitable for beekeeping, and honey can be harvested all year round. The flowers bloom early in spring, while the winter is not as cold as in the north, making the honey production relatively stable throughout the year."

Zhao Yanjun, bee farm owners in Shaoguan, Guangdong province

In 2025, Zhao is excited about the potential sales that livestreaming will bring about, which he said would be a new starting point and provide him new opportunities.

Since last year, he has traveled to many places including Guangzhou and Wengyuan in Shaoguan to learn about livestreaming and sales platforms from friends in the industry.

He also plans to adopt advanced technologies and equipment such as artificial intelligence to expand the scale of his business and ensure product quality, though the project is still in the learning and exploration stage.

Zhao said the domestic honey market has great potential and there are still many products that can be developed.

"My future plan includes diversifying the development of our honey products, such as doing deep processing and promoting nutrition supplement products and beverages in the following months," he said.

The beekeeper said he also plans to explore cultural and tourism projects, including local homestays and other rural vitalization initiatives.

Liu Yawei contributed to this story.

Chinese AI farming bot wins innovation award

By TIAN XUEFEI
and ZHOU HUTIYING in Harbin

An agricultural artificial intelligence model developed by a research team from Harbin Institute of Technology in Heilongjiang province received the highest award at the 2024 British Innovation and Technology Show in January.

The Diamond Natural Earth Award was bestowed on the AI model named Kwoo, and the over 150-strong team from Harbin, which included teachers and post-graduate students from the faculty of computing. A further 26 undergraduate students dedicated themselves to developing Android, IOS, web and WeChat mini-programs for the AI model.

"Agriculture is fundamental to human survival," said Jiang Jingchi, an associate professor from the faculty. "At present, large-scale production in modern agriculture has evolved from machinery automation to intellectual and unmanned operation."

Advanced intelligent decision-making tools are crucial in achieving intelligent field management in agricultural production, such as precise planting, pest risk assessment and yield prediction, he said. "As early as 2020, we started to develop an agricultural knowledge graph and conceptualize the model," Jiang said.

On Oct 23, Kwoo was registered by the Cyberspace Administration of China. Through demonstrations in capability, information filtering and ethical review, it became the first officially approved agricultural large model in China.

By automatically retrieving data including knowledge of both crop phenotype growth and agricultural operations, Kwoo is able to establish a unified plan.

"With advantages in image recognition, environmental data monitoring, professional knowledge and crop growth cycle prediction, the model provides intelligent guidance for farmers during their agricultural operations," said Jiang. "It can enhance overall crop cultivation efficiency, reduce total production costs, improve crop yield and quality, and eventually enhance the market competitiveness of agricultural products."

Integrating the cognitive capabilities of generative AI large language models, the model can provide intelligent responses in areas such as seed variety recommendation, standardized cultivation practices, pest prevention schemes and disease control methods.

By assessing external interven-

It (Kwoo) can enhance overall crop cultivation efficiency, reduce total production costs, improve crop yield and quality, and eventually enhances the market competitiveness of agricultural products."

Jiang Jingchi, associated professor Harbin Institute of Technology

tion factors such as weather, soil and management, the model can achieve high-precision long-term growth predictions for 24 crops and 64 varieties, including rice, corn, soybean and wheat.

"It provides effective warnings and prevention strategies before natural disasters, climate change and other challenges, thereby assuring food security," Jiang said.

With strong regional adaptability and knowledge specialization, Kwoo can support regional crop planning to address the uneven distribution of agricultural technologies in different regions. So far, Kwoo has been applied on over 66,000 hectares of farmland inside and outside Heilongjiang, through partnerships with academies of agricultural sciences in different regions and agricultural enterprises.

Leveraging the capabilities of Kwoo, farmers have achieved an average 5 percent increase in yield and a 10 percent reduction in both production and management costs. "Kwoo offers a platform that boasts communication and learning opportunities for agricultural technology personnel and promotes updating their knowledge and skill improvement," Jiang said.

The British Innovation and Technology Show was launched in 2001 by the British Inventors Society with support from the United Kingdom Intellectual Property Office. Its evaluation system focuses on the contribution to human society and ecology, requiring originality, uniqueness and practicality of technology. It is recognized as one of the most influential international invention exhibitions in the world.

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Job fair held for elderly care robotics

CHENGDU — Authorities in Chengdu, a sci-tech hub in Sichuan province, have unveiled their inaugural requirements for hospital and senior care robotics at a special job fair.

The pioneering event, hosted by the Chengdu Bureau of Economy and Information Technology, the civil affairs bureau and the health commission on March 12, highlighted Chengdu's ambition to become a national hub for robotics innovation while addressing labor shortages through automation.

In elderly care there are 22 categories of robots spanning daily life assistance, rehabilitation nursing, safety patrols and emotional companionship, according to the municipal bureau of economy and information technology.

For hospitals, needs range from medical assistance and drug delivery to artificial intelligence-powered diagnostics and precision rehabilitation, spanning 10 projects at nine medical centers.

Zhang Long, a manager at Chengdu 7th People's Hospital, arrived with a specific request: sanitation robots.

"Traditional manual disinfection is inefficient. We need smart devices to replace repetitive, single-task jobs," he said, reflecting a broader shift toward automation in public health.

Zhang emphasized Chengdu's growing reliance on advanced robotics like surgical and rehabilitation assistants to meet rising healthcare demands.

He described the event as "mutual-



At a large-scale job fair held in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on March 16, local tech startups and technology companies try to find talent in robotics. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ly beneficial exploration" bridging tech developers and end users.

Zhang's employer is among nine institutions piloting robots for tasks such as patient guidance and logistics.

"Opening up real-world scenarios as 'testing grounds' allows us to gradually discover smarter robots," he explained, noting that adoption starts with basic tasks like disinfection before scaling up to complex roles.

Chengdu's government aims to accelerate this synergy.

The municipal bureau of economy and information technology outlined plans to leverage the city's healthcare strengths to create a "demand-driven, scenario-validated" ecosystem.

It identified 87 robotics products from 31 companies in its first supply catalog, enabling targeted matches at the event.

Local tech startups also seized the opportunity to pitch cutting-edge solutions.

At the job fair, Feng Rui, chairman of a local technology company,

entered wearing a helmet-like brain-computer interface device.

"This equipment is primarily used for autism screening. Today, I am here to seek 'partners'," he said.

"Brain-control technology is an integral part of the robotics industry chain. There are several companies here that we can collaborate with," Feng noted, expressing his desire to find more testing grounds for the company's research and development products.

"Currently, our products are being used in several community health centers, and a production line in Jinjiang district (of Chengdu) is set to be operational within this year. We hope to seize opportunities like this to expand our market reach," he said.

Fan Xinhua, CEO of Buffalo Robotics (Chengdu) Technology Co, promoted the company's exoskeletons, which have been deployed at many of the nation's top hospitals.

The company's new-generation brain-controlled exoskeleton, set for 2025 release, uses neural signals to

enhance rehabilitation accuracy.

"We aim to bring these devices into communities and homes, empowering the elderly and disabled," Fan said.

According to the China Commercial Industry Research Institute, the market size for service robots in China was approximately 60 billion yuan (\$8.4 billion) in 2023, with average annual compound growth of 32 percent over the past five years.

Analysts predict that the market for service robots in China will grow to 85 billion yuan by 2025.

Backed by robust policies, Chengdu is fast-tracking its robotics industry with strategies including monthly robotics fairs and "robot plus" opportunity lists. It will also launch initiatives to crowdsource breakthroughs in core technologies while fostering collaboration among labs, manufacturers and end users.

XINHUA

Long-distance running not a stretch for cancer survivor

WUHAN — As he crossed the finish line of the Wuhan Marathon on Sunday, Ma Zhiyong pulled out his phone with trembling fingers. His chest heaved, sweat dripping from his forehead, but his face glowed with an irrepressible smile.

The first message he sent out was to his family: "I'm safe."

From a distance, Ma was hard to miss — a gray-haired runner, breathless but beaming. Up close, his voice was barely audible, a whisper that hinted at the battles he had fought. At 55, Ma had undergone three surgeries for throat cancer, leaving him without vocal cords. "The sound is produced by my muscle and airflow," he explained, touching his throat with a calm composure that belied his struggles.

The Wuhan Marathon marked Ma's 18th full marathon, but the start of his journey as a runner was a life-changing tragedy. In April 2018, Ma, a staff member at a local agriculture bank in Chengde, Hebei province, was diagnosed with throat cancer.

Thirty days after his initial surgery, Ma's doctor advised him to engage in moderate exercise.

"The hardest part was the moment under general anesthesia, when I felt my soul drifting away. After that, nothing else seems difficult," he said.

Ma's journey was anything but easy. After three half-marathons, his cancer returned in 2021 and again in 2022, requiring two more surgeries. But as soon as his body

allowed, Ma hit the road. Running was no longer just an exercise; it was a defiant statement that he was still here, still moving forward.

Since Nov 3, he has finished marathons in Beijing, Guangzhou in Guangdong province, Chongqing and Wuhan in Hubei province. "I was told that I might have completed the four grand slams in record time," he said.

Wearing a red headband and matching earbuds, Ma stood out in the bustling post-race crowd like a warm flame. His laughter, though raspy, was hearty, carrying a magnetic optimism. Simply being near him made others feel lighter.

"Running has made me more open, more cheerful and simpler in my outlook on life," he said. "We get about 30,000 days in a lifetime. Why spend them frowning when you could be smiling?" With a playful wink, he added, "Don't I seem pretty sunny to you?"

During the interview, runners stopped to wave and exchange greetings with him.

His social media channel, "Happy Running Brother Ma", features 188 videos — snapshots of him sprinting through marathons across China, always flashing his signature grin.

"I'll keep running. I'll live every day with sunshine in my heart," Ma said. Then he paused, his voice barely above a whisper, yet resolute, "As long as I'm alive."

XINHUA

WORLD

‘Golden decade’ forecast for China-Egypt relations

By AHMED ABDELLA in Cairo
For China Daily

Egypt and China are being tipped to embark on what a former Egyptian ambassador to China calls a “golden decade” of partnership.

Ali El Hefny, who also served as deputy foreign minister of Egypt, talked of expanding horizons for collaboration between the two countries.

“There is a determination in both Cairo and Beijing to maintain relations and coordinate on all regional and international situations,” El Hefny, vice-president of the Egypt-China Friendship Association, said.

“The growth of economic relations in the past decade indicates that the next decade, from 2025 to 2035, will be the golden decade for relations between the two countries.”

On the extent of coordination between the two countries, El Hefny said China is a major global power and Egypt is a regional power in the Arab world and Africa, and they have common interests.

The relationship between China and Egypt has included increasing economic collaboration, resulting in more investment and trade, he said. China has been Egypt’s top trading partner in recent years, and Chinese investment in Egypt has exceeded \$7 billion.

“Increased Chinese investment benefits both sides, not just Egypt but also the Chinese economy,” he said.

“Relations are gaining more momentum and depth through the number of diverse Egyptian-Chinese joint projects implemented in Egypt, extending to various regions.”

El Hefny cited as an example Egypt’s new administrative capital, Alamein City, and the Teda economic zone near the Suez Canal.

As a global leader in renewable energy, Chinese investment in green energy has accelerated in Egypt and other North African countries, contributing to their green transformation.

In December Egypt’s Suez Wind Energy signed an agreement with Power Construction Corporation of China to build a 1,100-megawatt wind farm in the Gulf of Suez. When the farm is completed it will become one of the biggest of its kind in Africa.

The Chinese motor vehicle maker BAIC announced last year that it will establish an electric car factory

“Relations are gaining more momentum and depth through the number of diverse Egyptian-Chinese joint projects implemented in Egypt, extending to various regions.”

Ali El Hefny, former Egyptian ambassador to China

in Egypt. It is forecast that the factory, expected to start production at the end of this year, will turn out 50,000 vehicles a year in five years.

Increasing Chinese investment has also significantly helped boost Egypt’s industrial and technology capacity for sustainable development, El Hefny said.

Technology sharing

“The most important feature that distinguishes Egypt’s cooperation with China from cooperation with other developed countries is that China transfers and shares technology with us. We obtain this technology in a way that enables us to strengthen our national industries.

“This ... enhances mutual trust and contributes to achieving sustainable development. We look forward to more cooperation in the field of localizing industry in Egypt, where we see that China can play a significant role in this area.”

On the importance of the Egyptian market for Chinese companies, El Hefny said: “Egypt represents a promising market for Chinese investment. Thanks to the trade agreements that link Egypt with Arab, African, European and South American countries, it can be a hub for exporting Chinese products assembled or manufactured in Egypt under the slogan ‘Made in Egypt.’”

These markets have a population exceeding 2 billion, ensuring the flow of goods and services without restrictions or customs duties, he said.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



Mourners gather at the funeral of Hussam Shabat in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza Strip, on Monday. Shabat, a journalist for Al Jazeera Mubasher, was killed in an Israeli attack in Gaza earlier in the day. BASHAR TALEB / AFP

‘Voluntary departure’ for Gazans slammed

Israel accused of forcing Palestinians out and violating international law

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Israel’s decision to set up an agency to oversee the so-called voluntary departure of Palestinians from Gaza and the approval of 13 settlement outposts in the West Bank have been condemned for defying international laws and undermining cease-fire restoration efforts.

Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and Austria and Germany were among those who condemned the move, saying the aim was to displace Palestinians and legitimize what were called colonial settlements.

Israel’s Defense Ministry said on Sunday that the country’s Security Cabinet had approved the establishment of a new directorate to coordinate the “voluntary relocation” of Palestinians from Gaza to third countries.

The directorate, which will operate under the Defense Ministry, will “prepare for and enable safe and controlled passage of Gaza residents for their voluntary departure to third countries,” The Times of Israel reported.

Egypt said the move lacked any legitimate basis, and that the departures were happening under policies that prevent humanitarian aid and use starvation as a weapon.

This constitutes forced displacement, a violation under international law and international humanitarian law, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said.

Meanwhile, Israel’s Prime Minister Isaac Herzog said on Tuesday he was shocked that the issue of hostages being held in Gaza was no longer a top priority in the country,

days after criticizing the government’s war policy.

“I am quite shocked how suddenly the issue of the hostages is no longer at the top of the priority list and at the top of the news,” Herzog said in a video issued by his office, adding it was important to keep working toward “bringing the hostages home, down to the last one.”

In the occupied West Bank, Israel’s Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said the 13 Jewish settlements will ultimately be recognized as independent and would “continue to lead a revolution of normalization and regulation in the settlements instead of hiding and apologizing.”

It was another important step on the path to “actual sovereignty in Judea and Samaria,” Israel’s term for the West Bank, he said.

Israeli airstrikes have continued across the Gaza Strip, killing at least 23 Palestinians on Tuesday, local health officials said.

Journalists killed

After Israel attacked a hospital causing deaths, including that of a teenager, on Sunday it continued its operations, and at least two journalists were added to the death toll on Monday. Hussam Shabat, a journalist working with Al Jazeera, and Mohammed Mansour, a correspondent of the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun, were among those reported dead.

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said it took the “difficult decision” to reduce its aid work in Gaza after deadly Israeli airstrikes resumed, but “the UN is not leaving” the enclave, he said.

On Monday the Palestinian

Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa, in a meeting with Sweden’s Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenegerd in Ramallah, called for more international pressure to halt Israel’s military operations in Gaza.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation also called on the world, and in particular the UN Security Council, to fulfill its responsibilities in confronting what it called Israeli crimes.

Gokhan Erel, Gulf studies coordinator at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Turkey, told China Daily that Israel appeared to be laying the groundwork for long-term demographic restructuring with its so-called voluntary departure of Palestinians from Gaza.

“Although presented as voluntary, such methods risk normalizing and speeding up forced migration, particularly in situations when daily life is rendered unlivable owing to ongoing assaults and blockade.”

If this policy continues, Gaza’s population is likely to shrink significantly, especially if third-party states agree to accept displaced people, perhaps under diplomatic or economic pressure, he said.

“This might eventually be portrayed politically as a question of personal choice, undermining Palestinian claims to the right of return and reshaping the historical narrative of displacement.

