

Tariff concerns

US Northwest states fret over ag-export impact

WORLD, PAGE 16



Bronze horse gallops through cultural history

TALES & TRAILS, PAGES 8-9



Brewing success

Yunnan's coffee conquers the taste buds of global consumers

BUSINESS, PAGE 14

# CHINA DAILY

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## Engagement key for stable ties with US

Frequent high-level meetings, dialogue signal willingness to promote bilateral cooperation

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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With a number of high-level meetings held in China recently, Beijing has welcomed a large wave of politicians, businesspeople and scholars from the United States in a lead-up to a series of talks with senior Chinese leaders and officials.

Analysts said such a high frequency of meetings at this point in time is aimed at keeping the communication afloat, given the recent trade wars waged by Washington around the world and the additional tariffs it has threatened to impose next month.

The US side should move toward the same goal as China, and the two countries should make the pie of their pragmatic cooperation even bigger in spite of rising difficulties in the bilateral ties, the analysts said.

The latest high-level contacts took place on Wednesday at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, where senior diplomat Wang Yi, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee, met with Evan Greenberg, executive vice-chair of the National Committee on US-China Relations.

Wang defined current China-US relations as being "at a critical juncture regarding the direction to be taken" and said that "the two sides should follow the key consensus and vision of the two heads of state, strengthen exchanges, enhance understanding, avoid miscalculation and manage differences".

China is willing to "engage in dialogue and consultation with the US side and address the legitimate concerns of each side based on the principle of equality and the spirit of mutual respect", he added.

Greenberg said, "China needs peace and prosperity, America needs peace and prosperity, and we need to be able to pursue our visions of greatness, each of us in harmony with the other."

On Sunday, Premier Li met with US Senator Steve Daines and a group of US corporate executives who were in Beijing to attend the

China Development Forum 2025. Li stressed that "there are no winners in trade wars".

Daines, a Republican from Montana, is the first member of the US Congress to visit China since US President Donald Trump took office in January.

In a separate meeting with Daines on Saturday, Vice-Premier He said that China firmly opposes the approach of politicizing or weaponizing economic and trade issues, and the two countries "have many common interests and broad space for cooperation".

Annual bilateral trade between China and the US exceeded \$680 billion last year, and some 73,000 US companies are currently investing and operating in China.

Jake Werner, director of the East Asia program at the Washington-based Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, said, "I hope that we can deepen our friendship, increase the number of exchanges, so we can better understand each other, and that we do this in order to confront our problems."

Yu Yunquan, vice-president of China International Communications Group and president of the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies, noted that the new US administration has taken many new policies and that "uncertainties in China-US relations have increased".

How Beijing and Washington develop their relationship is being closely watched by the international community, he emphasized.

"The two countries can become partners that support each other and achieve prosperity together. They should choose to have dialogue rather than confrontation," he added.

Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, during his meeting with Apple CEO Tim Cook in Beijing on Monday, said China stands ready to work with the US to create a more stable policy environment for businesses through equal dialogue.

Wang said their talks were "in-depth and pragmatic".

John Quelch, executive vice-chancellor and American president of Duke Kunshan University, welcomed the "very clear statement" of fiscal and monetary policy made by senior Chinese officials at the China Development Forum, and he endorsed Beijing's steps to boost the confidence of multinational companies regarding investing more in China.

"China, with 1.4 billion people, is exceptional and important to the global economy," he added.

## Taking to the streets



A slogan in Arabic reading (right) "Enough killing and destruction" and another held by a child reading "The children of Palestine: We want to live" are displayed during a rally in Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza Strip, on Tuesday. Hundreds of Palestinians chanted slogans during the protest, calling for an end to the Israeli-Hamas conflict. AFP See story, page 15

## Online column dedicated to protecting Taiwan compatriots

By LI SHANGYI  
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A column dedicated to reporting persecution of Taiwan compatriots by separatists was launched on Wednesday on the official website of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council.

Chen Binhua, spokesman for the office, said the column has been introduced in response to the Democratic Progressive Party authorities' frequent fabricated charges to suppress dissent in Taiwan, using threats and intimidation and stifling free speech in the process.

"The DPP authorities have been suppressing and persecuting political opponents, as well as parties, groups and individuals in Taiwan who support peaceful and integrated cross-strait development," he said.

Chen criticized certain separatist organizations, individuals, public servants and social media influencers for acting as enforcers and accomplices of the DPP authorities, and abetting their misconduct. "We are deeply concerned about these actions and will impose severe punishment for such behavior," he said.

The column has been set up as a floating window on the homepage

of the office's website, and relevant reports can be sent to the email address jubao@suremail.cn.

As of 5:00 pm on Wednesday, a total of 323 emails were received, according to Chen.

All reports will be handled properly and individuals against whom there is conclusive evidence of criminal activities will be held accountable in accordance with the law, Chen said, adding that the rights and personal information of those who file such reports will be protected.

Liu Zhenya, a social media influencer from the Chinese mainland, who is also known as Ya Ya in Tai-

wan, was recently forced by the DPP authorities to leave the island.

Liu and her husband, who was born in Taiwan, have three children. On March 15, relevant authorities in Taiwan revoked her residence permit, accusing her of "jeopardizing security and social stability" because of her previous comments on reunification. She was given 10 days to leave the island.

See *Straits*, page 3

### Inside

Editorial, page 11

## Scene of destruction



A broken bell is seen amid the remains of an ancient Buddhist temple destroyed by wildfires in the county of Uiseong, North Gyeongsang Province, South Korea, on Wednesday. The death toll in the wildfires raging across the country's southeastern region rose to 24 as of Wednesday. KIM DO-HOON / YONHAP VIA AP

## Constructive trade stance in long-term interest of Canada

Canada's decision to impose new tariffs on Chinese imports is a step in the wrong direction.

Last October, Canada imposed a 100 percent tariff on Chinese electric vehicles and a 25 percent tariff on aluminum and steel products, to which China responded this month with a 100 percent tariff on Canadian agricultural products such as canola oil and peas.

Instead of fostering economic growth and stability, the protectionist measures risk disrupting supply chains, driving up costs for businesses and consumers, and triggering a damaging cycle of retaliation. By imposing higher costs on industrial materials, consumer goods and agricultural exports, the measures create inefficiencies that ripple through the entire economy.

Canadian businesses that rely on Chinese imports — which amounted to around \$45 billion in 2023 — will face increased production costs that will ultimately be passed on to consumers. At the same time, China's tariffs on Canadian agricultural products will hurt farmers and exporters that depend on global markets.

Unlike the United States, which

### WORLD WATCH

By Alfred Romann

has a much larger economy to absorb trade shocks, Canada is highly dependent on open markets. Trade barriers could disrupt the country's ability to compete internationally and threaten key industries that rely on global supply chains.

Aligning with US trade policy at the expense of a more independent, open approach could leave Canada in a precarious position, limiting its ability to negotiate favorable agreements and diversify its economic partnerships. The US may be pushing Canada toward tariffs, but it does not seem poised to help it deal with any negative consequences.

Protectionist policies often aim to shield domestic industries from foreign competition, but they generally backfire.

Higher tariffs lead to increased costs of raw materials and intermediate goods, and this leads to higher production expenses for Canadian manufacturers. Small and medium-sized enterprises are hit especially hard because they do not have the financial resources of larger corporations.

Moreover, tariffs invite retaliation. This escalating dynamic is already at play. China's response to Canada's tariff measures targets key exports, particularly in agriculture.

Canadian farmers and agribusinesses, which rely heavily on international trade, now face a slew of new challenges.

See *Tariffs*, page 3

## SPACE STATION PROVIDING UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT FOR RESEARCH FIRSTS

China has equipped Tiangong to look for multiple scientific, medical, other breakthroughs

By YAN DONGJIE  
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With microgravity and cosmic radiation, the unique environment in space poses risks to human health and also vast opportunities for medical and scientific research breakthroughs, experts said.

This issue was highlighted recently when two NASA astronauts stranded aboard the International

### In-depth

Space Station for nine months appeared haggard and thin upon their return to the Earth.

Human activities such as movement and sleep are affected by such a lengthy period in space. The potential health issues astronauts

face are ongoing challenges for long-term manned space missions that are being addressed by Chinese experts.

"Muscle atrophy is one of the significant physiological changes in a microgravity environment," said Li Yuying, associate researcher at the Shanghai Institute of Nutrition and Health of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

See *Space station*, page 2

INSIDE Pursuit of a polyphonic world Global Views, page 13 www.chinadailyglobal.com

## PAGE TWO



**Left:** The Shenzhou XIX crew on board China's space station conduct an experiment on artificial photosynthesis for extraterrestrial survival. **Middle:** This screen image on Mar 21 shows Shenzhou XIX astronauts Cai Xuzhe (right) and Song Lingdong preparing for extravehicular activities inside the airlock cabin of China's space station. **Right:** Shenzhou XIX astronaut Wang Haoze works inside the station. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

# Space station: Unveiling pioneering research

From page 1

Li said that understanding the mechanisms behind these changes and finding solutions to mitigate them can eventually contribute to medical fields affected by similar conditions on Earth.

China established its own space station system after the launch of the Tianhe core module in April 2021, followed by the Wentian and Mengtian laboratory modules in 2022, with multiple manned and cargo missions.

In November 2022, Li's research team sent mouse muscle cell samples to Tiangong, China's operational space station, via the Tianzhou 5 cargo spacecraft.

In the Wentian module's biotechnology experiment cabinet, they successfully cultured and differentiated muscle cells, discovering phenomena such as cell fusion and muscle fiber formation in microgravity for the first time. The team also identified the gene responsible for autophagy, the body's cell recycling system, under these conditions.

"We were the first to use a skeletal muscle cell autophagy fluorescence reporting system to analyze the effects of space microgravity on muscle cell autophagy. This led to discovering the mechanisms and potential molecular targets related to muscle atrophy in space," Li explained.

This research holds the prospect of improving astronaut health by regulating autophagy through specific drugs, dietary adjustments, or exercise.

"The findings could also be applied to

patients with sarcopenia (loss of muscle mass) and those bedridden for extended periods on Earth, providing new solutions to combat muscle atrophy," she added.

## Research platform

The unique conditions on the space station are invaluable for addressing important scientific and practical problems across various disciplines, said Gu Yidong, chief scientist at the China Manned Space Agency.