“The repercussions are significant. Such a shift weakens the feasibility of a two-state solution by reducing the demographic and territorial coherence essential for a sustainable Palestinian state.

“Furthermore, it risks shifting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’s primary problem from occupation to irreversible population transfer, creating severe international law concerns.”

Xinhua and Agencies contributed to this story.

Republicans move to impeach judges who block Trump

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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The administration of US President Donald Trump and federal judges have clashed over court injunctions that have blocked White House policies, and Republican members of Congress are moving to have some of the judges impeached.

On March 18, United States Congressman Brandon Gill of Texas introduced a resolution to impeach US District Judge James Boasberg for ordering a halt to the deportation of Venezuelans accused of being gang members.

The deportations were carried out after Trump invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, which he says grants him the authority to deport noncitizens without appearing before a judge.

Boasberg ruled that the immigrants facing deportation must be given a chance to challenge their designations as alleged gang members. There is “a strong public interest in preventing the mistaken deportation of people based on categories they have no right to challenge,” he said, and “the public also has a significant stake in the government’s compliance with the law.”

On Monday Boasberg rejected a government application to have the order blocking the deportations lifted.

The same day Republican Congressman Andrew Clyde of Georgia indicated that he was introducing articles of impeachment against District Judge John James McConnell for his order extending a block on the administration’s attempt to freeze payments for federal grants and other government programs approved by Congress.

McConnell ruled that such broad categorical funding freezes are “like-ly unconstitutional” and cause “irreparable harm to a vast portion of this country.”

Last month another Republican Congressman, Eli Crane of Arizona, filed articles of impeachment against District Judge Paul Engelmayer of the Southern District of New York.

Engelmayer had issued an order blocking most of the administration’s officials, including Elon Musk and staff members of his so-called Department of Government Efficiency, from accessing Treasury records. The case was brought by 19 Democratic attorneys general.

Following the ruling on Feb 8 Musk called Engelmayer “an activist posing as a judge.” Since then, Republicans have called other judges who have ruled against the Trump administration political activists. Musk is also calling for such judges to be impeached.

Multiple injunctions

Two months into Trump’s second term he has faced more than 15 injunctions. In Joe Biden’s four years as president 14 court injunctions were imposed on actions he took, all by Republican-appointed judges. A study by Harvard University last year found that of the injunctions against Trump in his first term, from 2017 to 2020, 90 percent were issued by Democrat-appointed judges.

Trump has joined the impeachment calls of his Republican colleagues. He called Boasberg a “radical left lunatic of a judge,” writing on social media, “This judge, like many of the crooked judges I am forced to appear before, should be impeached.”

Following Trump’s post, the chief justice of the US Supreme Court, John Roberts, issued a rare public statement, saying: “For more than two centuries it has been established that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision. The normal appellate review process exists for that purpose.”

The Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, said Trump’s attack on Boasberg has resulted in a constitutional crisis.

Republican Senator John Curtis of Utah said it takes two-thirds of a Senate vote to impeach. “And we know it’s not going to happen,” he said in a TV interview.

But Curtis said this is not a constitutional crisis but “a civic lesson”.

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Turkish economy hit by political tensions

ANKARA — Türkiye’s economic outlook faces mounting uncertainty as recent political tensions threaten to derail efforts to curb high inflation, economists warn.

The Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem Imamoglu, a leading figure in the opposition Republican People’s Party, was detained a week ago with about 100 others over allegations of corruption and links to terrorism, rattling financial markets and investors. He was arrested on Sunday.

In response to the market unrest, central bank officials met commercial lenders in Ankara on Sunday afternoon to discuss stabilization measures, according to the Banks Association of Türkiye.

Following last week’s bleak performance, the Turkish lira touched 38 per dollar in early Monday trading.

Türkiye’s stock market also felt the effect, with the benchmark

BIST-100 Index falling 16.5 percent last week, the worst drop since the 2008 global financial crisis.

To stabilize trading, the capital market regulator on Monday imposed a ban on short-selling for a month to prevent stocks from falling.

However, Mustafa Sonmez, an economist in Istanbul, warned that continued political turmoil could derail the government’s inflation-fighting drive launched in mid-2023 amid a cost-of-living crisis.

“The central bank has burned billions of dollars to prevent further depreciation of the lira, using significant amounts in its foreign currency reserves,” Sonmez said.

The bank has enough reserves to “extinguish the fire for now,” but its further interventions could in the long run be challenging, he said.

With a weaker currency, Türkiye’s import costs will rise, adding pres-

sure to inflation, he said, as Türkiye is import-reliant in several fields.

In a note to investors last week, JP Morgan cautioned that political instability could have long-term economic consequences for Türkiye.

The financial institution raised Türkiye’s year-end inflation forecast to 29.5 percent from 27 percent, while revising up the estimate of the monthly rise in the consumer price index for this month to 3.2 percent, from 2.3 percent.

Atilla Yesilada, an economic analyst in Istanbul, said a rate cut that had been expected next month may now be delayed.

“We expect another cut, but this could be reversed in light of recent developments. We’ll have to wait and see,” he said. “Right now, markets are volatile, but this could subside in the coming days.”

XINHUA

Wild return

A Patagonian rhea, also known as Darwin’s rhea (*Rhea pennata*), bursts out of its transport crate as part of a conservation initiative led by Fundacion Rewilding Chile. The program involves the translocation of 15 rheas between Chile and Argentina to enhance genetic diversity in the Patagonia National Park in Chile. REWILDING CHILE VIA AFP

WORLD

EU awakens to reality of 'America First'

While US tariffs pose threat to continent, experts see chance for greater autonomy

By ZHENG WANYIN in London
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Tariffs of 25 percent that US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose on the European Union may push the bloc toward greater strategic autonomy, even if uncertainties remain on how far things will go, experts say.

"If Trump imposes the threatened 25-percent tariffs or any tariffs on Europe, which he has so far only indicated but not implemented, it will send the Europeans further down the road that they are already taking, which is, increasingly, they are talking about their own autonomy," said Radhika Desai, a professor in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba in Canada and a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

"But with Trump it's hard to tell. One day he is imposing tariffs, and another day he is reversing or modifying them. Exactly how that unfolds will depend."

The specter of 25-percent tariffs on all imports to the US from the EU came into play in late February when Trump told reporters in a cabinet meeting at the White House that "we'll be announcing it very soon."

Tariffs of 25 percent on all steel and aluminum imports into the US came into effect on March 12. In response, the European Commission has said it will retaliate in two steps, targeting US exports worth up to 26 billion euros (\$28 billion).

However, the first step, originally to take effect on April 1, has been delayed until mid-April, pending negotiations, the commission announced last week.

Desai described the EU countermeasures as "saber-rattling noises", saying the Europeans "must be seen" to stand up to Trump to send a message to him and European voters generally.

'Historically close'

"The question is how much (European countries) want to separate from the US. Because at the end of the day, the relations between the big capitalist classes of the US and Europe are fairly close, and they have historically been made so.

"The other question is how much they can assert their autonomy, particularly in the form in which they are saying they will do so, which is extremely belligerent, warlike. They said, 'We are going to arm ourselves' or 'We are going to spend more on European security' ... The fact of the matter is that there are all sorts of logistical problems with this.

"Overall, things are going to get a

Europe was utterly and completely unprepared for this situation. ... Trump has made his position and attitude toward Europe clear, but Europe was still living in a dreamland, really."

Martin Jacques, senior fellow at Tsinghua University and Fudan University

lot more confusing. It's not that we're going to see a very straightforward emergence of an autonomous Europe."

Martin Jacques, a senior fellow at Tsinghua University in Beijing and Fudan University in Shanghai, said Europe is "in a quandary", having realized only belatedly what a serious impact so-called America First policies could have on the continent.

"Europe was utterly and completely unprepared for this situation. There was really no excuse for this lack of preparation. We've had Trump 1.0. We've had all the stuff coming from him in the four years since he was out of office. Trump has made his position and attitude toward Europe clear, but Europe was still living in a dreamland, really.

"The dreamland was the relationship with the US was absolutely secure and would continue. So it has never had a plan B; it only had plan A, and that was the relationship with the US."

Jacques said he has discerned a "grudging acceptance" among European leaders that the old days are largely over, which may lead to a more united EU.

"When you think all this has happened in a matter of days and weeks, people move at different speeds in the face of new realities. Some people do that very quickly, some people don't want to believe it, but I think that we are now in a situation where (we can see where) things are going to go.

"Europe's reactions to the shifts (will) probably have the effect of bringing Europe more together."

Online
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Online
See more by scanning the code.



People gather by the rubble of a collapsed building at the site of a reported US airstrike on Yemen's Houthi-held capital Sanaa on Monday. MOHAMMED HUWAIS / AFP

White House 'leaks' Yemen war plans

WASHINGTON — Top Trump administration officials mistakenly disclosed war plans in a messaging group that included a journalist shortly before the United States attacked Yemen's Houthi, the White House said on Monday, following a firsthand account by The Atlantic.

Democratic lawmakers swiftly blasted the misstep, saying it was a breach of US national security and a violation of law that must be investigated by Congress.

The Atlantic's editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg said in a report on Monday that he was unexpectedly invited on March 13 to an encrypted chat group on the Signal messaging app called the "Houthi PC small group". In the group, US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz asked his deputy Alex Wong to set up a "tiger team" to coordinate US action against the Houthis.

National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said the chat group appeared to be authentic.

US President Donald Trump launched a campaign of large-scale military strikes against Yemen's

Houthis on March 15 over the group's attacks on Red Sea shipping. He has warned Iran that it needed to immediately halt support to the group.

Hours before those strikes started, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth posted operational details about the plan in the messaging group, "including information about targets, weapons the US would be deploying, and attack sequencing", Goldberg said. His report omitted the details but termed it a "shockingly reckless" use of Signal chat.

Accounts that appeared to represent Vice-President JD Vance, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles, and senior National Security Council officials were in the chat group, Goldberg wrote.

Trump told reporters that he was unaware of the incident. "I don't know anything about it. I'm not a big fan of The Atlantic," he said.

A White House official said later that an investigation was underway and Trump had been briefed on it. Hughes of the National Security

Council said in a statement: "At this time, the message thread that was reported appears to be authentic, and we are reviewing how an inadvertent number was added to the chain."

Under US law, it can be a crime to mishandle, misuse or abuse classified information, though it is unclear whether those provisions might have been breached in this case. The Atlantic report said the messages were set up by Waltz to disappear from the Signal app after a period of time — raising questions about possible violations of federal recordkeeping laws.

Top intelligence officials will face Congress this week to offer their first testimony in office about the threats facing the US and tackle urgent questions about the security breach.

The US strikes on Houthi entered their 10th day without any sign of stopping. The airstrikes pounded sites across the country into early Tuesday, with the group saying one attack in the capital killed at least two people and wounded more than a dozen others.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Briefly

DR CONGO Lab testing confirms malaria outbreak

Testing has confirmed that an initially unidentified illness that killed more than 50 people in northwest Democratic Republic of Congo was malaria, the country's National Public Health Institute said on Monday. At least 943 people fell sick and 52 died in Equateur Province at the start of the year, with symptoms ranging from fever and fatigue to vomiting and weight loss. Health officials said in February that the condition was suspected to be either malaria or food poisoning.

AUSTRALIA Budget unveiled as federal election looms

The Australian Labor government unveiled the federal budget on Tuesday ahead of the upcoming election. Delivering his budget speech to the parliament, Treasurer Jim Chalmers outlined five key priorities of the 2025-26 budget: easing cost-of-living pressures, strengthening Medicare, expanding housing, investing in education and boosting economic resilience. Australia's economy is set to grow from 1.5 percent this year to 2.5 percent by 2026-27, driven by a rebound in private sector demand, he said.

FRANCE Chewing gum releases microplastics: Study

Chewing gum releases hundreds of tiny plastic pieces straight into people's mouths, researchers said on Tuesday. The study comes as researchers have increasingly been discovering small shards of plastic, called microplastics, throughout the world. They have also discovered microplastics riddled throughout human bodies, sparking fears of the potential effect this could be having on health. There is no evidence directly showing that microplastics are harmful to human health, said Sanjay Mohanty, the lead researcher behind the new study.

AGENCIES — XINHUA

Indonesian economy faces headwinds

By PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong and LEONARDUS JEGHO in Jakarta

Recent losses in Indonesia's stock and currency markets reflect uncertainties over the country's economic prospects this year as concerns over local policies, US tariffs and falling commodity prices weigh on Southeast Asia's biggest economy, analysts say.

The rupiah fell to a record 16,642 against the dollar during early trade on Tuesday, the weakest level for the Indonesian currency since the Asian financial crisis in 1998. It recovered in the afternoon thanks to intervention by the Bank Indonesia, the country's central bank.

Earlier on March 18, a steep sell-off in equities forced the Jakarta Stock Exchange to temporarily halt

trading after the benchmark Jakarta Composite Index tumbled 7.1 percent — its biggest intraday slump since September 2011. The index recovered in the afternoon session, but it still closed more than 3 percent lower. The losses were extended in the following week, with the index closing 1.55 percent lower on Monday.

The government has set a 5.2 percent GDP target for this year. However, President Prabowo Subianto is aiming for an 8 percent growth during his first term that ends in 2029.

Indonesia is facing "a lot of headwinds", said Alicia Garcia-Herrero, chief economist for Asia-Pacific at the French investment bank Natixis.

Apart from concerns over the management of the sovereign wealth fund Danantara and the huge household debt, the Indone-

sian economy is taking a hit from weak global commodity prices and United States President Donald Trump's decision to slap punitive tariffs on major trading partners, Garcia-Herrero said.

Indonesia is one of the world's biggest commodity exporters, and earnings from mineral and agricultural exports have long propped up its economy.

However, in the first two months of this year, Indonesia's tax revenues fell by more than 30 percent to 187.8 trillion rupiah (\$11.3 billion). Anggito Abimanyu, Indonesia's deputy finance minister, said earlier this month that a decline in coal, oil and nickel prices is one of the key reasons behind the lower revenues.

The "accumulation of the various negative sentiments, which are global and domestic, has contribut-

ed to the fall" of the main Jakarta stock market index, said Primus Dorimulu, chief communication officer of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Rumors that the widely respected Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati could resign from her post have also hurt market sentiment, he said. The rumors have been dispelled by the Presidential Communications Office.

Josua Pardede, chief economist of Permata Bank in Jakarta, said the market reaction to Danantara has been "relatively mixed, with ongoing concerns about its governance".

"However, as the government has revealed the management and advisory team, I believe public caution may start to ease."

Leonardus Jegho is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

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US urged to halt port fees for Chinese ships

By BELINDA ROBINSON in New York
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A coalition of US trade associations, shipping companies and businesses wrote letters and testified before the United States Trade Representative's Office (USTR), urging it not to go ahead with a proposed \$1.5 million fee on Chinese-made ships that enter US ports.

More than 500 letters and comments were sent to the Section 301 hearings on "China Targeting the Maritime, Logistics, and Shipbuilding Sectors for Dominance", which took place at the International Trade Commission on March 24 and March 26 in Washington DC.

Captain Thomas R. Byrne, operations manager at the East Coast Stevedore Co, wrote in a letter: "The proposed service fee ... threatens to have significant negative repercussions for the livelihoods of many Americans.

"By imposing this fee, the cost of maritime trade will increase, placing additional financial strain on US

businesses, particularly those reliant on efficient and affordable shipping services."

Some of the organizations in attendance over the two-day hearing included the Chamber of Marine Commerce, National Retail Federation, American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA), China Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry and the American Soybean Association (ASA).

Mike Koehne, an Indiana soybean farmer and ASA director, told the hearing that "imposing port fees on most of the maritime fleet that exports from and imports to the US will increase costs for US farmers — both in terms of inputs like fertilizer, seed, et cetera, and getting crops to market.

"While well intended, this proposal would ensure US soybeans will bear higher costs and be less competitive in the global marketplace," he said.

A final decision on the fees is expected after the hearings. The USTR did not respond to a request for comment.

In the run-up to the event, the plans faced further opposition from more

than 30 US trade groups that warned in a study that "the various remedies suggested by USTR finds that in every case they would result in net losses for the US economy, US trade, and most of the US shipbuilding supply chain".

The American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA), a trade association that represents over 80 public ports, added in its comments to the hearing: "AAPA respectfully urges USTR to reconsider its approach to countering Chinese dominance in the global shipbuilding industry.

"USTR's proposal would raise prices for consumers and businesses, lead to chaos across the nation's port and transportation industries, and would not reduce the international shipping industry's reliance on Chinese shipyards."

The planned fees did, however, gain support from 63 congressional Democrats in a letter to US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

The hearing came about after the United Steelworkers and four other unions urged former president Joe Biden's administration in March 2024

to launch an investigation into China's dominance in shipbuilding.

While US shipyards dominated the trade in 1975, with around 70 commercial ships on order for production, it now produces under 1 percent of the world's commercial vessels.

The drop in production came as Chinese shipbuilders sailed full steam ahead and increased their share of global shipbuilding tonnage from 5 percent in 1999 to over 50 percent in 2023. China produced more than 1,000 oceangoing vessels last year; the US produced 10.

Additionally, the USTR found that China's ownership of the commercial world fleet is over 19 percent as of January 2024; and the country is responsible for production of 95 percent of shipping containers and 86 percent of the world's supply of intermodal chassis, among other components and products.

It concluded in a report that China's dominance is "unreasonable and burdens or restricts US commerce" and is actionable under Section 301 of the 1974 Trade Act — a law that allows the

USTR to investigate and respond to foreign trade practices deemed unfair.

The gap between the two nations' current shipbuilding capacity led to the proposal of fees to boost and subsidize the American industry.

The fees could include \$1 million per vessel on any ship owned by a Chinese transport operator or \$1,000 per net ton of a vessel's cargo capacity. There would be a fee of up to \$1.5 million on Chinese companies and vessels or maritime transport operators that use Chinese-built ships, based on the percentage of Chinese ships in their fleet. That could mean up to \$3 million per visit.

The fees also could hit operators who plan to order vessels from Chinese shipyards in the next two years. The charges would target any operator that used Chinese ships. The USTR said it requested consultations with the government of China on April 17, 2024.

Nate Herman, senior vice-president of policy for AAFA, told the hearing Monday: "Hard-working American families cannot afford further price increases and product shortages, and American manufacturers and farmers cannot afford to lose more export markets."

While the US wants to spur a resurgence, its shipbuilding industry has been in steep decline since the 1970s. Before China became the dominant shipbuilder, Japan and South Korea were steaming ahead.

If the fees go ahead, the US has set a target of at least 1 percent of US exports to be shipped on US vessels. Then it would be 3 percent of US exports on US-flagged vessels after two years and 5 percent after three years. Seven years on, the restrictions would require at least 15 percent of US goods to be transported on US vessels, with 5 percent on American-built ships.

Edward Gonzalez, CEO of Florida-based Seaboard Marine, the largest US-owned international ocean cargo carrier, testified Monday: "National interest will not be served if the effort to boost American shipbuilding unintentionally destroys American-owned carriers."

The only way for a firm to avoid the fees would be for the vessel operator to be based outside of China and have a fleet with less than 25 percent of its ships built in China.

Agencies contributed to this story.

BUSINESS

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More companies make beeline for Shanghai

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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Several enterprises have vowed to invest in Shanghai amid continued efforts by the city to improve government efficiency and facilitate technology innovation.

Their investment commitments came during the Shanghai Global Investment Promotion Conference 2025 held on Tuesday, which also marked the beginning of a weeklong business soliciting activity named "Invest in Shanghai".

The city inked a total of 21 new projects during the conference, covering sectors such as advanced materials, integrated circuits, high-end equipment, biomedicine, green and low-carbon development, digital economy and intelligent computing.

Among the newly signed projects were a new production facility and the regional headquarters of Shanghai Superconductor Technology Co Ltd. With a total investment of 2.5 billion yuan (\$340 million), the project — located in Zhangjiang of Shanghai's Pudong New Area — is projected to be the world's first large-scale industrial-level production and R&D base for second-generation high-temperature superconducting tapes.

At least 15,000 such tapes will be produced at the new facility, which is scheduled to become operational in 18 months, according to the company's chairman, Ma Tao.

This annual output equals to 5 billion yuan of industrial value. These tapes are widely used in high-speed transportation, large scientific equipment, electricity supply and high-end medical devices, among others.

Zhangjiang's emphasis on "hard technologies", a vibrant entrepreneurship spirit, and the pursuit of technology advancement among local companies can help land high-efficiency industrial projects.

Shanghai's focus on the nuclear fusion industry and several attempts at the application of superconducting cables will benefit the superconducting industry in general, said Ma.

On Tuesday, the second batch of Shanghai's industrial transformation and upgrade fund, valued at 50 billion yuan, as well as the State-owned Capital M&A Fund Matrix of Shanghai, also valued at over 50 billion yuan, were launched.

The funds will invest in emerging industries such as new generation electronic information, high-end equipment, biomedicine and civil aviation, among others.

Financial services conglomerate China Renaissance will work closely with the new funds, according to the company's chief executive officer, Wang Lixing.

State-backed funds in Shanghai have been quite active, sticking to market practices, and this has greatly facilitated the city's efforts to attract new businesses, he said.

"While China Renaissance started to serve as the external partner of companies about 10 years ago, the municipal government and district-level administrations in Shanghai have long assumed such a role, addressing companies' needs while making little disruptions to the daily operations of companies," he said.

Technology advancement has been one major feature of this year's conference.

As China has taken the lead in the development of humanoid robots, embodied intelligence and artificial intelligence, China Renaissance will step up its investments in these sectors, said Wang.

Li Shufu, chairman of automotive company Geely Holding Group, made a keynote speech with a pair of smart augmented reality glasses.

Part of the research team for the glasses, made by a Geely ecosystem company, is based in Shanghai. Since Shanghai is the accelerator driving Geely's technological transformation and globalization, the company will increase its investment in the city, focusing on new energy vehicles, intelligent connectivity and the methanol-hydrogen ecosystem, he said.

While Shanghai helped companies save 116 billion yuan last year, it will introduce more measures this year to reduce their cost of financing, transformation and logistics, Shanghai Mayor Gong Zheng said during the conference.

The development plan for 14 district-level leading industries was also released on Tuesday.

While aiming to bring their respective industrial value up to 100 billion yuan by the end of this year, the plan will help improve efficiency by seeking differentiated development paths and avoiding redundancies, said Chen Feifei, director of the comprehensive planning division at the Shanghai Economic and Informatization Commission.



A robot attracts delegates during the Shanghai Global Investment Promotion Conference 2025 held on Tuesday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Central bank conducts MLF operation

The People's Bank of China, the central bank, on Tuesday conducted a 450 billion yuan (\$62.68 billion) one-year medium-term lending facility operation to maintain ample liquidity in the country's banking system. With 387 billion yuan in MLF funds maturing this month, the move has resulted in a net liquidity injection of 63 billion yuan. It is the first net injection through MLF since July 2024. The operation indicates a moderately loose monetary policy stance, said Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank. Since the beginning of this year, the central bank has employed various tools to inject liquidity, helping to maintain adequate liquidity

and stable interest rates.

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 8 pips to 7.1788 against the US dollar on Tuesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the inter-bank market each business day.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BOAO FORUM



Wu Xiaojun, Huang Qifan and Peng Sen (from left to right) at a high-level dialogue on China's reform and economic prospects during the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

GDP showing more signs of stabilizing

Experts stress need for further deepened reforms, opening-up

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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China's economy is showing clear signs of steady recovery with a sound showing in the first two months, and is back on track for healthy, sustainable growth, bolstered by a mix of stimulus policies and meaningful reforms measures in the pipeline, economists said on Tuesday.

As the world's second-largest economy still grapples with pressing challenges from lack of effective demand, downward pressure and subdued expectations, they emphasized the need for further deepened reforms and opening-up as well as targeted measures to accelerate the shift toward consumption-driven growth.

"China's economy has weathered storms and is now firmly on the path of stable, healthy and sustainable development. This recovery trend is irreversible," Peng Sen, president of the China Society of Economic Reform, said during a high-level dialogue on China's reform and economic prospects during the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025. The forum will last from Tuesday to Friday in Boao, Hainan province.

Looking ahead, Peng, who is also former deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, said China's long-term goal for 2035 is for per capita GDP to reach the level of moderately developed countries, which requires doubling the nation's total GDP from its 2020 level and implying an average annual GDP growth rate of 4.73 percent.

"If we can achieve 5 percent GDP growth this year, we can meet the objectives for the period during the

China's economy has weathered storms and is now firmly on the path of stable, healthy and sustainable development."

Peng Sen, president of the China Society of Economic Reform

14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). However, the key challenge is maintaining stability and preventing economic downturns," he added.

Peng said that while stability is crucial, the ultimate goal is seeking progress through high-quality development and deepened economic reforms.

"Reform and opening-up remain key for China's economic future," Peng said, adding that the key focus should be placed on deepening economic structural reforms. Despite the continued recovery trend, China's broader economy is still facing pressing challenges from lackluster demand, operational difficulties faced by some enterprises and still lukewarm expectations.

Peng attributed the sluggish domestic demand to China's previously long-standing emphasis on investment-led growth over consumption. "China's total household consumption accounts for just 38 percent of GDP, compared to around 60 percent in most developed countries. If the gap is not addressed, achieving high-quality growth will be difficult," he added.

Recently, the General Office of the

Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council — China's Cabinet — issued a special action plan to boost consumption. According to the plan, the country will ramp up its support for the consumer goods trade-in program and utilize more fiscal funds to empower local authorities in expanding these initiatives.

Peng spoke highly of the government's intensified efforts to bring about a consumption-driven economy, adding that structural reforms in fields like income distribution systems, market-based allocation of resources as well as fiscal and taxation systems will be crucial in shifting toward a consumption-driven economy.

Wu Xiaojun, dean of Renmin University of China's National Academy of Financial Research, stressed that confidence among consumers, investors and businesses is fundamental to growth.

"Confidence stems from a sound legal system. While China has made significant progress in legal reforms, further improvements are necessary to meet the standards of developed economies," Wu said.

Wu underscored that institutional reforms — more so than short-term policies — will be critical in shaping China's economic trajectory. "Policies provide temporary adjustments, but institutions and the rule of law create a stable foundation for long-term prosperity," he said.

Despite ongoing trade tensions and decoupling efforts by some nations, Huang Qifan, former mayor of Chongqing, said China has made considerable progress in deepening reforms and expanding high-standard opening-up over the past decade.

"No matter what the global situation is, China's doors to the outside world will continue to open wider," Huang said.

BYD on track for global success

By LI FUSHENG
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Chinese new energy vehicle maker BYD saw its 2024 total revenue rise over 29 percent year-on-year to 777.1 billion yuan (\$107 billion), outperforming Tesla for the first time.

That brought its net profit attributable to shareholders to 40.25 billion yuan last year, up 34 percent from the previous year, according to the financial results released on Monday.

In comparison, Tesla's total revenue was \$97.69 billion in 2024, a 1 percent increase from \$96.7 billion in 2023. Its net income decreased to \$7.13 billion, down from \$15 billion in 2023.

BYD's core business — automobiles and related products — generated approximately 617.38 billion yuan last year, up 27.7 percent year-on-year, accounting for 79.45 percent of total revenue. Tesla's automotive revenues fell 6 percent to \$77 billion.

Meanwhile, revenue from BYD's mobile phone components, assembly and other product segments reached 159.61 billion yuan, representing a 34.6 percent increase and 20.54 percent of total revenue.

BYD's improved profitability can be attributed to multiple factors: the company's expanding market competitiveness coupled with economies of scale has helped lower unit production costs, widening its profit margins.

In 2024, BYD sold a total of 4.27 million new energy vehicles globally, marking a significant 41.26 percent year-on-year increase, of which 1.76 million were EVs.

Tesla's total sales fell 1.81 percent year-on-year to 1.79 million units in the same year.

The strong performance underscores BYD's growing dominance in the NEV market as it continues to scale production and expand its technological advantages.

Last year, China's NEV market totaled 12.86 million units, up 35.5 percent year-on-year, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. Of those NEVs, 33.2 percent were produced by BYD, said the CAAM.

BYD's prowess in building affordable automobiles has made the company's cars a compelling option in China's highly competitive auto market, although it also offers vehicles with a price tag of over 1 million yuan, like its Yangwang series.

Its Seagull EV, priced from 69,800 yuan, features cutting-edge technology such as advanced driver assistance software. Called God's Eye, the software is becoming standard on all BYD models, said its Chairman Wang Chuanfu.

Last week, the automaker unveiled a new battery and charging system — dubbed the Super e-Platform — that can charge at peak speeds of 1,000kW, providing around 400 kilometers of range in just five minutes.

BYD's R&D expenses stood at 54.2 billion yuan in 2024, up 36 percent year-on-year, according to its financial results.

Analysts at Soochow Securities estimate BYD sales will hit between 5.3 million and 5.5 million units in 2025, up 25 to 30 percent year-on-year. They expect BYD's overseas sales to double from the 2024 levels to 800,000 units, as it takes on global rivals outside of China.

In January, BYD's sales in the United Kingdom surged 550.8 percent to 1,614 units, seizing 1.2 percent of the country's overall vehicle market share.

It is the first time that the company has outsold Tesla on a monthly basis in the country, which saw its sales fall 8 percent to 1,458 in the same month, said the country's Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.

Free trade ports key to region's growth

By MIKE GU in Boao, Hainan
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Free trade ports can drive connectivity and opening-up forward especially in a changing world where geopolitical shifts, poverty and even supply chain disruptions prevail, as emphasized by guests and experts participating in the Free Trade Port Development session on Tuesday under the 2025 Boao Forum for Asia.

Ban Ki-moon, chairman of Boao Forum for Asia, said the impressive participation at the 2025 forum shows how important promoting free trade is, especially in a turbulent world where unfair trade caused by protectionism is rising. This is why it is essential to develop free trade ports to deepen global connectivity and cooperation, he added.

Promoting the growth of free trade ports can help Asia, now an engine of global growth, to promote multilateralism and reject protec-

tionism, stressed John Lee Ka-chiu, chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, at the conference.

"Hong Kong is a global city that thrives on connecting the world. For over a century, Hong Kong has thrived as a free port. Now an international financial, shipping and trade center, Hong Kong is celebrated for its strategic location and world-class connectivity," Lee said at the conference.

Aranca Gonzalez, former Spanish foreign minister, said at the conference that free trade zones are playing a healthier role today in addressing global risks and challenges, particularly in countering the rise of trade protectionism and fostering sound global economic growth.

Leong Vai Tac, former secretary for economy and finance of the government of Macao Special Administrative Region, said during the

conference that in addition to Hong Kong, Macao is also a global trade hub and an important free trade port, a fact that was mentioned several times by guests on stage. Macao is actively expanding its global network and working hard to attract businesses from around the world to invest, including companies from Africa and Latin America, and is already achieving positive results, he added.

Pei Sai Fan, adjunct professor of the National University of Singapore and former founding director of MAS Academy of Singapore, told China Daily that both Hong Kong and Singapore are world-class free trade ports, with Singapore primarily serving ASEAN and Hong Kong mainly connecting the world through the mainland. Rather than competing, the two can enhance cooperation and connectivity, as collaboration will lead to greater development for both, he stressed.

BUSINESS

CHINA DEVELOPMENT FORUM

Rio Tinto banks on nation's energy shift

By ZHENG XIN
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China's ambitious shift toward green energy is set to fuel significant demand for commodities like copper, aluminum and lithium, creating substantial opportunities for multinational mining giants such as Rio Tinto, its top executive said on Monday.

Speaking in Beijing, Jakob Stausholm, CEO of Rio Tinto, underscored China's indispensable role as the world's major manufacturing powerhouse and a cornerstone market for the Anglo-Australian miner.