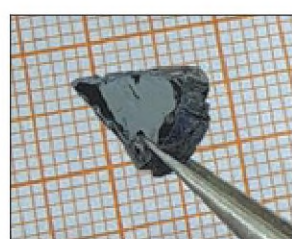
The Chinese space station will conduct over 1,000 research projects over the next 10 to 15 years, the Technology and Engineering Center for Space Utilization under the Chinese Academy of Sciences announced in January.

These efforts will include deepening research into basic biology, biotechnology and transformation, life ecology, and the origin of life, the center said.

Gu said the space station also offers a platform for breakthrough experiments in new space technologies.

"Nearly 100 academicians from the CAS and thousands of experts collaborated to plan the station's research projects, covering fields such as space life sciences, human studies, microgravity physical sciences, space astronomy and new space technologies," Gu stated.

The establishment of China's space station system, Gu said, "is the result of 30 years of hard work by multiple generations, representing a monumental stride in China's space endeavors and a historic opportunity for large-scale space science,



A space-grown Indium Selenide semiconductor crystal sample.

technology, and application research.

"Space science paves the way for significant discoveries, new major scientific principles, and notable practical benefits."

## Fully equipped

The space station is equipped with over 20 internal scientific experiment cabinets and three external experiment platforms. Major research tools, such as the two-meter aperture China Space Station Telescope, are under development, offering experimental platforms to scientists across various fields.

In addition to the research projects, the space station will "heavily promote scientific outreach and international cooperation," Gu said.

Scientists have already conducted pioneering experiments on the space station, such as obtaining new rice germplasm resources, differentiating embryonic stem cells into hematopoietic cells, and

achieving the longest-running space aquatic ecosystem.

Since its inception, the space station has launched eight manned missions and seven cargo missions, hosted 21 astronauts and achieved a stable space living environment, according to a report released by China Manned Space Agency at the end of last year.

According to data from the CAS, over 180 science and application projects have been conducted on the space station, generating more than 265 terabytes of scientific data, over 150 patents, and several results have been transferred and applied.

## Critical technologies

Researchers Liu Xuechao from the Shanghai Institute of Ceramics, and Jin Min from the Shanghai Dianji University, have made significant progress in research into new semiconductor materials through the space station's facilities.

"Semiconductor materials play an irreplaceable role in fields such as integrated circuits, communications, photovoltaics, and aerospace," Liu said.

"Space semiconductor crystal growth has been a major focus worldwide. Space station research supports the breakthrough of critical technologies on Earth."

The performance and structure of semiconductor materials are closely linked to their environment and manufacturing conditions, Liu said. Earth's gravity causes convection, sedimentation and wall effects during material preparation, impacting

nucleation, thermal mass transport, and microstructures while masking secondary effects.

Professor Jin's team discovered that Indium Selenide (InSe), a flexible semiconductor material that can bend, twist, and compress without breaking, is suitable for flexible thermoelectric devices.

"InSe semiconductor crystals not only possess excellent physical properties typical of traditional semiconductors, but can also undergo plastic deformation and mechanical processing like metals. This provides a new path for designing and applying next-gen electronic devices," Liu explained.

He added that InSe also shows vast potential for use in photovoltaics, optoelectronic devices, and photodetectors.

After 70 hours in the high-temperature materials science cabinet, Liu's team obtained a complete semiconductor crystal sample. Upon returning to Earth in June 2023, they found the material had swelled under microgravity, indicating potential expansions.

The space-grown samples exhibited significantly lower density defects compared with ground-based samples, with almost zero defects in areas not in contact with container walls.

"This breakthrough expands development opportunities substantially, promising improved transistor performance," Liu said. "Our future studies will build on this sample, aiming for commercial production of this semiconductor material soon."



Researchers examine space station experiment samples brought back by the Shenzhou XVIII spacecraft at the Technology and Engineering Center for Space Utilization under the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing on Nov 4. TECHNOLOGY AND ENGINEERING CENTER FOR SPACE UTILIZATION / VIA XINHUA

## Zebrafish, grain experiments answer cosmic questions

By YAN DONGJIE

On China's space station orbiting 400 kilometers above Earth, scientists are conducting a series of astounding laboratory experiments.

From zebrafish that lay eggs to rice that completes an entire life cycle, to fruit flies performing acrobatics, these fascinating space research projects are providing crucial clues for humanity in exploring the mysteries of life.

In April last year, four zebrafish measuring about three centimeters were brought aboard the Chinese Space Station by the Shenzhou XVIII crew.

In the "Tiangong Aquarium" ecosystem, four grams of hornwort, a fast-growing aquatic plant that can oxygenate water, were added. Over 43 days in orbit, the zebrafish not only swam freely but also naturally spawned in the space environment,

according to the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

This marked the first time China had established a self-sustaining aquatic ecosystem in space, with a closed loop of carbon dioxide exhaled by the fish and oxygen released by the plants. The 43 days also surpassed the previous record of 30 days set by the International Space Station's aquatic system, said researcher Wang Gaozhong from the Institute of Hydrobiology under the CAS.

"These three-centimeter-long fish are crucial for verifying vertebrate survival capabilities in space," he said.

"Zebrafish were chosen not only because their genome shares over 70 percent similarity with humans, but also due to their rapid reproduction rate," Wang explained.

Scientists are studying the effects of microgravity on vertebrate bones

and muscles through the swimming posture and movement trajectories of the fish.

The second phase of the experiment, set to start this year, will be expanded to consist of six zebrafish and six grams of hornwort.

Scientists plan to later dissect the fish samples on Earth to focus on the effects of microgravity on protein metabolism. These experiments are essential not only for astronauts' health, but also for potentially developing new treatments for osteoporosis on Earth, Wang said.

In the plant cultivation cabinet of the Wentian module, rice research completed a 120-day life cycle and achieved the first cultivation of space-regenerated rice.

Since the experiment began in 2022, scientists have overcome challenges like pollination and grain filling in microgravity. Space-grown

rice exhibits unique characteristics — more upright leaves and fewer grains per spike, yet the grains are fuller, said Wang Lihua, a researcher at the CAS Center for Excellence in Molecular Plant Sciences.

Excitingly, the space rice seeds have successfully propagated to a third generation on Earth, proving that cosmic radiation has not affected their genetic stability.

The research team is exploring cutting and regrowing techniques beyond traditional planting methods — harvesting the first batch and allowing the stubble to regrow.

Remarkably, space-regrown rice produces new spikes in only 45 days, reducing the cycle by one-third compared to on Earth. This "one sowing, multiple harvests" approach can increase space planting efficiency by half, offering a new perspective on food production for future lunar bases.

By comparing gene data from space and Earth, scientists have identified over 20 molecular switches regulating flowering.

"It's like equipping plants with a biological clock regulator, enabling us to potentially design space rice that delays flowering to continuously produce more food during long-term missions," Wang explained.

Furthermore, in granular vibration experiments, researcher Hou Meiyang from the Institute of Physics under the CAS observed movement that defies conventional knowledge. When a container with mixed grains vibrates under microgravity, larger grains sink instead of rising, a phenomenon named the anti-Brazil nut effect.

This discovery explains the unexpected sinking incidents lunar rovers encounter on the moon's surface and provides crucial data for designing future extraterrestrial exploration vehicles, CAS scientists said.

In November, fruit flies aboard the space station had already reproduced three generations in space. These tiny insects exhibited unique "space dance" behaviors in the weightless environment — floating and tumbling instead of crawling or flying, completing courtship and mating activities, the scientists said.

By analyzing over four terabytes of surveillance video, Chinese scientists are using artificial intelligence to decode the adaptive mechanisms behind these behavioral changes, said researcher Li Yan from the CAS.

Over the next decade, more than 1,000 research projects, including space breeding of mice and the synthesis of cosmic materials, will take place.

"Each piece of data we accumulate now is paving the way for humanity to step out of Earth's cradle," said CAS researcher Zhang Wei.

## TOP NEWS

# Envoy calls for global approach

UN Ambassador Fu Cong says revitalizing multilateralism is crucial in turbulent times

By CHINA DAILY

China's ambassador to the United Nations on Wednesday called for a revitalization of multilateralism and support of the UN Charter.



“And as humanity continues to push the frontiers, we must support the UN's role as the main channel of governance in those emerging fields such as artificial intelligence.”

**Fu Cong**, China's permanent representative to the United Nations

“Today, we are living in a changing and turbulent world, where hot spot issues continue unabated, various challenges keep emerging, and multilateralism faces mounting pressure,” said Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN. “China aligns itself with the statement by Venezuela on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defense of the UN Charter,” he said. “We commend the efforts of the secretary-general and the Secretariat to implement the pact.”

Referencing the 80th anniversary of the UN's founding, Fu said that “at this critical juncture, we must revitalize multilateralism and strengthen solidarity and collaboration.”

“We must turn the Pact for the Future from a road map into a construction plan, translate our political commitment into substantive actions, and together strive for world peace and development,” he said.

“To this end, we must first and foremost support the authority and role of the UN. We must safeguard the UN-centered international system and uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter,” Fu

continued. “We must revisit the founding mission of this organization, and stay committed to peaceful settlement of disputes and the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security.”

Fu called for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and bringing development back to the center of the international agenda, “so that all countries can share the dividends of development and achieve common prosperity.”

“We must also further reform and improve global governance to make it more just and equitable. To do so, we must increase the representation and voice of the Global South,” he said. “And as humanity continues to push the frontiers, we must support the UN's role as the main channel of governance in those emerging fields such as artificial intelligence.”

The envoy noted that China has always been a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development and a defender of the international order.

He said that President Xi Jinping has put forward the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind and the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative.

“All these represent China's proposals to further reform and improve global governance,” Fu said.

Last month, during China's Security Council presidency, China's UN mission hosted a high-level meeting on practicing multilateralism, reforming and improving global governance.

This week in Beijing, China held an international symposium themed “Strengthen the Role of the United Nations and Promote Multilateralism.”

“All these are aimed to facilitate the implementation of the Pact for the Future and contribute to the improvement of global governance,” Fu said. “China stands ready to work with all parties to build a community with a shared future and embrace an even brighter future for all.”

## To the rescue



A sick California sea lion with possible domoic acid poisoning is rescued on Tuesday by volunteers from Channel Islands Marine & Wildlife Institute in Santa Barbara, California, the United States. DAVID SWANSON / AFP

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Lai's strategies go against the will

of the people, fully exposing his ugly



Siddharth Chatterjee, United Nations resident coordinator in China (left), Munir Akram, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN (center), and Volkan Bozkir, president of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly (right), have a conversation on Wednesday during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025 in Boao, south China's Hainan province. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

## Boao Forum highlights multilateralism

By CAO DESHENG in Boao, Hainan  
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Multilateralism should be reinvigorated in promoting the building of a just and rational global governance system to cope with pressing global challenges, according to officials and experts attending the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference.