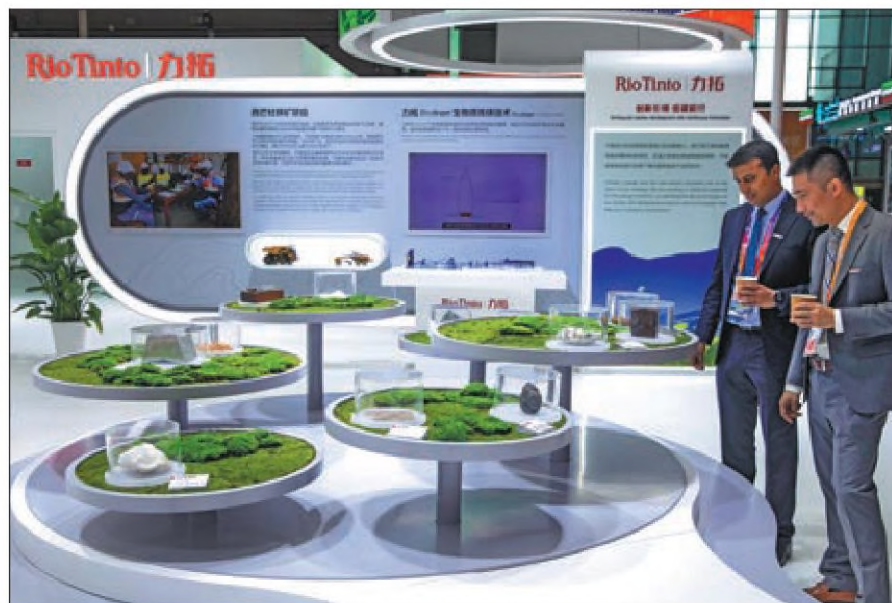
"China, the manufacturing hub of the world, is fundamental for us and accounts for a commanding 57 percent of our total revenue, solidifying its position as our largest customer," said Stausholm.

Beyond just a market for the company, China has been rapidly evolving into a crucial sourcing partner, with procurement from the country exceeding \$4.2 billion in the past year alone, reflecting a deepening economic interdependence, Stausholm said.

He emphasized the country's resolute drive toward a sustainable future through massive investments in solar and wind energy infrastructure, the expansion of sophisticated grid networks, cutting-edge battery production facilities, and the burgeoning electric vehicle industry.

"China is amazing in terms of energy transition, starting from roll-outs of solar energy and onshore wind, expanding the grid network, and EVs. It all leads to more demand for our commodities, providing massive opportunities for multinational corporations like Rio Tinto," he said.

Industry experts believe China's rapidly expanding green energy sector represents an unprecedented market opportunity for international energy companies.



Visitors check out exhibits at the Rio Tinto booth during the seventh China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Jakob Stausholm

China's dual drivers of ambitious carbon neutrality targets and massive renewable energy investments make it a highly compelling destination for global firms, said Wang Lining, director of the oil

market department under the economics and technology research institute of China National Petroleum Corp.

Participation in this dynamic market allows companies to tap into the world's largest energy consumer base, diversify their global operations away from traditional fossil fuels and secure a strategic foothold in the vanguard of the global energy transformation, he said.

Stausholm articulated strong confidence in China's economic trajectory, citing the government's recent reaffirmation of its ambitious 5 percent growth target for the current year amidst a complex global economic landscape.

"China is growing strongly and has just reconfirmed a 5 percent growth target for this year. I see increased

confidence from the government in its growth target," he said.

"I do think that there is a tremendous number of opportunities for innovative growth in China and beyond. It seems that the growth in innovation seems to accelerate."

To effectively meet this anticipated surge in commodity demand, Rio Tinto is strategically ramping up its global production capabilities.

A cornerstone of this strategy, according to Stausholm, is the imminent commencement of production at two major projects, the world-class Simandou iron ore project in Guinea and the strategically vital Western Range project in Australia, both slated to begin operations this year.

These projects are crucial for ensuring a consistent and reliable supply of high-quality iron ore to China's steel industry and the superior grade of iron ore from Simandou will be particularly beneficial for Chinese steelmakers as they intensify their efforts to reduce carbon emissions within their energy-intensive operations, he said.

Beyond the critical role of iron ore, Rio Tinto is strategically positioned to become a key supplier of a broader spectrum of essential materials vital for China's ambitious energy

transition, including lithium, a critical component in batteries powering EVs and energy storage solutions; copper, indispensable for expanding and upgrading electricity grids and renewable energy infrastructure; and aluminum, crucial for lightweighting vehicles and constructing renewable energy systems.

"We are excited to support this innovative growth in China and supplying lithium, copper and aluminum to Chinese industry," Stausholm said.

While acknowledging the prevailing global economic uncertainties and simmering trade tensions that cast a shadow over international commerce, Stausholm emphatically reiterated Rio Tinto's unwavering long-term investment strategy and steadfast commitment to the Chinese market.

China's ambitious energy transition is not merely a regional phenomenon but a global megatrend, said Stausholm.

This will act as a significant and sustained growth driver for Rio Tinto and the broader commodities sector in the foreseeable years to come, positioning the company to benefit from the evolving global economic order, he said.

Global ties more critical amid uncertainties

Former IMF official highlights role of cooperation in mitigating tariff impact

By WANG KEJU
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While the tariff policies wielded by the United States have ushered global businesses into a period of increased uncertainty, China is focused on building open and shared industrial chains to embrace international cooperation, and is leveraging its growing consumption momentum to boost global demand, senior economists said.

"While the high tariffs tipped by US President Donald Trump were a major shock, the deeper problem lies in the pervasive uncertainty that these policies have introduced into the global industrial landscape," said Zhu Min, former deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund, during the recently concluded China Development Forum.

But Washington doesn't just stop there. Zhu said that the Trump administration's recent emphasis on "reciprocity" extends far beyond just tariffs, and includes "equivalence" in market access and capital market openness, among others.

Trying to achieve this level of comprehensive "reciprocity" across all these domains will likely add significant complexity and cost to the process of global industrial restructuring, Zhu said.

Since early this year, the restructuring, mergers and acquisitions of enterprises embedded in the global industrial chain remain sluggish, and large companies are reluctant to commit to long-term investment, due to the sheer scale of prevailing uncertainties stemming from the White House, Zhu added.

The Economic Policy Uncertainty Index for the United States — devised by researchers from Northwestern University, Stanford University and the University of Chicago — surged to an unprecedented level in February, reflecting the confusion and apprehension among investors and businesses since official data on the index were first compiled in 1985.

"This is the critical issue that companies must grapple with in the current environment of profound policy unpredictability," said Miguel Angel Lopez Borrego, CEO and chairman of Thyssen-Krupp AG, a German engineering and steel production enterprise.

Major foreign firms must be able to strike a delicate balance between globalization and regionalization, Borrego said, noting that many of the innovations needed to reshape these crucial global networks can only be realized through close collaboration

between companies and governments across borders.

China possesses some of the most extensive and well-developed industrial and supply chain networks, complemented by a world-class logistics infrastructure, he said, adding that by tapping into China's expansive industrial and logistical resources, and cultivating deeper relationships with local partners, companies are able to reduce their costs and improve resilience to risks, and, more importantly, enhance their competitiveness in the global arena.

"Over the past few years, China's homegrown brands, technologies and domestic market are increasingly underpinning the evolution of its industrial and supply chains," Zhu said. "Meanwhile, Chinese companies are actively extending their reach from domestic value chains to global industrial ecosystems, integrating with international production networks."

Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of consumer electronics company TCL Technology Group, said that Chinese companies are moving beyond a model focused solely on product exports, and instead are increasingly focused on setting up local production and assembly facilities overseas, and establishing regional operational hubs.

By deeply integrating their core competencies such as technological know-how and management skills with local economic development, they can foster open, collaborative and mutually beneficial industrial chains, Li added.

Zhu said China's consumption-boosting initiatives will help bolster overall demand in the international marketplace and emerge as a pivotal contribution to the stability of global industrial chains.

Earlier this month, China's policymakers set the country's deficit-to-GDP ratio at the highest level on record, in order to provide a much-needed boost to the nation's tepid consumer demand, and they also rolled out an action plan to shore up consumer spending, with a focus on increasing household incomes.

Increasing China's consumption base, while fostering the growth of both domestic and foreign brands catering to the Chinese market, will be critical, Zhu said, adding that as Chinese consumers become ever-larger drivers of worldwide demand, they provide a vital counterbalance to the potential volatility and contractions that could otherwise ripple through international supply networks.

China instills confidence for growth

By WANG KEJU

China has instilled global enterprises with greater confidence as the world's second-largest economy has placed a high premium on technological innovation and opening-up at a time when the world is grappling with a confluence of challenges, said a senior executive.



Marc Horn

"We see that the Chinese government's sustained emphasis is on transforming the country toward high-quality growth driven by new quality productive forces," Marc Horn, president of Merck China, told China Daily during the recently concluded China Development Forum 2025.

China has been focused on driving innovation through open collaboration, bringing in foreign direct investments and creating a playing field where multinational firms can bring their global expertise to China while also learning from the innovations coming out of the country, Horn said.

"What is so unique about China's innovation ecosystem is the speed at which customer-focused technological solutions are being commercialized and scaled up, thanks to a well-integrated network of local partners along the industrial chain," Horn said.

The recent success of Chinese artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek, which has captured global attention, is just one example of the country's thriving tech companies that are poised to shape the digital and AI landscape, Horn noted.

"We believe that AI will have a big

impact on our R&D, innovation and production processes," Horn said. "If you're trying to find the best potential combination of many chemicals and molecules to generate a new product, that's where AI can help us a lot."

Over the past decade, Merck has deeply integrated itself into the country's innovation ecosystem through partnerships and investments, establishing manufacturing, technical services and R&D facilities mainly in Shanghai, Beijing and Jiangsu province.

"When we talk about investment now, it's not only about traditional capital expenditures. What we really try to do is to invest in people, talent and local partnerships, tapping into the wealth of knowledge and creativity within China," Horn said.

China's ongoing efforts to advance high-standard opening-

up and foster a more enabling business climate have also anchored the confidence of global firms like Merck amid rising external uncertainties.

Regardless of how the international landscape may evolve, China will unwaveringly push forward with high-standard opening-up, and create a world-class, market-oriented and law-based business environment, said Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the Office of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs.

"Fair and equitable competition" is most important for foreign companies to have success, Horn said. "We really appreciate what the government has been doing over the last couple of years."

"China is now looking at opening-up in sectors such as telecommunication, healthcare and hospitals. I do think that will encourage more companies to come to China and collaborate with local companies," he said.

Bosch sanguine on country's booming AI development

By FAN FEIFEI
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German industrial conglomerate Robert Bosch GmbH is bullish on prospects for applications of cutting-edge artificial intelligence technology and is actively expanding its research and development investment in the Chinese market, its top executive said.

Stefan Hartung, chairman of the board of management at Robert Bosch, said, "We have to see that China becomes not only a manufacturing location, but that it's also very much a research and development location, so about 10,000 of our 56,000 people are now engineers, mathematicians, physicists and people developing software that is made in China, for China."

He said in an interview with China Daily that the Chinese market is very research-intensive and Chinese consumers have very specific needs.



Stefan Hartung

Therefore companies need to also have R&D on the ground in China, and then the people can directly work with customers on the professional side to fit products with needs.

Hartung hailed China's recent achievements in the fast-evolving AI sector, such as the meteoric rise of Chinese AI startup DeepSeek, which has stunned the world with its latest reasoning models.

"That's a good contribution to the world because an open-source model always is a contribution for many people who do research like we do on AI. China definitely has a lot of potential in using AI, and I think going forward, we will also see a lot of applications, maybe in robotics, but maybe in automon-

atives, maybe also core manufacturing operations. So I think there are a lot of opportunities."

He said the company has leveraged the state-of-the-art AI technology in autonomous driving, home appliance products and factories in China, adding, "Our Chinese colleagues are very good at that, so they are taking the newest technologies, applying them and inventing new ones, which is a good thing."

Hartung said Bosch has collaborated with many Chinese AI companies, such as autonomous driving startup WeRide.

"There are many other cooperation arrangements we have with AI companies in China, so it makes perfect sense to do this in cooperation." As for China's emphasis on fostering new growth drivers, Hartung highlighted that the most important drivers include high-quality talents, which come out of schools, and technological innovation.

He said that a raft of policy measures boosting consumption unveiled by Chinese authorities — such as the consumer goods trade-in programs — have benefited the company in businesses of home appliances and auto parts in the world's second-largest economy, while showing optimism about the huge growth potential of China's consumer market.

Moreover, the company is promoting the development of low-carbon supply chains, and contributing to China's circular economy.

"We appreciate the efforts of the Chinese government in driving low-carbon development. Through forward-looking policies and initiatives, China is making remarkable progress and efforts to promote sustainable manufacturing, enhance resource efficiency and advance low-carbon supply chains," Hartung said.

Bosch has taken proactive steps to reduce emissions, enhance resource



Bosch's EV parts on display during an auto show in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

efficiency and integrate low-carbon technologies across its operations, he added. Last year alone, its facilities in China generated and consumed more than 60,000 megawatt-hours of green electricity from self-installed solar power systems — more than three times the level of 2020.

Noting that green hydrogen is a

key technology in helping China achieve its dual carbon goals, he suggested further improving related support policies for the hydrogen industry, particularly in areas like incentivizing the purchase and operation of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, and improving the hydrogen refueling infrastructure.

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Promising outlook for private enterprises

Government policies, economic conditions, market opportunities, technological advancements all point to significant potential for growth of nonpublic sector

By LIU WEILING, HU DONGMEI, LIU WEIFENG and LIU YUKUN in Yinchuan

In 1983, Peng Fan, a 20-year-old graduate from Sichuan province, found himself at the doorstep of a gritty machine tool foundry in Yinchuan, nestled among the wind-swept landscapes of the Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

As Peng looked at the yellow sand and worn-out factory, little did he realize that this very spot would grow into a global powerhouse in 3D printing.

At the time, Yinchuan was considered less developed, but the stark reality he was seeing far exceeded his imagination: workers with faces smeared black, dust filling the workshops, outdated production equipment and products limited to making manhole covers.

Yet, it somehow fueled Peng's determination to not only persevere, but also make a difference.

Going from being a technician to a workshop manager and now chairman, Peng said a spirit of hard work and a determination to innovate and break through barriers became the key factors in his later success in leading machine tool foundry's transformation into Kocel Group Ltd, and in introducing the company's 3D printers to the international market.

Currently, over 80 percent of Kocel's clients are Fortune Global 500 companies and industry leaders. Among its 20 subsidiaries, 12 are national-level high-tech enterprises, while three have been recognized as "little giant" firms by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Little giant firms are top performers of small and medium-sized enterprises among specialized, high-end and innovation-driven manufacturing sectors.

Kocel also boasts more than 10 innovation platforms, both at national and provincial levels.

At a private enterprise symposium held in Beijing on Feb 17, Peng was the only entrepreneur representative from Ningxia to participate in the event attended by China's top leadership.

Peng highlighted how conversations during the event notably enhanced the confidence of private enterprises.

"The current environment, government policies, economic conditions, market opportunities, and technological advancements all contribute to a significant potential for growth. In an era where technology drives the progression of the fourth industrial revolution, the outlook for private enterprises is both expansive and promising," he said.

On international stage

Peng's pursuit of technological innovation dates back to the late 1980s when he accompanied then factory director Sun Wenjing on a sales trip to Japan to promote castings, only to be ridiculed for their product quality.



Above: Peng Fan (center), chairman of Kocel Group Ltd, and his colleagues work on a production line at Kocel Group Ltd in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

Below: A foreign journalist studies a 3D printed Terracotta Warrior at Kocel Group Ltd in Yinchuan in September. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“Innovation can be likened to embracing change, whereas stagnation is akin to inviting demise. Remaining stagnant inevitably leads to decline, while embracing change, though one may fail, offers a potential solution.”

Peng Fan, chairman of Kocel Group Ltd

To meet the needs of its Japanese clients, staff members — from factory leaders to chief engineers and workshop managers — focused on technical improvements.