Themed “Asia in the Changing World: Towards a Shared Future”, this year's conference, running from Tuesday to Friday, is designed to promote openness and development and carry out the commitments of the United Nations Summit of the Future while focusing on the development of Asia.

“Global threats require global responses,” Vice-Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong said on Wednesday at High-Level Dialogue: Global Governance after the UN Summit of the Future, one of the panel discussions during the conference.

“Faced with a complex and severe international situation, we must uphold true multilateralism,” he said.

Chen highlighted the core role of the UN in the international system and called for safeguarding the authority of the intergovernmental body.

“We should replace group confrontation with inclusive cooperation, and break ‘small circles’ with greater unity,” he said.

Chen urged major countries to lead by example in upholding integrity and the rule of law, saying that “prioritizing one's own interests will only harm others while

not benefiting oneself.”

Noting that the current international situation is marked by a mix of uncertainty and instability, Chen warned that the world faces the risk of reverting to the law of the jungle. “It is imperative for countries to work together to advance global governance,” he added.

Chen said that faced with serious challenges, China has proposed the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, along with the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, guiding the way to address the common challenges that countries are facing.

The dialogue is viewed as a follow-up to the UN Summit of the Future, which concluded with the Pact for the Future, including a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations. The pact covers a broad range of themes, including peace and security, sustainable development, climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, youth and future generations, and the transformation of global governance.

Addressing the dialogue meeting, Ban Ki-moon, chairman of the Boao Forum for Asia and a former UN secretary-general, said that the demand for global governance has never been greater than today. “We are facing a growing global governance deficit, and that must be addressed with urgency,” he said.

Ban emphasized the role of the UN and the multilateral system, saying that multilateralism is an

effective approach to address common challenges.

“Countries must be guided by diplomacy, not by violence,” Ban said. “They must be guided by the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, not the law of the jungle. Countries should have closer trade and economic cooperation, not protectionism or beggar thy neighbor practices.”

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the UN's founding. Ban said that it's not just a time to celebrate the achievements the UN has made, but also a time to reflect on “what can be done to ensure it is representative, responsive and effective?”

In his speech at the dialogue, Guy Ryder, UN undersecretary-general for policy, talked about the challenges faced by the global body.

“We are living in a time of great disruption and great uncertainty. Consequences are difficult to predict, but we are already feeling the pressures facing the international system. Multilateralism, its values and even its legitimacy are being questioned,” he said.

At the same time, global challenges such as conflicts, poverty, climate change and the governance of technologies are becoming increasingly complex, he said, and the ability to address those challenges through global cooperation appears to be shrinking.

Ryder added that the way forward for the international community is one in which the rule of law and cooperation prevail, or otherwise the world will enter an era in which there will be a high degree of confrontation, and the notion that “might is right” will prevail.

## Strait: Lai, DPP called creators of crisis

From page 1

For similar reasons, the spouses of two other Taiwan residents were forced to leave the island and return to the mainland by the end of March.

Chen, the spokesman, said that on the one hand, the DPP authorities call themselves “advocates of freedom, rule of law and human rights”, but on the other hand, they “repeatedly abuse judicial measures” to bully cross-strait families and break them up. “This is unjust, harmful and unethical,” he added.

Recently, Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te unveiled 17 strategies to counter the Chinese mainland, labeling the mainland as “foreign hostile forces”. The strategies include a number of policies restricting mutual visits by Taiwan and mainland residents, as well as restrictions on cultural, academic and religious exchanges.

Lai's strategies go against the will of the people, fully exposing his ugly

nature of being against peace, dialogue, democracy and humanity, Chen said, adding that these moves are designed to provoke opposition and confrontation against the mainland while obstructing cross-strait cooperation.

“Lai is enforcing political terror and autocracy on the island,” the spokesman emphasized.

Underscoring that the mainland has been working with Taiwan compatriots to promote peaceful cross-strait development, achieving significant progress, Chen condemned Lai and the DPP as the destroyers of cross-strait peace and the creators of crisis in the Strait.

“Equating cross-strait relations with a hostile relationship is a blatant reversal of history, a reckless provocation against the mainland, and an escalation of tensions in the Taiwan Strait,” Chen said.

Lai's recent acts include obstructing cross-strait exchanges and tourism resumption, persecuting and

suppressing groups and individuals in Taiwan who support and participate in cross-strait exchanges, using intimidation to stop Taiwan compatriots from applying for mainland identification documents, and banning cooperation with certain mainland universities, Chen said.

Lai and the DPP have been scheming to amend some regulations to suppress political opponents and enforce political terror on the island, Chen noted.

The spokesman called on Taiwan compatriots to recognize the serious harm brought by the DPP authorities and oppose their wrongful actions from the perspective of safeguarding their own rights and maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait.

“We hope that Taiwan compatriots will work with us to eliminate interference, remove obstacles, promote exchanges and cooperation, advance cross-strait relations, and enhance the well-being and interests of people on both sides,” he added.

## Tariffs: Free trade key to being ahead

From page 1

For commodities such as canola, wheat and pork, losing access to the Chinese market means struggling to find alternative buyers — often at lower prices. The long-term impact of these trade disruptions could be devastating for Canada's agricultural sector, an industry that has long been a pillar of the country's economy.

In the face of escalating trade tensions with the US, Canada would be better served by easier access to the large China market.

Rather than escalating trade conflicts, Canada should be positioning itself as a leader in global trade cooperation by pursuing more free trade agreements and strengthening economic ties with as many partners as possible. This approach would allow Canada to secure a stronger and more sustainable economic future.

Canada has benefited immensely in the past from open trade policies.

Agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement have expanded access to new markets and created opportunities for Canadian businesses. Before it was derailed, the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement — the latest iteration of the North American Free Trade Agreement — was one of the most successful trade blocks in history.

Canada should take a similar approach with China and other economies, big and small. Engaging in constructive trade negotiations rather than escalating tariff battles will provide long-term benefits for Canadian industries and consumers.

The federal government must also recognize that trade policy should not be dictated solely by geopolitical pressures.

While Canada's relationship with the US is critical, aligning too closely with Washington's trade strategies without considering domestic economic interests could limit the country's ability to chart its own course.

As Canada approaches a new political cycle with the appointment of a caretaker prime minister, Mark Carney, to replace Justin Trudeau, and the certainty of new elections over the next few months, trade policy is increasingly important.

The election of a new prime minister could provide an opportunity to shift the country's approach to trade toward a more pragmatic and forward-looking direction. Leaders must recognize that protectionism is not the answer to economic challenges — cooperation and strategic diplomacy are.

Trade is a fundamental driver of economic growth, innovation and prosperity. Canada's economy is, at its core, resource-driven. As such, it depends on an open, rules-based trading system that fosters cooperation rather than division.

If Canada hopes to maintain its competitive edge in the global economy, it must reject protectionist impulses — or demands — and reaffirm its commitment to free trade.

By embracing open markets, reducing trade barriers and engaging in constructive negotiations with key partners, Canada can secure long-term economic stability and growth. Now more than ever, the country needs a trade policy that is rooted in pragmatism and a commitment to free trade, rather than reactionary tariffs that only serve to hurt businesses and consumers alike.

The author is managing director of Bahati, an editorial services agency in Hong Kong and Canada. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

## Initiative unlocks tourism potential of GBA

By LI LEI in Hong Kong  
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A group of researchers has proposed pooling tourism resources across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to create a globally competitive destination.

The initiative, outlined in a study published on Wednesday by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's School of Hotel and Tourism Management, aims to boost infrastructure investment, preserve historical heritage and drive integrated regional development.

Titled "Developing a Tourism Cluster in the Greater Bay Area: A Dual Branding Perspective", the report recommends that Hong Kong, Macao and the nine Guangdong cities in the GBA adopt a collective branding strategy to build a cross-border tourism cluster known for seamless connectivity and diverse attractions.

The study calls for an inter-regional task force to coordinate branding and marketing while preserving each city's unique identity.

"The primary aim of this research is to unlock the Greater Bay Area's tourism potential by showcasing individual cities' strengths under a unified cluster brand while fostering regional collaboration," the report stated.

Under the proposed model, tourism offerings could be combined to cater to different interests. Heritage trails, for example, could feature Hong Kong's Clock Tower in Tsim Sha Tsui and Jiangmen's *diao lou*, multi-story defensive village houses. Nature-focused itineraries could include Zhaoqing's karst landscapes and Huizhou's coastline, while family-friendly packages could link Hong Kong Disneyland Resort and Ocean Park with Zhuhai's Chimelong Ocean Kingdom.

The study also suggests leveraging social media to attract younger travelers and partnering with airlines, travel agencies and hospitality providers to offer discounted, flexible travel plans.

The recommendations are based on field research conducted by a team from PolyU, the University of Macau and the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, which assessed tourism resources and infrastructure across all 11 Greater Bay Area cities.

Researchers analyzed 200,000 social media reviews from platforms such as Weibo and Trip.com and interviewed 182 residents, officials and business owners. Their findings revealed strong tourism assets but a lack of coordinated branding efforts.

The study, supported by the Hong Kong government's Public Policy Research Funding Scheme, aligns with Hong Kong's push for a mega-event economy. A successful GBA tourism cluster could attract major international events, conferences and exhibitions, it said.

Lead researcher Hung Kam, a professor at PolyU's School of Hotel and Tourism Management, said the initiative would allow the region to maximize its collective strengths, spur innovation and create sustainable growth opportunities.

"This study advances academic research on destination branding, particularly for tourism clusters, and offers valuable insights for other regions exploring similar strategies," she said.

The study follows a pro-tourism guideline issued on Tuesday by the Guangdong government, which aims to transform the province into a premier travel destination as part of a broader push to stimulate consumption and economic growth.

The plan highlights the creation of curated tourism itineraries, capitalizing on the GBA's iconic skyscrapers and major infrastructure projects such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the cross-sea Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link.



**Above:** The 2025 Wuxi International Cherry Blossom Festival kicks off at Yuantouzhu scenic area in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, on Wednesday. **Left:** Members of the Japan-China Sakura Friendship Forest Preservation Association plant trees symbolizing friendship during the event in Wuxi on Wednesday. PHOTOS BY HUAN WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Wuxi sows seeds of friendship as cherry blossom event begins

By CANG WEI in Nanjing  
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The 2025 Wuxi International Cherry Blossom Festival and the 38th Anniversary of the Construction of the Sino-Japanese Cherry Blossom Friendship Forest kicked off on Wednesday, highlighting Wuxi's international connections and its role as a hub for cultural exchange.

The event, which originated in the 1980s from citizen-level exchanges between China and Japan, centers on the planting of cherry blossom trees. In 1988, Chinese and Japanese citizens planted 1,500 cherry blossom seedlings at the Yuantouzhu scenic area, marking the beginning of the "cherry blossom friendship" between Wuxi and Japan.

Today, the scenic area boasts over 30,000 cherry blossom trees across 650,000 square meters. Since 2014, Wuxi has used the annual cherry blossom planting activity as a platform for international cooperation and local exchanges.

More than 3 million visitors are expected to visit Wuxi during the

event, solidifying the city's status as one of the world's top three cherry blossom viewing destinations, alongside Tokyo and Washington.

Sun Wei, deputy mayor of Wuxi, emphasized the significance of the Sino-Japanese Cherry Blossom Friendship Forest as a symbol of the 38-year-long exchange between the two nations.

"With over 30,000 cherry blossom trees flourishing, the forest has become a unique symbol of Wuxi, set against the backdrop of the stunning Taihu Lake," he said.

Japan's Ambassador to China Kenji Kanasugi highlighted efforts to revitalize exchanges between the two nations.

"The renowned Sino-Japanese Cherry Blossom Friendship Forest in Wuxi is a valuable achievement driven by the unremitting efforts of Japanese and Chinese civilians to promote exchanges between the two countries," he said.

He expressed gratitude to those involved in the endeavor and pledged to maintain a positive relationship between Japan and China.

Yutaka Shibata, president of the Japan-China Sakura Friendship Forest Preservation Association,

praised Wuxi's cherry blossoms for attracting global visitors.

"With prayers for peace, people smile and admire the cherry blossoms, demonstrating the continuous expansion of world peace," he said.

He added that the association will continue to protect the cherry blossom forest, which symbolizes the wishes of past generations.

Wuxi has expanded its international engagement in recent years, strengthening its internationalization and economic openness. The city has established economic ties with over 220 countries and regions, and 118 Fortune Global 500 companies have invested there. Last year, its total foreign trade exceeded 770 billion yuan (\$106 billion).

Deputy Mayor Sun said the Wuxi government aims to improve the business environment for foreign nationals working, living, investing and developing in the city. The city plans to enhance industrial cooperation, explore complementary advantages and expand cultural exchanges to deepen friendly city relationships and promote mutual cultural learning.

## Guangdong undersea tunnel connected

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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An undersea tunnel at a depth of 68 meters beneath the Shantou Bay in eastern Guangdong province was successfully connected on Wednesday after a tunnel boring machine broke through rock with a diameter of 14.57 meters, nearly as high as a five-story building.

The connection marked significant progress in the construction of the undersea tunnel, setting multiple records in both domestic and international undersea tunnel construction.

The tunnel is the world's first high-speed rail tunnel featuring a single bore with two tracks. With a designed speed of 350 kilometers per hour, it forms a crucial connection in the high-speed railway between Shantou and Shanwei in eastern Guangdong.

The tunnel, considered a key project along the railway, spans 9,781 meters. It is one of the most challenging tunnels under construction due to its complex geological structure and hydrogeological conditions, according to builders.

"The project team has advanced a series of design solutions, successfully overcoming multiple threats such as high-intensity earthquakes, dense active faults, extremely high water pressure in the sea area, highly corrosive seawater and extremely complex strata," said Huo Fei, chief designer of the Shantou Bay undersea tunnel



project at China Railway Design Corp.

The tunnel must traverse 17 fault zones in a high-intensity seismic area with an 8-degree magnitude, including eight active faults, while withstanding the dual pressures of extremely high water pressure on the seabed and highly corrosive seawater.

To ensure the tunnel can withstand the immense pressure of seawater, the project team conducted calculations and analyses to understand the pressure state of seawater during earthquakes. By carrying out directional grouting construction from busy shipping lanes in the bay to the seabed, the team reduced water seepage and pressure in the tunnel, setting a precedent for high-precision, ultra-high-pressure grouting at a depth of hundreds of meters for railway tunnels.

To minimize the impact of earthquakes on high-speed rail operations, the team developed flexible and expandable damping joints at tunnel segment joints and a flexible isolation layer that

resists water pressure and absorbs seismic energy.

"The design allows the tunnel to remain stable during earthquakes," Huo said.

Faced with the high corrosiveness of seawater, engineers proposed a comprehensive waterproof and anti-corrosion defense system that includes pressure reduction, integrated waterproofing and high-strength crack resistance, according to Huo.

## Setting records

A series of innovative technologies have helped the tunnel overcome challenges related to pressure, seismic activity and corrosion resistance, while setting several records in deep-sea tunnel construction.

In addition to being the world's first single-bore, double-track high-speed railway undersea tunnel, it has also become the world's largest excavated diameter railway undersea tunnel that has been fully connected, the domestic railway undersea tunnel crossing the most active faults and the domestic undersea tunnel with the highest water pressure.

Once the entire line is completed and opened to traffic, the Shantou-Shanwei high-speed railway will connect with another high-speed railway under construction between Shantou and Zhangzhou in Fujian province, creating a new north-south high-capacity passenger transport corridor between the Pearl River Delta, the Western Taiwan Strait Economic Zone and the Yangtze River Delta.

## Hotline offers solace to those in distress

12356 to be made available nationwide after trial launch proves successful

By WANG XIAOYU  
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When clinical psychologist Meng Fanqiang answered a call to the newly launched national mental health support hotline in late January, the caller struggled to articulate her thoughts and could only weep.

Through fragmented words, the woman in her late 20s managed to tell Meng she had recently lost her job, ended a relationship and was overwhelmed with distress, blaming herself for all her misfortunes.

"I began by offering relaxation tips to help her calm down and focus on my suggestions. I reassured her that her pain and distress were valid and it would take time to work through these emotions," he said. "I also emphasized that none of those negative experiences were her fault."

Meng, who also heads the psychological assessment department at Beijing Anding Hospital affiliated to Capital Medical University, said that nearing the end of the 30-minute call, the young woman sounded calmer and was able to approach her life challenges with a more rational perspective. She promised to call back if she felt distressed again.

"Her case demonstrates the strength of the hotline — it is quick, easily accessible and serves as an emotional buffer for people experiencing a mental health crisis who don't know where to turn for help," he said.

Meng is one of some 60 trained mental health specialists at the hospital who have answered calls to the 12356 national mental health support hotline since its launch in selected regions on Jan 1.

The hotline operates around the clock in at least 18 provincial-level regions and is expected to be available nationwide starting May 1, according to the National Health Commission, which launched the hotline with support from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Beijing was among the first regions to implement the five-digit number, with Beijing Anding Hospital, along with 16 local psychiatric medical institutions, managing the hotline.

Cui Sipeng, office director of the Beijing mental health center and a hotline manager at the hospital, said the city operates nine phone lines during the day from 8 am to 6 pm and two lines after those hours.

"As of Thursday (March 13), the hospital has received over 2,700 calls, with peak hours occurring from late night to around 2 am," he said.

Cui noted that all call operators specialize in psychology or psychiatry, and the team includes experienced therapists from hospital wards. "They have also undergone training to adapt to phone conversations, which differ from their usual face-to-face interactions, as well as training in medical ethics and other clinical techniques," he added.

Typical callers often experience anxiety and depression, with issues

ranging from familial and interpersonal relationships to parenting challenges.

Cui said that call operators not only lend a sympathetic ear, but also provide informed guidance.

"Callers often feel trapped in a whirlwind of negative emotions. A hotline counselor's role is to first acknowledge and contain those emotions, then offer a fresh perspective on their issues," he said.

Call operators will also provide psychological education such as teaching basic relaxation techniques and breathing exercises, while raising awareness about mental health and psychiatric conditions.

According to the China Mental Health Survey released in 2019, the lifetime prevalence of psychological disorders among Chinese adults was 16.57 percent, with mood disorders and anxiety being the most common conditions. The country's Healthy China Initiative (2019-30) aims to increase the treatment rate of depression by 80 percent by 2030.

Health officials have noted that a growing number of Chinese people are facing mental health pressures as the nation has experienced changes such as rapid economic growth, urbanization, industrialization and the challenges of an aging population.

Authorities have implemented a series of measures to make mental health services more accessible and less stigmatized. These include establishing more psychological clinics and service centers in hospitals, training general medical workers to identify mental health issues, organizing experts to conduct awareness campaigns and launching the hotline.

Meng noted that public awareness of mental health has improved in recent years, with more people recognizing the importance of seeking mental health support during distress and feeling comfortable reaching out for help in crisis situations.

"The hotline provides an outlet to address early signs of mental health problems. Some people may find it cumbersome to visit a psychological clinic, so the hotline offers them a chance to vent and seek guidance," he said.

Cui recalled a call in late January from a graduate student experiencing severe anxiety due to a combination of issues involving his relationship with his parents, graduation and job hunting.

"During the call, I realized he wasn't aware that he could take steps to interact with those around him. I encouraged him to reach out to his parents and discuss some of his troubles," Cui said.

"Before ending the call, he told me he had just wanted to have a talk but was surprised to find motivation to make real-life changes afterward," Cui added.

Experts said more efforts will be made to train additional mental health support counselors and serve less-developed regions.

## Training together



The Chinese and Thai navies hold an opening ceremony for a joint military exercise named Blue Strike-2025 in waters near Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, on Wednesday. It was the sixth such joint training exercise held between the two countries. The operation will continue until April 2. QIAO CHENXI / XINHUA

## CHINA

## Village head evolves into birding pioneer

Xie Fanglin finds innovative approach to boost Mingxi's avian tourism industry

By CHEN LIANG in Mingxi, Fujian  
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Nestled within the rolling mountains in the northern part of Fujian province, Mingxi county in Sanming city is known for its rich avian life, boasting nearly 350 species of wild birds.

To develop bird-watching into a pillar industry, the local government in 2016 organized nearly 40 grassroots officials from its townships and villages to visit a village in Zhangzhou, a city in southern Fujian, to learn the art of operating bird hides — camouflaged shelters used to observe birds at close range without disturbing them.