After two months of preparations, the samples were approved by the Japanese clients.

Subsequently, the foundry gradually established joint ventures with Japanese companies.

After gaining a foothold in the Japanese market, they set their sights on the European and US markets, targeting an order from US-based General Electric Co for power machinery castings.

At the time, high-end castings in China were reliant on imports, and GE's requirements for gas turbine castings were stringent, requiring precision testing through X-rays, ultrasonic waves, and standards far exceeding domestic levels.

After prolonged efforts of systematic process improvements and alignment with standards, as well as nearly 100 million yuan (\$13.8 million) in equipment upgrades, Kocel Group Ltd successfully received orders from General Electric, becoming a major supplier in the Asia-Pacific region.

This breakthrough quickly triggered a chain reaction, with international companies such as Siemens in Germany signing cooperation agreements.

"In the past, manufacturing companies focused more on production and manufacturing, investing more people and resources in this area, while marketing as well as research and development were relatively weaker. With the development of digitization and intelligence, manufacturing has become less labor-intensive, with investments in marketing as well as research and development growing larger," Peng said.

Despite the current challenges faced by China's manufacturing sector in expanding globally, including geopolitical tensions and trade conflicts, Peng emphasized that leveraging technology-driven products and implementing the "close enough to clients" strategy — establishing branches or factories near clients overseas — are crucial factors for achieving success.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, shared a similar view.

Zhou noted that industries like machinery are now facing more complex overseas environments and heightened investment scrutiny from host countries.

He emphasized the importance of seizing opportunities in competitive markets such as the Middle East and emerging economies.

Furthermore, Zhou stressed the need for companies to embrace technological and environmentally friendly practices by developing green technologies, adopting new energy solutions, supporting eco-friendly initiatives, and actively engaging in sustainable development efforts.

Manufacturing innovation

In 2012, Peng first encountered 3D printing technology abroad and realized that this would be a revolutionary breakthrough for the casting industry. However, the integration of traditional casting with 3D printing posed exceptionally high difficulties, and internal opposition was relentless.

"There were voices that (said) once we fail, we'll lose everything." Peng defied the odds, investing 2 billion yuan in R&D and embarking

on a multiyear challenge.

During the R&D process, there were several years of investment exceeding profits, he said.

"We invested over 2 billion yuan, unsure if it would succeed, and at one point, I was very anxious," he said.

Looking back now, Peng's decision at the time proved undoubtedly right.

In recent years, there have been heated discussions of the hyper-competition in the manufacturing industry.

Many manufacturing companies have competed for market share through low-quality and homogeneous products, manifesting as price wars and surplus outdated capacity, without improving efficiency or technological progress, leading to an overall decline in industry profits.

On the reasons for the hyper-competition, Zhu Keli, executive director of the China Information Industry Association, highlighted several key factors: Constrained market capacity compels certain companies to engage in "price wars", a significant level of product homogenization, and a proliferation of low-level redundant construction of products.

At the policy level, a clear governance direction is evident.

The Central Economic Work Conference in December explicitly called for systemic regulation of cut-throat competition. Building upon this move, the 2025 Government Work Report underscored the removal of market barriers, advocating for strategic actions like eliminating entry and exit obstacles, enhancing factor allocation mechanisms, and establishing a unified national market.

In this context, intelligent manufacturing and differentiated competition offer a path forward for enterprises.

Peng cited Charles Handy's Second Curve theory to tell the transformation and upgrade story of his company.

The theory emphasizes that organizations must cultivate new growth drivers before their existing businesses reach maturity, and companies should consistently explore and pursue innovative revenue sources.

He said innovation and the adoption of new technologies are crucial for the traditional manufacturing sector to transition to value-added, future-oriented strategies.

Talking about the pressure that a company may face by investing heavily on innovation and not knowing if it works out, Peng said: "Innovation can be likened to embracing change, whereas stagnation is akin to inviting demise. Remaining stagnant inevitably leads to decline, while embracing change, though one may fail, offers a potential solution."

Peng and his team's striving for innovation has paid off.

Today, the company's 3D printing equipment has been among the top in global sales for five consecutive

years, supplying a large group of the world's top 500 companies.

Its digital factory model has been promoted to areas such as the Yangtze River Delta region, with a five-fold increase in per capita efficiency and a 50 percent reduction in production cycles.

Peng said that at present, there are many AI models in industrial scenarios, such as those empowering production lines, factories, and management in manufacturing, which will trigger an intelligent transformation in production manufacturing.

"We have a plan for three to five years to develop AI models and scenarios and conduct small-scale verification and promotion in industrial scenarios. Our annual R&D investment accounts for more than 8 percent of sales revenue, investing about 100-200 million yuan," he said.

"Our goal is to achieve intelligence in high-end equipment manufacturing, 3D printing, and intelligent manufacturing services, further deepening AI empowerment and application. Later, we will conduct AI research development in different scenarios in the industrial field in the first three years, apply our technology in production, and promote the experience to other players in the industry," he added.

Peng said that the current environment, policies, economic situation, market space, and technological area have brought broad development prospects for enterprises.

"The government supports the development of the private economy, and the rest is to roll up our sleeves and work. In terms of innovation capability, adapting to the market, and development, private enterprises have unique advantages. In an era of technology as the driving force for the fourth industrial revolution transformation and development, private enterprises have broad prospects and great potential," he said.

The remarks echoed the primary objectives outlined in the Government Work Report, emphasizing the crucial need for the effective implementation of policies and measures to bolster the growth of the private sector, all the while safeguarding the lawful rights and interests of private enterprises and entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the report advocated for capable private companies to cultivate a robust modern corporate framework infused with distinct Chinese characteristics, positioning this as a focal point in the government's agenda for 2025.

According to data released by the State Administration for Market Regulation, as of the end of January, the total number of private enterprises in China had surged to 56.7 million, marking a 4.2-fold increase compared to the number recorded in 2012.

Contact the writers at liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

Ningxia mulls lift as global wine hub

By LIU WEILING, HU DONGMEI, LIU WEIFENG and LIU YUKUN in Yinchuan

An image of flowers thriving in the rugged crevices of mountains in China's northwest embodies a remarkable resilience that has captivated a group of young entrepreneurs from Shanghai, inspiring them to establish roots in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, create the Dulaan winery, and venture into the global wine market.

They are riding the wave fueled by the Ningxia government to actively support and foster the wine industry with favorable policies.

Leveraging its distinctive climate and environmental advantages, Ningxia is making an effort to grow into an international hub for wine production.

Among the visionaries is Xue Yingzi from Shanghai, deputy man-

ager of Dulaan, who identifies herself as part of the new wave of entrepreneurs in Ningxia. Drawn by local incentives and the enchanting landscapes beneath the Helan Mountains, coupled with the quality of local wine production, Xue's boss decided to establish a winery and chose her to oversee the project.

Xue said she initially grappled with adapting to the rhythm of life in this new setting. "Our company is headquartered in Shanghai, and during the construction phase, I found myself flying back and forth almost every month, adapting to the climate and learning the art of winemaking while overseeing construction projects, all amid the unforeseen challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic."

Encompassing an expanse of 3,303 mu (220 hectares) of land, with an initial phase covering 1,415 mu and a planned investment of 1.5

“I believe this resilience, perseverance and hopefulness are inherent traits of Ningxia and its people.”

Xue Yingzi, deputy manager of Dulaan

billion yuan (\$207 million), the Dulaan winery project aims to develop the entire grape cultivation-to-wine production industry chain, along with wine culture tourism.

Due to the hurdles faced during construction, Xue acknowledges

moments of doubt. Nevertheless, the overall ambience in Ningxia instilled in her a profound sense of optimism that overshadowed the challenges.

"One day, we stumbled upon intricate patterns on the rocks, which upon closer inspection revealed tiny blossoms. Though they were moss, at that moment, they infused us with great strength. I believe this resilience, perseverance and hopefulness are inherent traits of Ningxia and its people, which also boosted my strength to overcome obstacles."

Xue elaborated on their global introduction of grape varieties, the recruitment of overseas research and development experts, and the establishment of a platform for industry exchanges on a global scale. Furthermore, they interwine wine tasting with leisure activities to craft a themed estate



Tourists enjoy a view of the Helan Mountains in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, in October. MAO ZHU / XINHUA

for a serene experience.

In recent years, Ningxia has expedited the profound integration of "wine + cultural tourism", undertaking a series of winery cluster projects and wine tourism complexes.

According to the local wine industry authority, the region has outlined six projects for the integrated

development and enhancement of the wine sector in the eastern foothills of the Helan Mountains, with a total investment of 21.85 billion yuan this year. Presently, with the comprehensive implementation of these plans, several pivotal construction projects in the region have been set in motion.

COMMENT

Editorials

Protectionist shipbuilding measures will create more problems for US

The US Trade Representative's Office is holding a public hearing on its proposed port fees targeting Chinese-built vessels this week, with the move by the Donald Trump administration to 'resurrect' US shipbuilding facing pushback from businesses.

Framing the fees as a response to China's "unfair" practices and of critical importance for national security, the USTR baselessly argues that Chinese government subsidies to its shipbuilding sector harm US businesses, while posing economic and national security risks by creating dependencies that Beijing could weaponize in a potential conflict. These are nothing but excuses fabricated by the US administration to justify its attack on the Chinese shipbuilding industry. The other aim of the move, which enjoys bipartisan support in Congress, is to discourage shippers and ocean carriers from buying Chinese vessels so as to enable US shipyards to fill the vacancy left by their Chinese counterparts.

But the question is whether the stone will prove too heavy to be used to kill the two birds it is aimed at.

A study commissioned from Trade Partnership Worldwide, an economic analysis company, by an ad hoc coalition of farmers, manufacturers and retailers, logistics and transportation services providers, concluded that the various remedies suggested by USTR "would result in net losses for the US economy, US trade, and most of the US shipbuilding supply chain" and "individually and in aggregate, would reduce the US GDP and likely worsen the overall US trade deficit".

The proposed discriminatory shipbuilding measures represent precisely the kind of shortsighted US protectionism that has repeatedly failed to deliver promised benefits while inflicting unnecessary harm on global trade. Such protectionist measures will only isolate US industries from global markets while raising costs for US businesses and consumers.

The proposed targeting of Chinese-built ships represents yet another misguided attempt to blame China for the US' industrial decline. The proposed fees are intended to be used to subsidize the US shipbuilding industry.

But rather than addressing the real challenges facing US shipbuilders — such as outdated technology, lack of investment and inefficient production — the USTR-proposed protectionist measures would increase US shipping costs, reducing the US' trade competitiveness and exacerbating the US trade deficit.

Farmers and energy exporters would be the hardest hit. It is forecast that US agricultural exports — including wheat, soybean and cotton — would face double-digit declines, handing market share to competitors such as Brazil and Australia. US energy exports of coal, oil and gas would also suffer, further weakening the US' position in global trade.

Higher shipping costs would also impact manufacturing, retail and logistics, leading to job losses in ports, the wholesale trade, and consumer industries.

China's competitiveness comes not from subsidies but from its economies of scale, innovations, and efficient supply chains. Chinese shipbuilders lead globally because they deliver high-quality, cost-effective vessels that meet international needs. Instead of scapegoating China, the US should focus on modernizing its shipbuilding industry through R&D and workforce training; strengthening supply chains rather than disrupting them with tariffs; and promoting fair competition instead of resorting to protectionism.

The US should learn from the past. The Jones Act, a federal law that has regulated maritime commerce in the United States since the 1920s, requires goods shipped between US ports to be transported on ships that are built, owned and operated by US citizens or permanent residents. Although the protectionist law was intended to ensure the US could rely on its own ships for transportation in times of need, it eventually weakened its shipbuilding industry's global competitiveness.

Instead of trying to punish China for its industrial successes, the US should invest in its own industrial future. Trying to quick-fix complicated problems is not resolving the US' problems, it is only creating new ones.

Dramatic breakthrough out of reach

The recent talks between US and Russian delegations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, offer a glimmer of hope that progress is being made toward at least a limited ceasefire in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

With the two sides remaining far apart on key issues, the mere fact that talks took place, with the US, Russian and Ukrainian delegations together at the same venue, signals a potential shift from battlefield escalation to diplomatic engagement, a welcome development and one that aligns with China's consistent advocacy for dialogue aimed at a permanent political settlement of the conflict.

The discussions, which lasted 12 hours, focused primarily on securing a temporary halt to attacks on Black Sea shipping and reviving the defunct Black Sea Grain Initiative — a critical agreement that facilitated Ukraine's agricultural exports and stabilized global food prices. The US-brokered 30-day limited ceasefire, which includes preceding pledges by both sides to avoid targeting energy infrastructure, is a modest but meaningful step forward. However, given the deep mutual distrust between Moscow and Kyiv, it would seem to be jumping the gun to anticipate any sudden and dramatic breakthrough. This was highlighted by a statement released by Moscow after the consultations in Riyadh, which said due to Ukraine's position, Russia and the United States failed to reach a joint statement.

But if a Black Sea maritime ceasefire can be put in place that allows both sides to transport grain and fuel, and resume trade in the region, the intention is then to shift the focus to the front lines, and for discussions on a peacekeeping verification mechanism on the battlefield.

China has long maintained that military force will not resolve geopolitical crises and that negotiations must take place to address the legitimate security concerns of all parties. And, as a responsible major country, it has actively promoted peace through initiatives such as the Group of Friends for Peace, which it cofounded with Brazil and other Global South nations to foster a consensus on a political resolution to the crisis.

Speaking before the Riyadh talks and after a meeting of the Group of Friends for Peace on Thursday, Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, said that recent developments suggest that the conflict in Ukraine "might be approaching a turning point, with the focus shifting from the battlefield to the negotiating table". If that is the case, all efforts to promote talks need supporting.

However, for any peace process to succeed, the international community — particularly the US and European nations — must adopt a balanced and impartial approach. While Washington's recent mediation efforts are commendable, lasting peace will only be possible if the security interests of both Russia and Ukraine are considered fairly. The US must resist the temptation to impose one-sided conditions, which would only allow resentment to fester. Moreover, Europe's historical tensions with Russia should not be allowed to derail the negotiations; instead, European leaders should engage constructively to help bridge differences rather than inflame them.

The international community must work together to create conditions conducive to direct Russia-Ukraine negotiations, free from external coercion or geopolitical manipulation. Only through inclusive and equitable diplomacy can this devastating conflict be brought to a just and enduring end. The path to peace remains hard to see, but the Riyadh talks demonstrate that dialogue is not impossible and that with perseverance and diligent efforts the goal of a negotiated peace can be arrived at. China will continue to support all efforts that prioritize a ceasefire, de-escalation, and a permanent settlement of the crisis.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

High-quality development of China offers new opportunities

The two-day China Development Forum 2025, which concluded in Beijing on Monday, has once again demonstrated China's commitment to fostering a stable and open business environment as the world navigates economic uncertainties and geopolitical tensions.

The top executives of global multinationals attending the forum praised China's unwavering openness, saying it will accelerate new industrialization, sustainable growth and digital innovation. They pointed to China's increasing technological prowess and market-driven efficiency as key factors generating fresh prospects for international enterprises. These reflect their view that China is still an attractive investment destination.

Ministry of Commerce data show that 7,574 foreign-invested enterprises were established in China in the first two months of 2025, representing year-on-

year growth of 5.8 percent. Meanwhile, foreign-invested businesses in China saw their export value grow 6.9 percent year-on-year to 1.08 trillion yuan (\$148.78 billion), according to the General Administration of Customs.

Development remains the ultimate driver of economic prosperity, the foundation of human well-being and the most powerful remedy for global tensions.

While some nations remain trapped in a counterproductive zero-sum game, China has chosen the path of bridge-building and inclusive progress. China extends a genuine invitation to the world — cooperation over confrontation, shared growth over isolation and collective prosperity over narrow self-interest.

This approach offers a practical way out of today's economic stagnation. Where others see walls, China builds connections; where some promote decoupling, China

advocates collaboration. In doing so, it reaffirms that the future of global growth lies not in fragmentation, but in unlocking development opportunities for all.