Among the officials, Xie Fanglin stood out. Truly inspired by what he saw, he has transformed himself from a village official to a successful bird hide operator, homestay owner and bird-watching guide.

Living in Zhongxi village in Mingxi, his bird hide has become a favorite among bird-watchers and photographers. His homestay, which boasts 22 standard rooms, is often fully booked, and his tour to observe the elusive white-eared night heron, an endangered nocturnal bird, has become one of the most popular services among bird enthusiasts since its launch in January.

"If you treat bird-watching as a business, you must be truly hardworking, open to new ideas and not afraid of changes," Xie, 48, told China Daily at his three-story homestay. "Because bird-watchers and photographers' interests are always evolving, they seek new and rare birds to watch and photograph. To meet their changing needs, I am always thinking about how to improve my services."

His business savvy has been nurtured by his diverse experience. He joined the People's Liberation Army in 1996 and retired in 2001. After several years in wood-floor processing and trading in Yunnan province, he returned home in 2008. "My friends asked me to return to help develop our village," he said.

After two years working as a village cadre, he was elected Party chief of the village in 2013.

**Hide operator**

He started building a bird hide and feeding birds in 2016 and quickly became captivated by the avian world and its possibilities.

He built his bird hide at the foot of his family's bamboo grove and regularly fed birds at an open ground in front of his hide. In 2017, Elliot's pheasants, an endangered species only found in southeastern parts of China, started visiting his hide and became regular visitors. "It has become a hit for my bird hide and has been a popular target for bird-watchers and photographers," he said.

Then he found that there are Mandarin ducks living in Mingxi Creek, which winds through the village that borders Junzifeng National Nature Reserve. He started guiding his customers to watch and take photos of the beautiful ducks.

In the summer of 2017, he also found Oriental dollarbird, a distinctive pale blue bird, breeding at the village and set up a temporary hide for his customers. Immersing himself in bird-watching as a



**Clockwise from top:** A bird-watcher approaches Xie Fanglin's bird hide in Zhongxi village, Mingxi county, Fujian province, on March 21. CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY A Blyth's kingfisher is seen perching on a rock in Mingxi Creek near Zhongxi village. CARRIE KA-WAI MA / FOR CHINA DAILY Xie Fanglin searches for kingfishers along the creek. CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY



pair of the birds nesting on the bank of the creek.

Rather than rushing to publicize the exclusive find for personal gain, Xie built a temporary hide on the creek bank and invited 10 familiar photographers to join him to embark on a 60-day observation journey.

"At that time, the birds' well-being was uncertain. Premature disclosure could disrupt their habitat and lead to the loss of these treasured birds in Mingxi," Xie said. To encourage the photographers' record of the birds' whole nesting process, he offered them free meals and lodging.

It was a pity for them to witness that two of the four young chicks died for

unknown reasons. "One of their parents pulled out their bodies from the hole where they lived and dumped them in the water," Xie said.

In 2021, they continued their observation and found two chicks eaten by a snake, and in 2022 Xie saw a snake eating the eggs. "Just as our observations show, the reproductive success rate of the Blyth's kingfisher is truly low," he said. "That's why it's so difficult to find the birds in the wild."

After understanding the habits of the Blyth's kingfisher, he unveiled his discovery to bird enthusiasts in the summer of 2022, sparking a buzz among the bird-watching community.

In 2018, after his term as the village head, he decided to quit. "I found that the bird-watching business was interesting but needed my full engagement," he said. "I was just too exhausted to continue my multi-task mode."

Following the 2022 breeding season, he began guiding people to find the kingfishers along Mingxi Creek, charging 400 yuan (\$55) per person per day. His pricing varied for different bird species: white-eared herons at 300 yuan per person per day; Elliot's pheasants at 100 yuan, Mandarin ducks at 50 yuan from November to June, and dollarbirds at 50 yuan from mid-April to late July.

Xie's day usually starts at 6 am, guiding customers to his bird hide in the morning and leading other groups to watch birds, particularly kingfishers, in the wild after breakfast.

**Photography service station**

In May 2017, Xie began renovating his old house to create a homestay for bird enthusiasts, completing the project in February 2018. Charging 200 yuan for a standard room, he shared the latest bird news in various WeChat groups, attracting bird lovers from over 30 countries and regions.

The popularity of his homestay and services caught the attention of Sony (China).

In August last year, Sony chose Xie's homestay as the location for its ecological photography service station, offering the latest equipment for photography enthusiasts to experience. "Sony (China) has established eight such stations in the country," Xie said. "Mine is the only one in Fujian."

With three Sony cameras and several lenses available, Xie has taken stunning bird photos, sharing them on his WeChat moments to attract more visitors.

The bird-watching industry has brought significant rewards to Xie and his family. He has chosen to share his gains, encouraging fellow villagers to establish bird hides. Although some villagers built their own hides, maintaining them proved challenging due to lack of interest or commitment.

"None of them can maintain a bird hide for a long time," he said. "If you don't persist in feeding birds every day, the birds won't appear regularly. So the birders and bird photographers won't come."

Instead, Xie buys agricultural products from his fellow villagers and promotes them to his customers. During peak season from October to May, he introduces customers to villagers with available rooms once his homestay is fully booked.

"My record of visitors per day was more than 50," Xie said. "That means I could introduce about 30 guests to other families."

Xie also collaborates with a fellow villager on night tours to search for the white-eared night heron. The villager drives an electric pontoon for the night tour, earning 150 yuan per passenger.

In summer, the off-season for bird-watchers and photographers, Xie's homestay caters to primary and high school students visiting the village for nature experiences. As a result, he often reads wildlife books.

"I have to prepare to answer all kinds of questions about nature from students," he said.

By CHEN LIANG in Mingxi, Fujian  
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Last month, Carrie Ka-wai Ma received a WeChat message informing her of a unique opportunity to observe elusive white-eared night herons at a reservoir near Zhongxi village in Fujian province.

"It was wonderful news," said Ma, an ardent bird-watcher who works with Hong Kong Wetland Park on exhibit planning and who is also an amateur bird ringer.

The message was from Xie Fanglin, a bird-watching guide based in Mingxi county, Fujian, who had previously guided her around his hometown.

"I immediately started planning a trip to Mingxi county," Ma said.

The white-eared night heron is not a new bird for the experienced birder. Primarily found in southern China and northern Vietnam, it is a nocturnal and exceptionally elusive species. Due to its rarity, the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List classifies it as endangered, because its population is small, fragmented and in decline.

Ma is among the few Chinese bird-watchers who have previously seen this mystical bird. Her first sighting was in 2003 at Chebaling National Nature Reserve in Guangdong province, where she glimpsed a black silhouette against the dusk sky. In the summer of 2017, she traveled to the Xin'anjiang Reservoir in Zhejiang province, where local birders had discovered pairs of the nesting herons.

## Bird-watcher thrilled with chance to see rare heron



**From left:** A white-eared night heron perches on a branch in Mingxi county, Fujian province, on March 7. CARRIE KA-WAI MA / FOR CHINA DAILY Xie Fanglin (second from right) guides bird-watchers and photographers to spy night herons at a reservoir near Zhongxi village on March 20. CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

"However, I never had the chance to observe their nocturnal behaviors," she said.

Once her plans were made, Ma and two birding friends boarded a bullet train from Shenzhen in Guangdong province to Zhangzhou in Fujian on the morning of March 7, then transferred to another train to Sanming city.

They met Xie at the station and he drove them to Zhongxi, arriving in late afternoon to watch Elliot's pheasants at Xie's bird hide.

That evening, Xie guided Ma and her friends, along with several other customers, into the depths of the reservoir on an electric pontoon.

Each bird-watcher had a chair and space to set up a camera tripod. Xie's partner operated the boat while Xie sat at the front, navigating and searching for white-eared night herons with a torchlight.

Scanning the muddy banks and shoals with his torch, Xie spotted at least four white-eared night herons over two hours.

"We saw two birds feeding on the bank before flying into the trees," Ma said.

Ma said that the reservoir is part of a river and riparian forests grow on its banks.

"From my observation, the water is very clean and the place has minimal human interference, very similar to the habitat I saw in the Xin'anjiang Reservoir," she said.

"There are tall trees with dense canopies which serve as good nesting habitats for the birds. Near the reservoir, there are also farms for them to find food. So this area

could be a significant breeding site for the herons."

Xie concurred with Ma's observations. In fact, the bird-watching guide started searching for the night herons because a bird photographer accidentally took pictures of a juvenile white-eared heron near Zhongxi in May 2022.

"The presence of a juvenile indicated the bird might have been born here," Xie said. He explored habitats around the village, notably the woods near rivers, and eventually discovered the herons on the reservoir banks during a night watch.

"I realized it was almost impossible to find the birds during the day," he said. "But at night, they reliably appeared at the reservoir."

After locating the birds, Xie sought the best way to bring his guests into the heart of the reservoir safely and comfortably.

"I spent two years testing different boats to find the best one," Xie shared. "I tried several types, including fishing platforms and rubber boats, before designing our current pontoon boat."

Tours on the pontoon boat, stable and quiet, quickly became a hit within the birding community. "So far, I've welcomed 600 to 700 guests," Xie said.

For Ma, the two-hour night tour yielded not only sightings of the night herons but also 15 red-backed flying squirrels and several other bird species.

"It was truly satisfying," she said. "Mingxi is such a wonderful place for bird-watching. I am sure I will visit again."

## ACROSS ASIA

## Editor's note:

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



A Singapore Airlines plane flies above Frankfurt am Main on June 17, 2024. KIRILL KUDRYAVTSEV / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Aviation safety takes flight

Singapore will bar passengers from using or charging power banks inside aircraft

Travelers who ignore a new aviation industry ban may face warnings, fines, or have their devices confiscated, experts tell The Straits Times. From April 1, Singapore Airlines, or SIA, and its low-cost arm Scoot will prohibit passengers from using or charging power banks in-flight. This comes after a series of recent cabin fire incidents on carriers such as Batik Air and Air Busan.

Other Asian carriers, such as Thai Airways, Eva Air and China Airlines, have implemented similar rules.

Asked how the ban will be enforced, an SIA spokesperson said: "The safety of our customers and crew is a top priority for the SIA Group. Our crew are trained to remain vigilant and ensure customers comply with in-flight safety procedures."

While SIA has not specified consequences, experts such as John Tan, lead professional officer teaching air transport management degree program at Singapore Institute of Technology, or SIT, believe airlines will first issue warnings to passengers who do not comply.

Tan says: "If the problem continues, penalties could include fines or confiscation of the device. In extreme cases, passengers might be removed from the flight once it lands, and repeat offenders could be banned from future flights."

Caleb Sim, senior lecturer teaching the aviation management diploma program at Republic Poly-



The remains of an airplane that caught fire are seen at Gimhae International Airport in Busan, South Korea, on Feb 3. A portable power bank likely caused the fire, local authorities said. YONHAP

technic in Singapore, agrees, referencing the 2016 ban on the Samsung Galaxy Note 7.

In October 2016, multiple airlines — including SIA and all United States carriers — prohibited the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 from being brought on board, either in carry-on or checked-in baggage. The phone had been deemed a fire hazard following multiple reports of overheating, burns and other injuries.

Noncompliant passengers in the US faced fines or criminal prosecution, while SIA denied boarding to those carrying the device.

Sim says national and international civil aviation authorities need to rally behind airlines so they can be empowered to enforce stricter consequences.

He adds: "Asian airlines tend to be more 'polite' or service-oriented, and usually aim to create a positive travel experience for their passengers. So, I suspect they will not be too harsh in enforcing the conse-

quences of using power banks in-flight until national or international aviation authorities step in with regulations."

Since 2016, International Air Transport Association regulations have required lithium-ion batteries to be carried in the cabin, instead of the cargo hold.

Under the current rules, power banks with a capacity of up to 100 watt-hours are permitted in the cabin. Those between 100Wh and 160Wh require approval, and those above 160Wh are not allowed on board.

## Pros and cons

Singaporean freelance creator Dylan Wong supports the ban.

"The 31-year-old says: "For me, getting from one destination to another safely is more important than having a fully charged device."

SIT's Tan says while the ban improves safety, it is likely to cause inconvenience for many travelers,

especially frequent flyers and business travelers who depend on power banks to stay connected in-flight.

While SIA provides USB ports and power sockets, economy travelers on Scoot must pay between \$5 and \$11 for in-seat power supply, depending on the flight duration.

An SIA spokesperson said Scoot is committed to ensuring that prices remain affordable.

Engineer Darren Lee, 31, often travels on Scoot and worries about long flights without power.

"When I reach my destination, I don't want to have to worry about my phone dying as I navigate the airport, book transport or check in to my hotel," says Lee, who adds that he is unlikely to pay for in-seat power.

He believes that some passengers may secretly continue to use their power banks, which could be riskier due to heat building up in enclosed bags.

For clearer guidelines on power bank use, Sim suggests that in-depth research be done to identify the make and model of power banks involved in cabin fire incidents.

"Not all power banks are manufactured to the same standards. Right now, we don't really have any control over what type and what quality of power banks passengers bring on board," he says.

Despite the mixed feedback from travelers, Tan says the ban signals a broader shift in aviation safety.

"As new technologies such as personal devices and advanced systems become more prevalent, the industry is increasingly focused on managing risks. This proactive approach shows that airlines are addressing potential safety issues before they become widespread problems," he says.

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE

## Tourism and biodiversity at risk as raging wildfires devastate forests in Nepal

An alarming rise in the number of forest fires has been devastating Nepal's forests and releasing massive amounts of carbon that threaten both biodiversity and the economy, according to a new research which warns that the worst is yet to come.

In February, wildfires ravaged around 82 hectares of forest land in Sindhupalchok, particularly in the upper regions of Jugal and Bhotokoshi rural municipalities. The blazes took days to extinguish. Similarly, a wildfire in Liping forest in ward 2 of Bhotokoshi rural municipality burned down 35 hectares.

In Dolakha, a massive fire scorched hectares of forest land in the Gaurishankar Conservation Area. The fire, which started on Jan 28, was brought under control after nine days. Before that, it had spread over 600 hectares, including critical red panda habitats.

A wildfire in the forests of Timang in the mountain district of Manang started on Feb 1 and burned for days before dying out.

The research indicates that Nepal's forest fires could release over 170 million tons of soil organic carbon and 325 million tons of above-ground wood carbon, amounting to more than 495 million tons of carbon emissions. This underscores the urgent need for fire mitigation and forest management.

While forests can regenerate after fires, full recovery can take nearly a decade.

Over 5,200 fire incidents were reported in Nepal last year, the second highest incident after 2021, when 6,537 such cases were reported, according to the Department of Forest and Soil Conservation.

The wildfire season in Nepal has just begun and is expected to peak in April and May. Experts warn that fire-induced air pollution could overwhelm hospitals with respiratory cases.

Open fires and wildfires emit hazardous pollutants such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, lead, and mercury. These toxins have both short-term and long-term health consequences.

Kathmandu Valley is particularly vulnerable. The research notes that smoke from forest fires often settles in the bowl-shaped capital, creating a persistent haze over the city.

"It's just the start, as the worst is yet to come," Bhupendra Das, an air quality expert, said in a recent interview. "The prolonged dry spell will likely lead to more wildfires, and authorities are ill-prepared to tackle them."

Poor air quality can cause pneumonia, bronchitis, conjunctivitis, skin allergies, strokes, and heart problems in the short term. Long-term exposure increases the risk of lung and intestinal cancers, kidney disease, and cardiovascular conditions.

Forest fires not only threaten biodiversity but also impact Nepal's food supply, tourism, and local economies.

Tourism, a key pillar of Nepal's economy, depends on protected areas and national parks, which are now at risk. Last year, wildfires severely impacted Pokhara, a popular tourist city, disrupting flights for weeks due to dense smoke.

Hotel operators report that, in recent years, smog from forest fires has lingered over Kaski and Annapurna until the arrival of monsoon

rains, obscuring mountain views from tourist hot spots like Ghandruk. In the spring, Nepal's peak tourist season, wildfires in the Tarai region affect flights. Last spring, Janakpur Airport, a key pilgrimage site, saw nearly a week of flight cancellations due to farm fires.

## Call to action

The new research conducted by experts from Arizona State University, Jackson State University, the University of Groningen, and Kathmandu Forestry College, used NASA Earth Observations and machine learning to analyze fire risks over the past two decades.

It is Nepal's first national-scale study on the fire-carbon-biodiversity nexus.

Experts note that Nepali farmers increasingly burn vegetation due to labor shortages. Traditionally, most farmers avoided burning straw and used it to feed livestock, but this practice is changing.

"As happened in the case of the recent Los Angeles wildfires, Nepal is trapped in a carbon-temperature feedback loop," said Kshitij Dahal, a doctoral student at Arizona State University and lead author of a research article titled "Nepal's carbon stock and biodiversity are under threat from climate exacerbated forest fires".

In a brief statement released to the media, he said, "The difference is Nepal's fires threaten biodiversity found nowhere else on Earth."

"If we do not act now, we risk losing critical biodiversity and worsening global climate change," said Professor Ambika P. Gautam of Kathmandu Forestry College. "We urgently need better fire management strategies."

Wildfires have a big impact on Nepal's national parks and wildlife reserves.

According to research, Koshi Tapu Wildlife Reserve and Chitwan, Banke, Bardiya, Shuklaphanta, and Parsa National Parks are highly susceptible to wildfires, threatening rare species such as Bengal tigers, one-horned rhinos, and wild elephants.

Nepal's southern provinces, including Lumbini and Madhesh, face the highest wildfire risks. Six of Nepal's 20 protected areas, including Chitwan and Bardiya National Parks, are under extreme threat.

Rocky Talchabhadel of Jackson State University warned, "Our models show that wildfire risk in Nepal's south has been rising since 2001. Without action, these fires could wipe out decades of conservation progress and transform vital carbon sinks into carbon sources."

The study calls for immediate fire mitigation strategies, including community-led patrols to detect and control fires early, AI-based early warning systems to predict and prevent wildfires, and cross-border collaboration to leverage South Asian climate partnerships.

Prajal Pradhan of the University of Groningen emphasized the need for sustainable solutions: "This isn't just about stopping fires. Nepal must integrate climate action and biodiversity protection into sustainable development initiatives."

For example, sustainable forest management — such as controlled timber harvesting — can reduce fire risks while ensuring long-term forest health.

THE KATHMANDU POST, NEPAL



Fires rage in the Hattiban forest on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal, on Feb 20. AMBIR TOLANG VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Private rice imports surge amid shortages in Japan

Private imports of overseas rice have been increasing rapidly in Japan due to shortages in the domestic market. In the fiscal year 2024, rice import applications submitted to the government covered a record-high 991 tons as of the end of January.

Currently, companies are able to profit from such imported rice, even though they have to pay a high tariff. Kanematsu Corp, a major trading company based in Tokyo, has decided to import an unprecedented 10,000 tons of rice in 2025.

There are two types of rice imports. Rice is either imported by the government, which is obliged to purchase a certain amount from foreign countries under the rules of the World Trade Organization, or it is privately imported by trading and other companies, which pay a tariff to the government.

Up to 100,000 tons of government-imported rice for staple food use is available for the market. Records of privately imported rice are available



Government-stockpiled rice bags arrive at a rice mill in Saitama Prefecture, Japan, on March 18. THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP IMAGES

for fiscal 2019 onward, with 426 tons imported in fiscal 2020.

The amount had since been between 200 tons and 400 tons each year, but in the fiscal year 2024 it reached 468 tons by the end of December. Then by the end of January, the amount had more than doubled to 991 tons.

Kanematsu announced in February

it would import 10,000 tons of rice due to the high demand from those in the restaurant industry, such as Gyudon beef rice bowl chains.

According to sources close to the distribution industry, the purchase price for Calrose medium grain rice produced in the United States is about 150 yen (\$1) per kilogram, including transportation and other

costs. After the tariff is added, the total price is about 500 yen per kilogram.

Given that domestic rice is currently sold at around 900 yen per kilogram in stores, companies can sufficiently profit from imports, the sources said.

The Yokohama-based supermarket chain OK has been selling Calrose rice at 10 of its outlets since March 7 at 3,335 yen for five kilograms, including tax.

The system under which the government buys foreign rice is called the minimum access system. Following the 1993 Uruguay Round multilateral trade talks, the system was implemented in fiscal 1995.

Of the current rice import quota of 770,000 tons, the import of general-purpose rice for staple food use is limited to 100,000 tons. The government-imported rice sold out in the fiscal year 2024 for the first time in seven years due to a poor domestic rice harvest.