China remains steadfast in advancing an inclusive, mutually beneficial open world economy. This commitment underscores its responsible global leadership while delivering stabilizing forces and strategic impetus to international economic development.

China's economic trajectory remains one of the most compelling stories of the 21st century. By deepening reforms and expanding high-standard opening-up, it is continuously offering opportunities for global enterprises. China's steady hand and inclusive policies provide a much-needed anchor for global growth. The world should take note — those who engage, rather than retreat, will reap the rewards of this dynamic market.

—ZHANG XI, CHINA DAILY

Beijing, Paris securing world from unilateralism

At a regular news conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Monday, the spokesperson announced that Jean-Noël Barrot, the French minister for Europe and foreign affairs, will visit China on Thursday.

The timing of Barrot's visit is significant, a year after the 60th anniversary of China and France forging diplomatic ties. The Chinese leader's state visit to France at the time set bilateral ties on a new journey, having profound and positive impact internationally.

Barrot's upcoming visit will help take China-France ties in the healthy direction

charted by the two nations' leaders.

It's worth noting also that Barrot is visiting China in the year of the 80th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and World War II as well as the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. The international landscape facing mankind is an increasing mix of turbulence and transformation with rising instability and uncertainty, which makes it important for China and France, both permanent members of the UN Security Council and each other's comprehensive strategic partners, to

strengthen collaboration.

Just as the Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, it's imperative that the two nations enhance strategic communication and contribute to world peace, stability and development. Through Barrot's visit, China and France will hopefully consolidate political mutual trust, uphold openness and win-win cooperation, promote solidarity and coordination, safeguard multilateralism, jointly guard against the undertows of unilateralism and the law of the jungle, and inject more certainty into the world.

—ZHANG ZHOULIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Washington should stop cyberattacks targeting mobile users

The report "Mobile Cyberattacks Conducted by US Intelligence Agencies" released by the China Cybersecurity Industry Alliance on Tuesday exposes how relentless the United States-sourced malicious cyber activities targeting China have become in recent years, especially the malicious cyber activities carried out through the global supply chain.

According to the report, the US has conducted intensive malicious cyberattacks and eavesdropping activities against global mobile smart terminals, supply chains, and operators.

The US government has taken advantage of its monopoly in telecommunications technology and in the upstream of the telecommunications industry and supply chains, and carried out large-scale and long-term malicious cyber activities, which have been pervasive, targeting mobile phones and even the entire mobile industry ecosystem globally. It is clear the US is the major country that carries out cyberattacks through the supply chain and mobile operators, though it always tries to stick that label on other countries.

Over the years, the US has blamed others for threatening the security of the supply chain, applied double standards, and

tried every means to hype up the so-called security issues in the 5G supply chain. At the same time, with the cooperation of major US internet companies or equipment suppliers, it has installed "back doors" in telecommunications equipment and products to serve its cyberattacks.

Compared with traditional PCs, mobile smart terminals such as cellphones have more network security exposure and vulnerabilities to attack, and so they are targeted by US intelligence agencies for key attacks. Their attack scenarios target mobile terminals, mobile network communication equipment, telecom operators, and other related systems.

By exploiting vulnerabilities in SIM cards, mobile operating systems, and apps, as well as deploying customized Trojans or commercial spyware, the US' mobile cyberattacks have actually penetrated every corner of network products such as SIM cards, firmware and operating systems, data interfaces such as USB cables, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, cellular networks and GPS, the data centers of major internet and IT vendors, and even the entire mobile industry ecosystem, as the report revealed.

By doing so, these intelligence agencies extensively steal personnel data, account credentials, device information, communication links, and geolocation data. These large-scale and long-term eavesdropping

and theft activities on global mobile smart terminals have undoubtedly endangered the cybersecurity and national security of countries around the world.

As Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said on Tuesday, "We believe this report will help the international community have a better understanding of what the US has done in this field", urging the US side to cease its malicious cyber activities targeting China and beyond.

China's practices in and attitudes on promoting cybersecurity through exchanges and collaboration with other countries pose a stark contrast with the US.

China has engaged in active cross-border collaboration in terms of the digital economy, cyberspace security, and reform and development of global cyberspace governance to promote inclusive development of the internet, and all these efforts contribute to building a community with a shared future in cyberspace. It has worked to provide affordable internet access and has actively promoted an internet economy based on mobile connections in the least developed countries to eliminate poverty caused by lack of network facilities.

China is ready to work with other countries, including the US, to foster an open, inclusive, and vibrant cyberspace that is fairer, more secure, and more stable.

—LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Ibrahim Khalil Ahasan

China further opens its door to attract FDI

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is essential for achieving sustainable economic growth and navigating the geopolitical complexities. Accordingly, China recently unveiled a strategic action plan for stabilizing foreign investment in 2025 to align its high-level opening-up with international economic and trade rules after having removed many restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector last year. The action plan, jointly devised by the Ministry of Commerce and the National Development and Reform Commission, was approved by the State Council, China's Cabinet, at its executive meeting.

As part of China's latest efforts to attract more FDI, the action plan includes 20 specific measures in four aspects. China will implement pilot programs to open up such sectors as value-added telecommunications, biotechnology and wholly foreign-owned hospitals, providing comprehensive services for foreign-invested projects in these sectors.

In addition to progressively liberalizing the education and culture sectors, China hopes to expand its pilot programs by opening up industries such as the services sector, telecom and medical services. China is also committed to removing all market access restrictions in the manufacturing sector, ensuring equal treatment of goods produced by domestic and foreign enterprises, improving access to credit, and allowing more foreign companies to participate in sectors such as those related to animal husbandry including animal breeding, and production of feed and feeding equipment and veterinary medicine, as well as eldercare, cultural tourism and sports.

About 59,080 new foreign-invested businesses were started in China in 2024 alone, up 9.9 percent year-on-year. On the other hand, China's overseas investment has increased significantly from 2021 to 2023 — to more than 1 trillion yuan (\$139.5 billion) a year. In January, total FDI in China reached 97.59 billion yuan, an increase of 27.5 percent over the previous month, with 12.5 percent of all FDIs being used in high-tech manufacturing.

China's action plan will play a key role in attracting high-quality foreign investment, boosting economic development by increasing tax revenue, creating a large number of local jobs, and improving the living standards of local people. This is due to the further opening-up of the manufacturing and other industries to foreign investors, the growth in FDI, and the optimization of pilot programs in sectors such as tele-



Besides, the government's policy to improve financial flexibility will allow foreign-invested businesses to access domestic finance for equity investment by lifting restrictions on domestic loans.

com, healthcare and education.

Increasing FDI in the telecom sector will further boost China's high-end manufacturing, the green sector, cross-border e-commerce, digital transformation, and research and development of artificial intelligence. Amid the unveiling of DeepSeek, AI's Sputnik moment, China made a calculated decision to open up its telecom sector, which would spur innovation-led growth and improve China's ability to advance cutting-edge digital technology. Notably, China launched a new pilot program last October, expanding foreign access to data centers and value-added telecom services in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Hainan province.

The action plan is a milestone in China's healthcare sector in that it

enabled the establishment of wholly foreign-owned hospitals in some major cities. Aside from easing restrictions on FDI in the healthcare sector, China has also been upgrading and expanding healthcare infrastructure to better address medical issues and develop the "Healthy China 2030" program.

The country may also expand youth and research education exchanges with other countries, attract and train foreign talents, and promote vocational education by further opening up the education sector.

This might prove to be a turning point in China's economic recovery, which in turn will improve the country's healthcare and technology infrastructure, enrich its cultural heritage and boost its silver economy. China is still a coveted investment destination, and the action plan will further boost investor confidence in China's market, encourage foreign entities to invest more in the country, attracting more foreign capital in the shape of long-term investment in Chinese publicly-traded companies.

Besides, the government's policy to improve financial flexibility will allow foreign-invested businesses to access domestic finance for equity investment by lifting restrictions on domestic loans. The strategic investment of foreign entities in Chinese equity offers the opportunity to unleash the unrealized growth potential of the stock market, while boosting flexibility and encouraging larger-scale investment.

By creating a more business-friendly environment through, among other things, the continuous shortening of the negative list, and with 21 free trade zones, a vast market, growing numbers of foreign enterprises, and comprehensive and efficient industry and supply chains, China is set to draw more foreign investment. The Chinese government is also promoting innovation, building mega projects, advancing new quality productive forces, further deepening reform and making concerted efforts to attract more investment to achieve sustainable development.

In particular, the action plan's long-term investment attraction strategy is essential for China to meet its development requirement as it proceeds to realize high-quality economic development.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

John Gong

A new global economic order, if it can be built

Washington's punitive tariff attacks started, literally, within days of US President Donald Trump's inauguration. He first announced 25 percent tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico, which he has put on hold after both countries' aggressive response, and 10 percent additional tariffs on Chinese goods.

In March, the Trump administration imposed another 10 percent tariffs on Chinese imports.

Besides, Trump has promised that more tariffs are on their way targeting imports from the European Union.

Trump is a self-proclaimed "tariff man". But it has become clear by now that tariffs, to the White House, are more than just a tool to address the US trade imbalance, or to propel "Corporate America" to reshore, or to reestablish the industrial manufacturing base in the United States.

Trump has expressed fondness for the McKinley era when there was no income tax, as the entire federal budget was financed by tariffs. There are many influential people around him, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick for example, who truly believe in the tariff-income tax-substitution theory and are bent on going on with this "social economic experiment", so as to reduce

US consumers will not only see high prices, but also will be denied access to affordable but high-quality made-in-China products.

income tax for Trump's billionaire friends.

Of course, to a trained economist, this theory borders on lunacy, as probably an overwhelming majority of the economist community worldwide would agree. Nevertheless, it looks like this theory is going to be put into practice. Tax revenues will have to come from somewhere else, so some tariffs will come into play, at least partly. But even some less onerous tariffs would have a profound impact on the rest of the world.

China stands front and center against this tariff challenge from the US. It stands as the second-largest exporter to the US market, behind only Mexico, and with the largest trade surplus in goods totaling nearly \$300 billion in 2024. No matter how one looks at it, China appears to be an apparent and legitimate target of the Trump administration's "tariff revolution".

As a result, the Sino-US trade relationship seems set to deteriorate in the long run. Many Chinese companies and the Chinese government are prepared for this. The question is: Can we manage this process less abruptly, less disruptively and less destructively?

But at the end of the day, it is not so much of a far-fetched idea to fathom the scenario of an eventual decoupling, or at least a decoupling to some degree, of the Chinese and US economies.

If that were to happen, the world may see two parallel trade networks with China and the US respectively playing the central roles in them. China will just do fine thanks to its robust economic relationships with ASEAN, the EU, the Global South in general, the BRICS countries in particular, and other developing countries.

The US market accounts for a bit less than 15 percent of the total Chinese exports. However, a significant part of Chinese exports is related to US and other foreign companies operating in China. Is this really a doomsday scenario for China's economy? Obviously not.

In fact, Beijing has been preparing for a possible second trade conflict since 2018. Today with China's domestic market-focused dual circulation development paradigm, Chinese com-

panies' extensive global supply chains, and the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative footprint, the country is in a much better position to weather the US tariff storm.

Besides, the US would suffer from a parallel world economic order. US consumers will not only see high prices, but also will be denied access to affordable but high-quality made-in-China products.

Take the automobile industry for example. The current 100 percent tariffs on auto imports from China have already made Chinese-made cars economically unviable.

Without access to cutting-edge but still affordable BYD electric vehicles, the US administration's "drill, baby, drill" policy will eventually turn the US into an ICE (internal combustion engine) island, whose vehicles will be at least one generation behind China's. What tariffs ultimately protect are not just Detroit automakers but also their outdated technologies.

Is this going to be in the US' national interest? From China's perspective, I say, so be it.

The author is a professor at the University of International Business and Economics. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Zhou Shuchun

The author is chief researcher at the China Watch Institute, China Daily.

Spirit of math beckons golden age of science

That graduates from China's top universities made waves in the global mathematics community by solving long-standing puzzles, and 2025, which was hailed as a milestone for Chinese mathematicians, should be seen more as an aspiration than a celebration. The heightened attention is nevertheless a heartening phenomenon.

Admittedly, it is a triumph of the international community of scholars. The young mathematicians received their undergraduate education in China before pursuing overseas studies, where they achieved groundbreaking results.

Following Wang Yilin's historic win last year as the first Chinese woman to receive the Salem Prize, two studies — co-authored by Wang Hong of New York University, Deng Yu of the University of Chicago and Ma Xiao of the University of Michigan, together with their foreign counterparts — have come to be recognized for proving the three-dimensional Kakeya conjecture and solving the narrow formulation of Hilbert's sixth problem. These breakthroughs reportedly fill gaps in mathematical research, potentially advancing the validation of core conjectures and offering new tools for fluid dynamics.

While Chinese students' dominance in math competitions has become routine news, such accolades are often attributed to exam-oriented training that prioritizes problem-solving practices over deep exploration of principles like the number theory or geometry. Critics argue this approach may stifle critical thinking. As a result, the value of Olympiad math — commendable in itself but often seen as a "stepping stone for college admissions" — has grown increasingly contentious, leading to its gradual decline in popularity.

But the ascent of Chinese scientists on the global stage seems inevitable, marking not just a national triumph but a renaissance of humankind's timeless quest for knowledge.

Zooming out, the broader picture reveals more profound shifts. China's technological development once leaned heavily on applied research, with foundational studies relatively lagging — a pragmatic and inevitable choice during its early reform era. Faced with pressures of economic take-off, the nation prioritized engineering and scaled manufacturing to boost productivity, with resources naturally funneled toward applied technologies.

Today, however, self-reliance in science and technology has become a strategic imperative. China's leadership emphasizes the importance of integrating basic research into top national agendas, recognizing that breakthroughs in core technologies demand progress at their roots. As global competition increasingly focuses on foundational frontiers while the translation cycle for basic research has shortened, vulnerabilities exposed by "chokepoint" technologies like semiconductors have underscored the urgency of overcoming dependence with regard to foundational theoretical frameworks.

Basic research — the wellspring of innovation — is now seen as vital for building a sci-tech powerhouse. As Vannevar Bush argued in *Science: The Endless Frontier* — a landmark in US science policy — 80 years ago, a nation relying on others for foundational knowledge cannot lead. China is heeding this lesson: investment in basic research is rising steadily, with full-time researchers in the field growing with each passing year. The nation's annual output of 5 million STEM college graduates, the world's largest talent pool, further bolsters this shift.

Yet systemic challenges remain. Cultivating a culture that values truth-seeking science requires reforming evaluation systems prone to short-termism and low tolerance for failure. The case of Tu Youyou — whose Nobel-winning artemisinin research endured years of setbacks outside conventional metrics — serves as a reminder. Equally crucial is fostering curiosity-driven education to inspire the youth. As Einstein noted, "Curiosity has its own reason for existing" — a sentiment echoed by Huawei's Ren Zhengfei: "One must endure ten years of cold benches to achieve breakthroughs from zero to one."

Similarly, Chinese mathematician Shing-Tung Yau, a Fields Medalist and a staunch advocate for basic research, asserts: "For China to become a true science powerhouse, it must cultivate scientists who pursue truth for its own sake." Convinced that mathematics is the "foundation of foundations", Yau is reportedly spearheading efforts meant to establish China as a global mathematics hub, including a bid to host the 2030 International Congress of Mathematicians. His vision, that China will soon produce a new generation of world-class mathematicians, may yet be tested.

But the ascent of Chinese scientists on the global stage seems inevitable, marking not just a national triumph but a renaissance of humankind's timeless quest for knowledge.