THE JAPAN NEWS

## TALES &amp; TRAILS

## PASSAGE TO HISTORY

Hexi Corridor connected China to the world and provided a route for culture and commerce, **Zhao Xu** and **Ma Jingna** report.

**Editor's note:**  
China Daily reporters leverage local expertise to devise different itineraries that showcase a blend of historical landmarks and natural wonders in highly recommended cities and sites, offering practical guidance to experience the country.

This is a passageway that has connected China to the world for more than two millennia — a corridor where the wind howls and sand dances year-round, where travelers and their camels once trudged, laden with bundles of silk and sacred scrolls. It was an artery of coveted treasures and the teachings of Buddhism, a crossroads for dreamers, adventurers and believers — souls drawn by an innate yearning for the unknown. Today, it remains a path of wonder, traversed by those who stand in awe of nature's power to sculpt the land and humanity's indomitable desire to shape history.

This passageway is known as the Hexi Corridor — a corridor in name and essence, flanked by the towering Qilian Mountains to the south and the unyielding deserts to the north. Falling entirely within the borders of modern-day Gansu province in northwestern China, it winds through a chain of oases, fragile yet vital, their very existence owing to the mountains whose name, Qilian, means "heaven" and whose soaring peaks produce the life-giving meltwater that sustains this arid land.

"Hexi" means "west of the Yellow River". For ancient travelers from China's heartland, a westward journey through the corridor began with crossing the Yellow River. By contrast, a 7th-century traveler from West Asia or the Mediterranean, having journeyed the full 1,200 kilometers of the corridor, would look out over the river to the expansive plains of central China, and ultimately to Chang'an, the glorious capital of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The name of this passageway is therefore self-explanatory: the Hexi Corridor was a window through which China and the world reached out to each other. A vital stretch of the ancient Silk Road, it became a conduit for art, culture and trade — a witness to the will of man and the building of a state.

That human will was repeatedly put to test in this part of the world, where life was a constant struggle due to water scarcity and many other challenges.

In 139 BC, the powerful Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) dispatched an envoy led by the missionary-adventurer Zhang Qian on a westward journey. Their mission: to seek political allies in the fight against the Xiongnu raiders from the steppes in the north, who dominated the corridor at the time.

Zhang did not return until 126 BC, having spent 13 years on the road, including nearly a decade in Xiongnu captivity.

While his expedition yielded no immediate political alliances, his vivid firsthand account brought the land he had so relentlessly traversed to the attention of Emperor Wudi, who instantly recognized its immense potential.

By then, the Han military campaigns against the Xiongnu were already in full swing, culminating in the decisive victory of a young general, Huo Qubing, in 121 BC.

Leading his unstoppable troops, he marched all the way to Dunhuang at the western end of the corridor. Within the ensuing decades, Dunhuang became a Han military outpost along with Jiuyan, Zhangye and Wuwei, all oasis towns along the corridor.

Today, statues of Huo on a rearing horse can be found throughout the corridor, from city plazas to ranches, where steeds once so prized by Emperor Wudi now roam the grasslands, with

the snowcapped Qilian Mountains in the distance.

Meanwhile, Dunhuang attracts millions of tourists each year, thanks to its world-renowned Mogao Grottoes. Carved into the sandstone cliffs at the desert's edge, these splendidly frescoed caves stand as a testament to the spread of Buddhist art along the corridor, as it was subjected to the profound influences of Chinese aesthetics and philosophy.

The Hexi Corridor, true to its nature, was a melting pot of traditions embraced by a multitude of peoples across its vast expanse and beyond. An open, commercial culture thrived, and astute power players, mindful of history, knew that survival depended as much on diplomacy as on military strength. Alliances were sealed through marriage, with princesses journeying alongside travelers across the Gobi Desert.

Today, we reconstruct their lives through tomb epitaphs, along with bronze ware and gold ornaments that accompanied them into the afterlife, now displayed in museums.

See *Spiritual*, page 9

Visitors take a camel trek into the desert of the Hexi Corridor in Gansu province, a region famed for its wealth of historical sites and a variety of natural landscapes.  
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



# TALES & TRAILS

## Heavenly horse 'reins' again

Ancient bronze artwork discovered in 1978 symbolizes vigor of culture, **Zhao Xu** and **Ma Jingna** report.

This is not merely a bronze horse from nearly 2,000 years ago — it transcends the title of a masterpiece of art. For the Chinese today, it is a symbol of strength, an emblem of fortitude, a token of the vigor and verve that defines both its era and our own.

It is a galloping horse frozen in a moment of pure exhilaration, all four hooves off the ground and head tilted to one side in joyous abandon. Every detail — from the flared nostrils to the gaping mouth and wide, bulging eyes — speaks to the boundless energy coursing through the animal's veins in that fleeting moment.

As if the sense of speed were not yet fully captured, a bird appears beneath the horse's raised right hind hoof. Startled, it turns back in alarm — just as the unstoppable force of the horse overtakes it.

Since its discovery in 1978 in a Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) tomb dated to around the late 2nd century, the bronze horse, standing at approximately 36 centimeters in height, has been regarded as the most prominent representation of the "heavenly horses" frequently mentioned in historical texts of the era. These horses, a breed native to the ancient Kingdom of Dayuan in present-day Uzbekistan, were prized for their exceptional build and stamina, making them ideal warhorses.

Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty, believing that smooth passage along the Hexi Corridor would help fill his stables with these remarkable creatures, desperately sought to acquire them.

That goal was eventually accomplished. The horse, currently on display at the provincial museum in Lanzhou, Gansu province, offers a fitting starting point for any traveler hoping to dive into that history.

Few may realize that although Lanzhou, as the provincial capital, is not technically part of the Hexi Corridor, it lies a mere 160 kilometers from Wushaoling, or Wushao Mountain, the eastern end of the corridor. In 121 BC, Huo Qubing, poised to become the dynasty's guardian god in his battle against the nomadic Xiongnu horsemen, entered the Hexi Corridor from here.

Today, major archaeological finds from the Hexi



Top: Leitai Han Tomb in Wuwei, a 15th-century shrine dedicated to the God of Thunder, sits right atop a tomb dated to around the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries. Above from left: A wooden spotted dove dated to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220); a massive bronze wok once used by Xiongnu troops; and a wooden camel head sculpture. PHOTOS COURTESY OF GANSU PROVINCIAL MUSEUM AND WUWEI MUSEUM

region fill the galleries of the provincial museum, including a wooden spotted dove that once adorned a cane, a symbol of privilege reserved by the Han Dynasty law for those over 70. These privileges, recorded on wooden slips also displayed in the museum, included exemptions from taxes and the right to remain standing before a court official. Their discovery in the region attests to Han Dynasty's firm control over Hexi.

There are also many miniature wooden farm animals and tools once used as funerary objects — evidence of the thriving agriculture and livestock farming in the corridor's oasis towns. One of these towns was Wuwei, a major political center of the region between the early 4th century and mid-5th century.

Remember to visit the Wuwei Museum, whose collection ranks among the finest in the country.

One of its prized artifacts is a massive bronze wok, standing at 118 cm in height and weighing 230 kilograms. Excavated locally, it is believed to have been used by Xiongnu troops for stewing beef and mutton — dishes a modern traveler to Hexi must try, as the region still boasts some of the finest beef and mutton in China.

Both museums have dedicated large sections of their spaces to Silk Road artifacts — fabric

specimens and silverware adorned with grapevines and the image of the Greek wine god Dionysus, for example. The Sogdian people, whose control over Silk Road trade peaked from the 4th to the 8th centuries, are represented by pottery figurines wearing big beards and the equivalent of modern-day windbreakers. Wall texts tell the invention in the silk-buying regions of a primitive drying device, to make the fabrics drier, lighter, and therefore cheaper to purchase since it was sold on milligrams, very much like gold.

Then there are the horses — wooden, ceramic, and, of course, bronze — all on display in the museums. But one must visit the Leitai Han Tomb in Wuwei, not only because it is the very site where the famed bronze horse, so fast as to outpace a flying bird, was discovered, but also because in a side chamber of the tomb lay an entire bronze chariot procession: 39 horses, 45 human figures and 14 chariots, including the aforementioned one.

The tomb's vaulted main chamber, soaring 4.5 meters high, is built entirely of baked bricks — without cement, concrete, or any binding material. Yet, it has endured for 1,800 years, even withstanding the devastating 1927 earthquake that leveled much of Gansu's aboveground architecture. Inside, intricate branch-shaped lanterns

were discovered, designed to consume all oxygen in the chamber, preventing oxidation and preserving its content.