GLOBAL VIEWS

MARCOS CORDEIRO PIRES

Get Smart, stay safe

The aim of guiding principles for AI should be to ensure that it is not used against countries, individuals or society

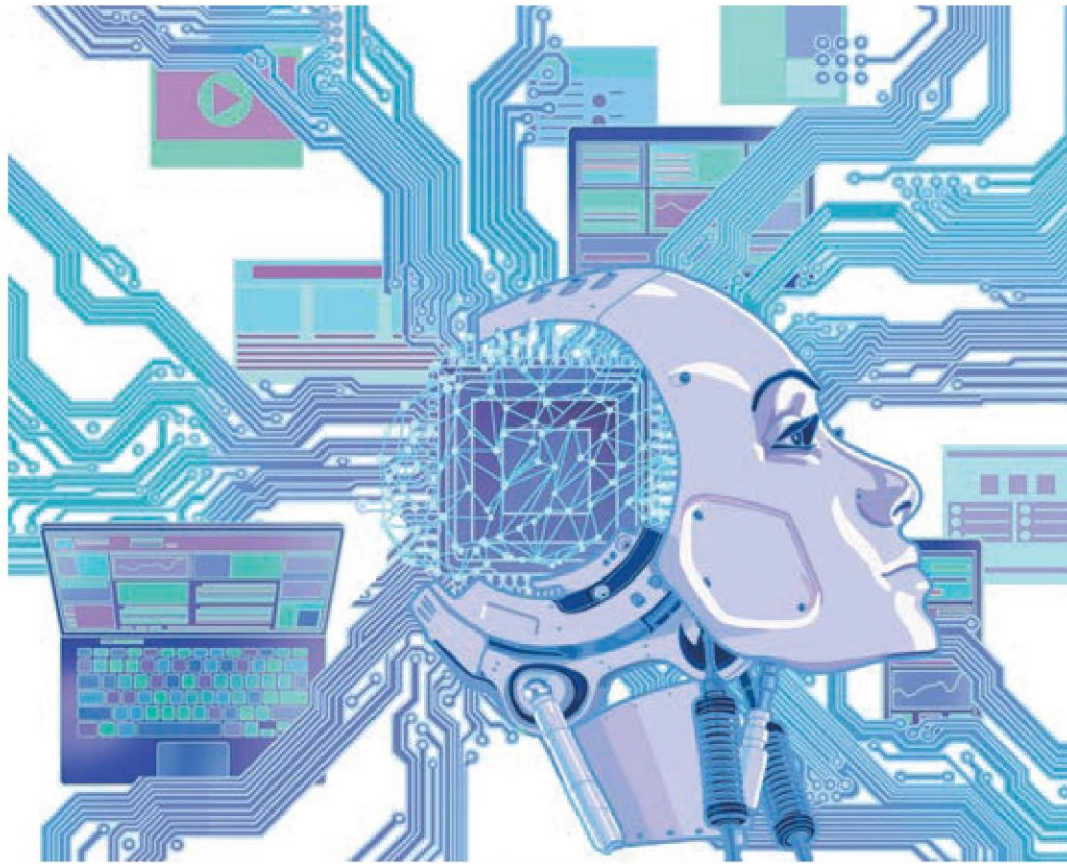
In his farewell address from the White House on Jan 15, then US president Joe Biden referred to former US president Dwight Eisenhower's memorable 1961 speech, in which he warned the people of the United States of the dangers of the military-industrial complex assuming enormous power. Eisenhower had stated: "In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."



The reference to Eisenhower was not out of place. Biden mentioned the disproportionate power currently held by the owners of Big Tech companies such as Google, X, Amazon, Microsoft, Meta and Apple, among others. On Jan 15, Biden said: "... six decades later, I'm equally concerned about the potential rise of a tech-industrial complex that could pose real dangers for our country as well. Americans are being buried under an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation enabling the abuse of power ... The truth is smothered by lies told for power and for profit ... Meanwhile, artificial intelligence is the most consequential technology of our time — perhaps of all time. Nothing offers more profound possibilities and risks for our economy and our security, our society, our very — for humanity ... We must make sure AI is safe and trustworthy and good for all humankind."

It is essential to mention that despite all the warnings, the political power of the US continues to be dominated by billionaires. Regarding the military-industrial complex, dozens of think tanks have ideologically lobbied for the arms producers by creating artificial threats to lead the country to war, such as the ones in Afghanistan or Iraq. They seek to justify a defense budget that is close to \$1 trillion, which feeds the greed of the arms industry.

Big Tech companies adopt the same "modus operandi", creating an extensive network of think tanks that defend their



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

interests against fair regulation by society. In the name of "freedom of expression", they make a lot of money by trying to engage people through fake news. Big Tech companies are accomplices to political attacks in various parts of the world, participating in hybrid wars and color revolutions against the enemies of the country that hosts them.

It is a shame that Biden mentioned the

power of Big Tech in the last days of his term. For the four years he was president, he did a lot to support tech giants in the US, protecting them from global competition and creating industrial and technological policies such as the CHIPS and Science Act and Inflation Reduction Act, which are granting billions of dollars in subsidies to the sector. The Biden administration also imposed protectionist measures by denying

access to advanced semiconductors to China, imposing a 100 percent tariff on electric vehicles produced by Chinese companies, and even suppressing the TikTok app in the US.

On Feb 10 and 11, government leaders, companies, researchers and civil society organizations attended the AI Action Summit in Paris to draw guidelines for developing AI internationally. The final document

listed some non-binding principles, such as promoting AI accessibility to reduce digital divides; ensuring AI is open, inclusive, transparent, ethical, safe, secure and trustworthy, taking into account international frameworks for all; and reinforcing international cooperation to promote coordination in international governance, among others. The document was backed by 60 signatories, including France, China, India, Brazil, Japan, the African Union and Canada. Unfortunately, as the US government's support for Big Tech is a bipartisan issue, US delegates refused to support the final declaration.

As we can see, the guiding principles are neutral and do not seek to harm any specific company or country. They aim to defend the parameters so that the development of AI does not turn against individuals and society. In addition, the document presupposes creating a minimum level of governance to encourage cooperation and regulate the development standards of this disruptive technology.

During the conference, US Vice-President JD Vance warned against the EU's regulatory approach, stating that "excessive regulation of the AI sector could kill a transformative industry". The US and the United Kingdom declined to sign a global AI safety declaration at the summit. However, behind the defense of freedom of creation is the maintenance of the status quo that benefits US companies, particularly Big Tech's interest in maintaining their power and excessive profits.

Given the enormous problems facing humanity and the immense possibilities for applying AI, this disruptive technology cannot be the object of selfish actions that seek to extend the hegemony of the US into an increasingly multilateral world. Nobody can cover the sun with a sieve. International cooperation is always the best way forward.

The author is a professor of international political economy at Sao Paulo State University in Brazil. 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.

ZHAO MINGHAO

Silicon soldiers of fortune

'Tech hawks' are increasingly influential in shaping US policy toward China

As Washington escalates its rhetoric on strategic competition with Beijing, technological rivalry between China and the United States has intensified. The ties between the national security apparatus and the tech industry in the United States are growing stronger, with artificial intelligence companies, quantum computing companies, industry associations and think tanks focusing on tech competition emerging as key partners for US security agencies.



Through such mechanisms as the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, the Defense Innovation Unit and the Hill and Valley Forum, the US government is deepening its coordination with the tech sector — while the latter seeks to leverage these ties for greater financial and political gains.

A new generation of tech companies at the forefront of emerging fields, such as Palantir Technologies, Anduril Industries, and SpaceX, has assumed an increasingly prominent role in Washington's national security strategy. These companies are part of what analysts have described as a modern version of the military-industrial complex, now evolving into a broader "tech-security complex" that is central to maintaining US primacy and shaping the geopolitical landscape of technological competition with China. The influence of these companies on China-US competition deserves utmost attention.

During the Cold War, in response to the "Soviet threat", the US military-industrial complex expanded rapidly. Defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics became the primary beneficiaries of US military spending, helping drive technological innovation in tandem with national security interests. Today, under Washington's "great power competition" framework, technology is at the core of US-China rivalry, and a growing ecosystem of high-tech companies and venture capital is exerting ever-greater influence on the relationship between the two countries.

This shift is particularly evident in the US Congress, where an emerging bloc of "tech hawks" is shaping US national security strategy from a legislative standpoint.

The legislative branch has become a key driver of strategic competition and ideological confrontation with China, with some Neo-Reaganite lawmakers taking an especially hard-line stance, viewing Beijing as Washington's most formidable adversary. Over the past few years, hundreds of China-related bills have been introduced in Congress, many of which focus on restricting China's access to key technologies, such as the CHIPS and Science Act and ENFORCE Act.

Several members of the Congress with tech backgrounds have played a pivotal role in framing China as a technological threat and advocating for a tougher approach. Senate Intelligence Committee Vice-Chairman Mark Warner, a former tech entrepreneur, has argued that "national security now is a technology race with China". Senator Jacky Rosen, who previously worked as a computer programmer, has called for increased defense spending in areas such as hypersonic, space and autonomous weapons systems to ensure that the US maintains its edge over China.

The growing alignment among US Congress, tech companies and venture capitalists reflects the increasing influence of "tech hawks" in shaping US policy toward China. In addition to the long-dominant "economic hawks" and "ideological hawks", this new faction has become a driving force in Washington.

Jacob Helberg, a Silicon Valley veteran with extensive industry experience and connections, spearheaded the creation of the Hill and Valley Forum, a mechanism that exemplifies the growing convergence between Silicon Valley and the US government on tech nationalism. Helberg, a staunch China hawk, has described the US-China relationship as a "gray war" and has advocated technological decoupling with Beijing. He has characterized the Hill and Valley Forum as "a coalition to win the second Cold War with China". He was tapped by President Donald Trump to be under secretary of State for Economic



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

Growth, Energy, and the Environment.

Beyond Helberg, other prominent Silicon Valley figures with right-wing political leanings, including billionaire investor Peter Thiel and Anduril founder Palmer Luckey, have taken a hard-line stance on China. These tech elites have used their growing political influence to shape US national security strategy, funding the Senate campaign of JD Vance, supporting Trump's presidential bid, and pushing for legislation to ban TikTok. In doing so, they have helped forge an increasingly tight-knit alliance among Silicon Valley, Congress and the federal government, while also reaping substantial financial benefits from the narratives of great power competition and China-US conflict.

At the same time, core pillars of the US national security apparatus, including the US Department of State, the military and intelligence agencies, are deepening their

cooperation with the tech sector. The Department of State has strengthened its focus on "tech diplomacy", investing in AI and other digital tools to enhance US diplomatic capabilities. It has also established the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy to oversee issues related to cybersecurity, the digital economy and emerging technologies.

The Ukraine crisis has further accelerated the militarization of emerging technologies, underscoring the urgency of integrating AI and data-driven warfare into US military operations. The Pentagon has ramped up its efforts to build a "data-driven, AI-enabled force", with the Army, Air Force and Space Force launching targeted initiatives in partnership with companies such as Palantir. Meanwhile, through newly established mechanisms such as the Central Intelligence Agency's Transnational and Technology Mission Center, the US intelligence community is

striving to build public-private partnerships for the digital age, leveraging innovation to strengthen its strategic advantage.

To conclude, the fusion of government and corporate power in the US tech-security complex is accelerating — a trend that is likely to intensify during the Trump administration. The interplay among "tech hawks", "economic hawks" and "ideological hawks" is anticipated to deepen, further reinforcing Washington's whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to exerting pressure on China in the technology sphere.

The author is a professor at the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University and a China Forum expert. 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.

Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z



Social Media Digest

Pawsitively fresh

The pet food sector in China is evolving beyond traditional choices like dry kibble and processed canned meats, embracing a more innovative approach with freshly prepared meals for pets, bringing new energy to the market.

Leading this shift is Pet&Fresh, a pet food retailer that opened its doors in Shanghai on Feb 22. Customers can handpick fresh ingredients like broccoli and chicken breasts, which are then cooked by store staff into a nutritious meal for their pets.

Some online users have compared this experience to hotpot dining, where diners select ingredients to cook in a shared broth, dubbing it "hotpot for dogs". At 24.90 yuan (\$3.43) per 500 grams, pets can enjoy a nutritionally balanced meal that feels as fresh as it is healthy.

In addition to fresh meals, customers can explore a variety of frozen food options, including meal packs, meat sausages, meatballs, bakery cakes, and pasta and rice balls, all neatly arranged in the frozen and refrigerated section.

The rise of fresh meal options marks a promising future for China's pet industry. According to Xinmin Evening News, the younger generation now views pets as integral family members, willing to invest time, money, and effort to ensure their pets live high-quality lives.



Pet food retailers now offer freshly prepared meals for pets. vcg

Future fashion

Y3K, short for the year 3000, is a trendy aesthetic that combines shimmering fabrics, metallic elements, and sleek silhouettes.

Evolving from Y2K, a nostalgic style that blends futuristic and 20th-century elements, Y3K draws inspiration from diverse sources such as virtual reality, cyberpunk, and future bionics. This avant-garde look imagines a world 1,000 years ahead, offering a bold expression of what the future could be.

Emerging as a response to the evolving digital age, Y3K reflects society's growing fascination with technological progress. For example, the layered patterns in Y3K designs are influenced by advancements in 3D printing.

The style first gained significant traction within the K-pop industry, where idols incorporated its elements into their performance outfits. From there, Y3K quickly spread across global social media platforms, including China's Xiaohongshu (RedNote), sparking widespread discussions.

But Y3K isn't just about clothing — accessories and cosmetics are crucial to showcasing the style's futuristic, sci-fi vibe. People experiment with different colored contacts for each eye, layer on silver rings, and wear bold, cutting-edge sunglasses, all of which reflect individuality and a passion for the future.

Y3K envisions a world where fashion blends effortlessly with technology. Virtual clothing — existing only in the digital realm — offers an eco-friendly way for young people to express themselves, helping to reduce the environmental impact of physical fashion.

GUO JIATONG



Y3K fashion typically features shimmering fabrics and metallic accents, blending cutting-edge style with a futuristic vision. vcg

Shaping futures through UN internships

Students at Shanghai Jiao Tong University gain global experience through United Nations internships, bridging Chinese wisdom with international impact.



“Landscape architecture isn't just about design — it's about improving living conditions and enhancing social equity.”

Zou Liyao, 25, a landscape architecture student at SJTU

“I've constantly sought out bigger platforms and opportunities, hoping to stand on an international stage and see the world from a broader perspective.”

Tang Yingjin, 25, a business administration student at SJTU

“The work we do here is always solution-oriented, which has allowed me to see the practical applications of my research.”

Wu Wei, 26, a theory of Marxism student at SJTU

“The UNHCR has to rely on companies for investment or assistance, but in China, no one is left behind.”

Zhang Chaoyue, 25, a journalism and communication student at SJTU

By GUO JIATONG
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Born in a village and raised in a small city in Jiangxi, Tang Yingjin, 25, has always wanted to see the wider world. Now a business administration student at Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU), he has explored metropolises like Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou — but he wanted more.

“This has become a bit of an obsession for me,” said Tang. “I've constantly sought out bigger platforms and opportunities, hoping to stand on an international stage and see the world from a broader perspective.”

Last month, his dream came true when he began an internship at the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva, Switzerland.

As part of a 12-person team, he works alongside colleagues from Poland, Lebanon, Indonesia, and beyond.

“Geneva is a small city, but it's home to many international organizations and has a truly global vibe. Walking down the street, you can see people of all different skin colors and hear various languages,” Tang said. “It's a place where you can feel a strong cultural collision, but it's also where I've experienced a lot of kindness, which has helped break down preconceived notions or biases I may have had.”

Tang is one of more than 60 SJTU students who have participated in United Nations internships across 15 countries since 2024. These students,

heading to nations like France, Kenya, and Jordan, form a unique cohort of young diplomats blending Chinese wisdom with a global vision.

For 25-year-old Zou Liyao, a landscape architecture student at SJTU, his internship at the United Nations Development Programme Representative Office in Beijing has been a chance to connect his passion for design with broader social goals.

“Landscape architecture isn't just about design — it's about improving living conditions and enhancing social equity,” he explained. “This aligns with the UN's concept of ‘Leaving No One Behind.’”

Zou believes that China has many valuable experiences in urban and environmental management that can be shared with the world, particularly in the Global South.

“For example, China has made significant advancements in flood management, such as building water conservancy projects and improving early climate warning systems,” he said. “These experiences can serve as important references for countries like Laos, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, which are heavily affected by the monsoon climate.”

Many nations are already actively learning from China. Wu Wei, a 26-year-old PhD student from the School of Marxism, has been interning at the UN University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies in Belgium for two months. She has noticed that in her team's

meetings, China's practical experiences are frequently referenced — even in projects unrelated to China.

“Every time I hear others acknowledge China's accomplishments, I feel a deep sense of pride,” she said. “In moments like these, simply being in the room as someone from China feels meaningful.”

Real-world impact

Wu's research has long centered on China's contributions to global governance, but it wasn't until her internship at the UN that she truly realized how these theoretical ideas could translate into real-world solutions.

“At school, I constantly felt that what I wrote was abstract and groundless, but here, the problems are concrete, specific, and real,” she said. “The work we do here is always solution-oriented, which has allowed me to see the practical applications of my research.”

The work of Zhang Chaoyue, a 25-year-old graduate specializing in journalism and communication, is also solution-oriented.

Since early February, Zhang has been interning at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Ecuador. His primary role is to document the organization's community activities through photos and videos, giving him a close-up view of how the UNHCR helps train refugees in new skills so they can adapt to society and earn a living independently.

This work reminded Zhang of China's own poverty alleviation efforts in his hometown of Qingyang, Henan province, where the government trains residents in skills such as sewing, livestock raising, and baking — empowering them to lift themselves out of poverty.

He reflected on the differences between China's approach and that of the UNHCR. “The UNHCR has to rely on companies for investment or assistance, but in China, no one is left behind,” he said. “I can see the advantages of China's system in a way I hadn't before.”

Feng Jiaqi, 22, an undergraduate from the School of Foreign Languages, has also been working to support the underprivileged. Since October, she has been interning with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization in Accra, Ghana.

Feng works with the gender and communication group, organizing workshops and training programs for local women entrepreneurs. These programs help women learn how to start or expand their businesses, secure financial support, grow their distribution networks, and overcome gender-related prejudices.

This work reflects Feng's passion for making a positive impact on marginalized communities.

“What attracts me most to international organizations is knowing that I'm not working for self-interest, but for a greater good — to help others improve their lives,” she said.



Feng Jiaqi (third from left, back row) poses for a photo with colleagues at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Office in Accra, Ghana, on Dec 21, 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Z WEEKLY

By GUI QIAN
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Signing sessions, variety show studios, concert backstages — these are the spaces where pop idols create countless photos, videos, and iconic moments that shape our imaginations of star life.

Now, ordinary people can recreate those same scenes with identical set designs.

In April last year, the world's first idol experience center opened in Shanghai. Spanning less than 200 square meters, it features six sets inspired by K-pop idol culture. Here, visitors can dress like their favorite idols, apply sparkling girl group makeup, strike signature K-pop poses, and record dance videos — essentially experiencing their own one-day debut.

Chen Rong, 30, from Guiyang, Guizhou province, is the owner of this center and the creator of the "idol experience store" concept. After spending eight years working as a model in Shanghai, she became familiar with studios and backstage areas. That was when she realized that while many people are curious about these spaces, they rarely get the chance to step inside.

"I wanted to bring the idol lifestyle to the public so that everyone can experience it," she said. "Here, girls can wear outfits they wouldn't normally choose and enjoy capturing glamorous, star-like moments."

Chen herself dreamed of becoming a star from a young age, aspiring to be a singer. She even applied to join the Chinese idol group SNH48 GROUP and was offered an interview. However, feeling unsure of herself at the time, she ultimately backed out, thinking the dream was out of reach.

Despite her deep passion for idol culture, Chen encourages a more balanced and rational approach to fandom.

"Supporting idols shouldn't be taken to extremes — it should bring positive influence and energy," she said.

Immersive experience

Hu Xinyue, a 16-year-old from Shanghai, has loved K-pop dance since childhood. She has been practicing for over seven years and runs a dance blog alongside her schoolwork.

When she discovered the idol experience center, she was thrilled and has since visited five times to film dance challenge videos, recreating the moves and songs of popular South Korean groups like Aespa, Blackpink, and Twice.

"I've been dancing since I was little, and I've always dreamed of performing on stage," she said. "Seeing myself in the same setting, shining like my favorite idols, fills me with pride."

Hu chose to film her videos against a backdrop inspired by the red wall of a K-pop music center, a place where idols often take selfies and create behind-the-scenes moments. This setting holds special meaning for her, as it reflects the life of idols offstage.

"Although idols shine on stage, most of their hard work happens behind the scenes. Recording videos here is my way of showcasing the true spirit of idol culture," she said.



Stepping into the spotlight

From K-pop-inspired set designs to personal idol transformations, this unique venue offers fans a chance to live out their celebrity dreams.

“Supporting idols shouldn't be taken to extremes — it should bring positive influence and energy.”

Chen Rong, owner of an idol experience center in Shanghai

Above: Lila (Xingyue) participates in a pretend signing session at the world's first idol experience center in Shanghai. Right: Liu Wanyi strikes a pose in a South Korean reality show-inspired setting at the center. Bottom center: Chen Rong (right) and her friend pose for a photo at the center. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Liu Wanyi, a 19-year-old university student from Hangzhou, Zhejiang, traveled to Shanghai last June to visit the idol center. There, she participated in a signing event to interact with her idol — Yuma from Japan's &TEAM — through a "reverse signing" format.

In this unique event, idols ask fans a question about themselves, and only those who answer correctly or meet certain criteria receive a signature.

Dressed in a glamorous performance outfit and sitting in front of the display, Liu felt as if she were the idol at the signing event, making the experience even more exciting.

Liu believes that her love for idols is her "motivation to explore the world"; and she sees the idol center as an important part of that journey.

The allure of the center has even spread overseas. News about it garnered tens of thou-

sands of likes on South Korean social media, with netizens expressing surprise that such a venue — which doesn't even exist in South Korea, the birthplace of idol culture — has been created in Shanghai.

So far, Chen's store has welcomed nearly 20 South Korean customers, who use translation devices to communicate with staff. Despite the language barrier, their eagerness to experience idol culture was

undeterred. Visitors have also come from the United States, Russia, Japan, Thailand, and other countries and regions.

Lila, also known as Xingyue in China, is a US influencer with millions of followers on Chinese social media. She visited the idol experience center out of curiosity and observed a unique aspect of East Asian culture: many people adore idols in very detailed ways — watching all their variety shows and livestreams, buy-

ing merchandise, and even changing their phone wallpapers to images of their idols.

However, Lila found that visiting the center serves a different purpose than idol worship — while idol worship is focused on supporting idols, the center is more about enjoying the broader idol culture and aesthetics, offering individuals the opportunity to indulge in a personal dream.

"Girl group members are often seen as perfect beings, almost unattainable," she said. "Realistically, I can't debut as an idol in South Korea, but here, the makeup artists do their best to transform me into an idol look, allowing me to imagine myself in that position. It's a fascinating fantasy."

Stars in motion

This fantasy-creating economy is thriving.

Shortly after Chen's idol experience center opened last year, many people, unaware of the concept, often mistook photos of customers for those of real idols.

Chen recalls that at first, there weren't many visitors, but once customer photos started circulating on social media, people began to comment, "It really looks the part," "It's very interesting," and "I was successfully fooled," which led to a surge in foot traffic.

Since the beginning of this year, influencers with millions of followers have been visiting the center almost daily. To provide a high-quality experience for guests, Chen introduced an appointment system through a WeChat mini-program, limiting the number of visitors to eight per hour.

After the success of Chen's center in Shanghai, similar venues have appeared in cities like Beijing, Chongqing, and Wuhan in recent months.

Netizens have jokingly said that Chen has single-handedly created a new business niche. "Initially, I was frustrated seeing so many imitation stores popping up," Chen said. "But later, I realized that if this sparks entrepreneurial ideas for others, I'm happy about it."

To raise the bar for imitators and further explore the concept of "experiencing idol life", Chen plans to upgrade the photo-focused venue into a comprehensive idol culture experience community.

She has rented nearly 700 square meters of space next to the original venue, intending to add more entertainment elements, including a stage for formal performances. This will allow guests to film performance videos or rent the space for underground idol performances. The venue will also feature interactive areas at the entrance, and Chen plans to invite vloggers and influencers to serve as "one-day managers", engaging directly with customers.

Her ultimate goal is to attract the attention of South Korean idol entertainment companies, hoping they will see this emerging Chinese business model as a potential channel for selecting idol trainees.

"Many of our customers have the talent to become idols, with impressive singing and dancing skills. This could really help them," Chen said.

LOVE THIS



LOOK



Z WEEKLY

Global students explore Suzhou's cultural depth

A group of international students explores Suzhou's rich heritage, gaining deeper insights into its history, traditions, and the value of cross-cultural connections.



Left: Olagunju Jesutoni Peace (center) poses for a photo with a Kunqu Opera artist (right) in Suzhou, Jiangsu, on March 3. **Right:** Alexandre Beaudin showcases the woodblock print he has just created. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By MENG WENJIE
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Suzhou's ancient gardens and canals have long drawn visitors, but for 10 young people from around the world, the city offered more than just postcard views — it was a place to experience, not just to see.

On March 3, international students from countries including Canada, Russia, Nigeria, Thailand, and Malaysia explored this historic destination in East China's Jiangsu province.

For Jiratchaya Phinyoworakul, a 23-year-old Thai student at Fudan University in Shanghai, this was her second visit to Suzhou. She noted that among her friends in Shanghai, Suzhou consistently stands out as the top weekend getaway for an authentic Chinese cultural experience.

"Six years ago, I toured Suzhou with my parents, but we only visited the famous landmarks. This deeper exploration provided me with a fresh perspective," she said.

Olagunju Jesutoni Peace, a 22-year-old Nigerian student at Suzhou University, shared similar sentiments. "Despite living in Suzhou since arrival in China, I always felt I hadn't truly explored much," she said.

Olagunju's fascination with Chinese culture began in childhood when she and her

mother would watch Chinese films together. She finally realized her dream of coming to China in August last year.

During their visit, Olagunju and her international peers explored the former residence of Zhang Taiyan (1869-1936), a renowned scholar from the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) who mentored many students, including the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936).

However, what impressed her the most was Zhang's wife, Tang Guoli (1883-1980), a pioneer in China's early democratic and feminist movements. "It was inspiring to learn that she was just as remarkable as the men — strong, intelligent, and ahead of her time," Olagunju said.

Alexandre Beaudin, an 18-year-old Canadian engineering student at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, was captivated by the architectural beauty of the residence. "The white walls, black-tiled roofs, and intricate wood carvings harmonize perfectly with Suzhou's classical gardens," he said.

The group's appreciation for Suzhou's fusion of modernity and tradition deepened at the Ni Art Museum.

Beaudin was particularly drawn to contemporary artworks that focused on introspection. One quote from an artist in an exhibition deeply resonated with him: "What I present and express — is it my true

intention? Or is it simply something I hope others will use to define and evaluate me?"

As a social media content creator, Beaudin found this reflection especially relevant. "In today's digital age, so many of us prioritize posting idealized, edited content to gain views or likes, instead of being completely honest about who we truly are," he said.

Cultural immersion

In addition to exploring Suzhou's traditional architecture, the travelers also engaged with the city's intangible cultural heritage.

They tried their hand at woodblock printing, a meticulous craft that involves carving a reversed image onto a wooden block, inking it, and pressing it onto paper.

Before this trip, Olagunju had only read about woodblock printing in her Chinese history class and had never attempted it herself. This time, she tried inking the block and pressing it onto paper but quickly realized that these steps weren't the most challenging.

"The hardest part is something we don't see — the carving of the wood," she said. "It's amazing to think that someone took the time to carve all those intricate details into the wood."

A particularly memorable moment for

Olagunju occurred when she met a group of elderly women during the trip. "They were all dressed so beautifully, taking pictures of each other," she recalled.

In Nigeria, Olagunju explained, it's rare to see a group of women dress up and go out together just for fun. "I was so touched, and I hope that could be my future," she added.

This trip also fostered meaningful cross-cultural connections among the participants.

Yap Jin Jing, a 24-year-old Malaysian student at Shanghai University, found dining with her international companions quite amusing. Coming from various countries, the group had diverse dietary restrictions due to religion, habits, or allergies. Before each dish was ordered, they would consult the waiter and translator to ensure it didn't contain any ingredients they needed to avoid.

"Despite all our differences, we still sat at the same table," Yap said.

"We developed an appreciation for our differences while realizing that, regardless of where we grew up in the world, we share many similarities, much more than we may think," Beaudin said. "We share many of the same hopes and dreams, reminding us that, in the end, we are all united by common goals."



Zhao Rui helps farmers pick peaches in Zhaoquan village, Tianjin, during the harvest season. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Innovation fuels rural growth

By MENG WENJIE

Just before the Spring Festival of 2025, residents of Zhaoquan village, located in Shuangkou county within Tianjin's Beichen district, received supplies like rice, flour, cooking oil, and other daily necessities.

These gifts were the result of the village's collective economic development over the past year. Behind this progress is the dedicated effort of the village Party branch, led by 30-year-old Secretary Zhao Rui.

After graduating from Tianjin Medical University in 2017, Zhao returned to her hometown in Shuangkou town, joining a group of young leaders driving rural revitalization in the region.

"Having grown up in the countryside, this land is my roots. I want to help it move toward a brighter future," Zhao said.

In 2021, Zhao's outstanding abilities earned her the position of Party secretary and director of the Zhaoquan village committee.

Today, the village's Party branch has nine members, with four under 30 years old. This youthful team has brought fresh and innovative ideas to drive the prosperity of the village.

In May 2024, encouraged by the local district government, Zhao and her colleagues launched video accounts on popular social media platforms like Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) and Kuaishou. Through these platforms, which resonate strongly with the younger generation, they aim to explore new opportunities for generating income and advancing the village's development.

One of Zhao's video series, titled "100 Simple Acts for the Villagers", showcases her efforts to address the daily challenges and needs of the local community. These initiatives include providing free haircuts, delivering disease prevention lectures, and teaching elderly villagers how to use smartphones.

"Many young people from the village have moved to cities for work, leaving behind mostly elderly residents," Zhao explained. "Now, they can make video calls."

Digital transformation

These videos have not only brought a fresh perspective to the villagers' lives but, more importantly, have put Zhaoquan on the map, attracting investment.

One such project is the establishment of a forest farm in the village, where visitors can enjoy family-friendly outdoor activities. This project has boosted the village's revenue and created job opportunities for its residents.

Zhao's social media initiatives have also helped expand the market for the village's agricultural products.

Last September, local farmers struggled to sell their grape harvest. In response, Zhao created a series of videos documenting the grape cultivation and harvesting process, highlighting the fruit's sweet-and-sour flavor and juicy texture. Soon after these posts went live, grape wholesalers contacted Zhao, leading to the successful sale of approximately 35,000 kilograms of grapes.

Zhao has also extended her efforts to neighboring areas, using her videos to promote their agricultural products and scenic spots.

Last June, a young woman from a nearby village reached out to Zhao's team. Her family's apricot harvest was ready, but they faced a narrow selling window. Unfortunately, her mother was bedridden due to illness, and they didn't have an online platform to attract potential buyers.

Zhao and her team responded quickly, visiting the family that same day. They produced a video for the apricots, which helped the family sell their surplus and eased their burden.

"Social media is a powerful tool for bringing attention to these small villages and driving economic growth in rural areas," Zhao said.

In addition to creating short videos, Zhao and her colleagues have ventured into livestreaming e-commerce as a new way to support the village's development.

"I'm just an ordinary person from a farming background," Zhao explained. "Although my influence is limited, I want to use my efforts to bring real benefits to the people in my hometown."



Spring awakening

On March 16, international students from countries including Russia, Indonesia, India, and Pakistan visited Huilong county in Chongqing's Liangping district to experience the cultural traditions of Jingzhe (Awakening of Insects), the third solar term of the year, which lasts from March 5 to March 19 this year. During their visit, they explored local oilseed rape fields to learn how technology has enhanced crop yields. They also took part in Jingzhe traditions such as bamboo weaving and kite-making.

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