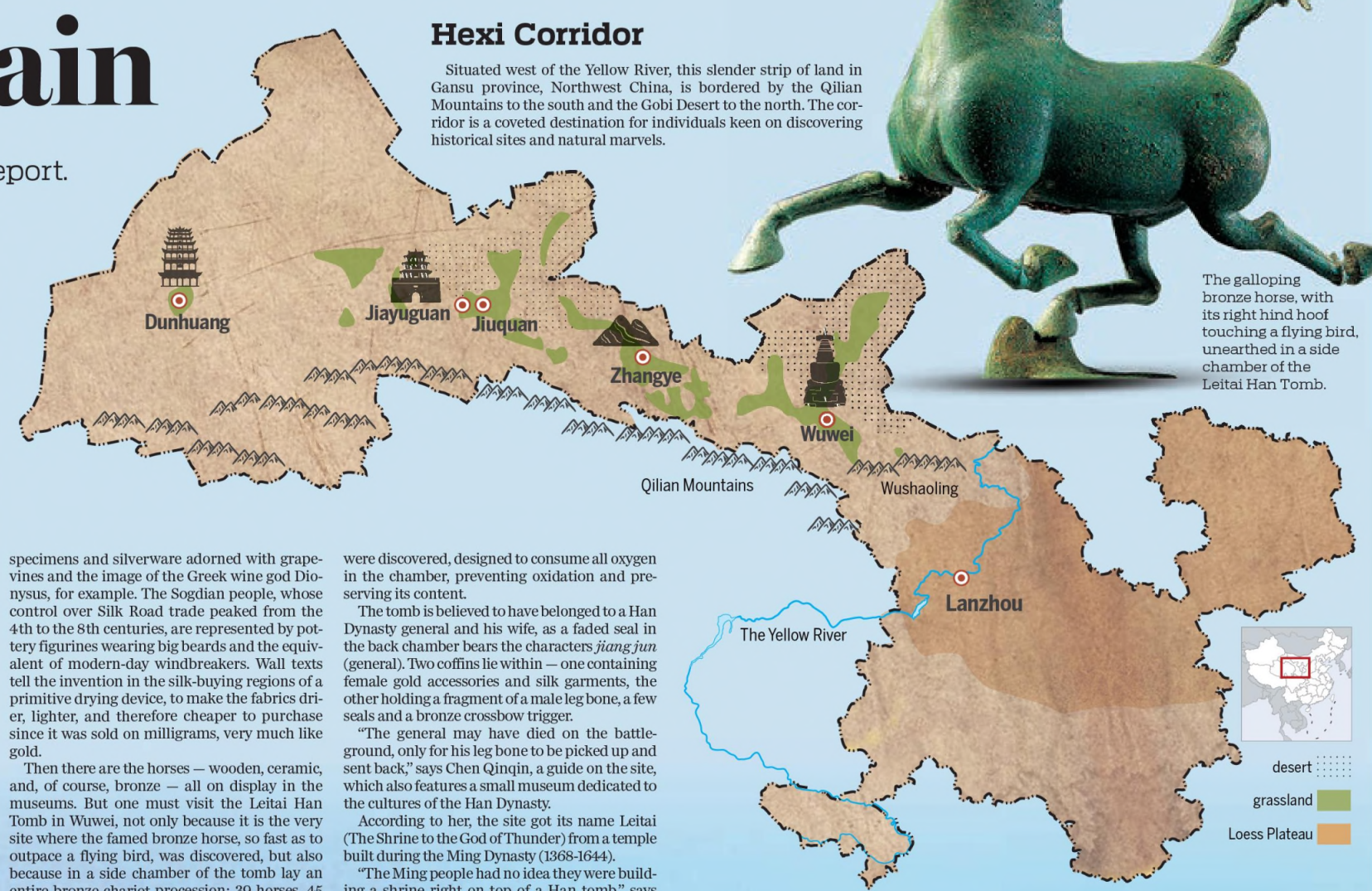
The tomb is believed to have belonged to a Han Dynasty general and his wife, as a faded seal in the back chamber bears the characters *jiangjun* (general). Two coffins lie within — one containing female gold accessories and silk garments, the other holding a fragment of a male leg bone, a few seals and a bronze crossbow trigger.

"The general may have died on the battlefield, only for his leg bone to be picked up and sent back," says Chen Qinjin, a guide on the site, which also features a small museum dedicated to the cultures of the Han Dynasty.

According to her, the site got its name Leitai (The Shrine to the God of Thunder) from a temple built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

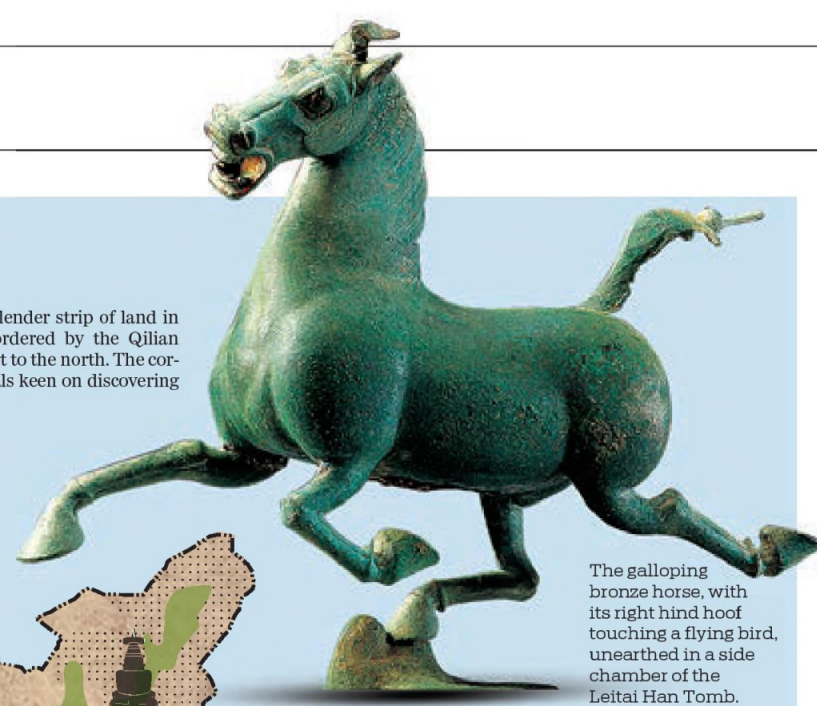
"The Ming people had no idea they were building a shrine right on top of a Han tomb," says Chen. "But when you think about it, it's typical of Hexi, where one layer of history was inevitably built upon another, and revelations often come when least expected."

Tong Yunshan contributed to this story.  
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### Hexi Corridor

Situated west of the Yellow River, this slender strip of land in Gansu province, Northwest China, is bordered by the Qilian Mountains to the south and the Gobi Desert to the north. The corridor is a coveted destination for individuals keen on discovering historical sites and natural marvels.



The galloping bronze horse, with its right hind hoof touching a flying bird, unearthed in a side chamber of the Leitai Han Tomb.

GRAPHICS BY LI XIAOTIAN / CHINA DAILY

### Must visit:

- **Gansu Provincial Museum:** No. 3, Xijin Road (W), Qilhe district, Lanzhou city, Gansu province
- **Wuwei Museum:** No. 25, Guzang Road, Liangzhou district, Wuwei city, Gansu
- **Leitai Han Tomb:** No. 272, Beiguan Road (M), Liangzhou district, Wuwei city, Gansu



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## The Great Wall of man and nature

By **ZHAO XU** and **MA JINGNA**

Nowhere in the Hexi Corridor does a traveler feel closer to those who came before him than at Yumen Pass. Located about 90 kilometers northwest of Dunhuang, it marks the corridor's westernmost end — a threshold laden with both historical and emotional weight.

For those departing, this was the final farewell to familiar soil, a place for lingering glances before vanishing into the unknown. For those arriving, it was a gateway of hope — the desert and its hardships behind them, and ahead, the vibrant trading hub of Dunhuang, beckoning like a promise fulfilled.

Once surrounded on three sides by water — a strategic choice for its location — the pass now consists of only a rectangular fortress with crumbling rammed-earth walls that blend seamlessly into the surrounding Gobi.

However, as an outpost of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), this UNESCO World Heritage Site still warrants a long journey. In Chinese,



Above from left: Remnant of the Great Wall dated to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) in Dunhuang; the "Colorful Danxia" of Zhangye; and Yardang rock formations in Dunhuang. Below right: The Great Wall dated to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) extending from the Jiayu Pass. SUN ZHOUJI / FOR CHINA DAILY. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. TONG YUNSHAN / CHINA DAILY



Above from left: Remnant of the Great Wall dated to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) in Dunhuang; the "Colorful Danxia" of Zhangye; and Yardang rock formations in Dunhuang. Below right: The Great Wall dated to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) extending from the Jiayu Pass. SUN ZHOUJI / FOR CHINA DAILY. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. TONG YUNSHAN / CHINA DAILY



Above from left: Remnant of the Great Wall dated to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) in Dunhuang; the "Colorful Danxia" of Zhangye; and Yardang rock formations in Dunhuang. Below right: The Great Wall dated to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) extending from the Jiayu Pass. SUN ZHOUJI / FOR CHINA DAILY. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. TONG YUNSHAN / CHINA DAILY

city, named after the pass itself. Located 160 km southeast of Yumen Pass, Jiayu Pass marks the western end of the Ming Great Wall. Nearly 80 percent of the existing structures, covering more than 33,500 square meters, date back to the Ming Dynasty. These include imposing tower buildings and large stone slabs with deep grooves left by passing carriages.

Stones for construction were sourced from the nearby Black Mountain. In winter, water was poured on the slopes to create a natural slide for easier transport. Winters are still harsh, and staying warm is essential for visitors who choose to experience the land at its most severe.

Interestingly, the rammed earth used for construction was sun-dried in summer and fried in a gigantic wok during winter to ensure that no plant seeds or insect eggs remained, preventing future threats to the wall's stability. With the Ming Great Wall extending north and south of it, the pass, located at the narrowest point of the Hexi Corridor, seemed to hold the corridor gently by the neck with its strategic control, or so it was believed.

Here stands the westernmost beacon tower of the Ming Great Wall, with bundles of sticks once burned to send urgent signals displayed in a nearby museum. By then, the ancient Silk Road had waned, replaced by what would become known as the Maritime Silk Road connecting southern and southeastern China with the broad market in the Indian subcontinent, the Arabian Peninsula, eastern Africa and Europe.

New frontiers emerged, and new world unveiled, yet these ancient passes and walls endured — witnesses to the might of ancient China, and to the great land route that bridged civilizations between the East and West.

Tong Yunshan contributed to this story.



Above from left: Remnant of the Great Wall dated to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) in Dunhuang; the "Colorful Danxia" of Zhangye; and Yardang rock formations in Dunhuang. Below right: The Great Wall dated to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) extending from the Jiayu Pass. SUN ZHOUJI / FOR CHINA DAILY. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. TONG YUNSHAN / CHINA DAILY

### Must visit:

- **Yumen Pass and Han Dynasty Great Wall:** Dunhuang, Gansu province
- **Jiayu Pass and Ming Dynasty Great Wall:** Jiayuguan city, Gansu
- **Confucius Temple in Wuwei:** No. 172, Chongwen Street, Liangzhou district, Wuwei city, Gansu

## Spiritual: Legacy of a long stay

From page 7

One thing that the land was never short of was remarkable life stories. Between 385 and 401, Kumarajiva (344-413), a Buddhist monk from the ancient kingdom of Kucha in present-day Aksu prefecture, Xinjiang-Uyghur autonomous region, stayed in Wuwei, then known as Liangzhou. From this transformative period emerged a master translator of Buddhist scriptures, whose work achieved a rare balance of beauty and fidelity, shaping Chinese Buddhism for generations to come.

Kumarajiva passed away in Chang'an, where he led 800 monks in an ambitious translation effort. The *sarira* of his tongue — *sarira* being the Sanskrit term for the cremated remains of spiritual masters — is believed to be held within the base of a Buddhist temple tower in Wuwei.

For both Zhang and Kumarajiva, the Hexi Corridor was never meant to be the destination, yet fate held them there far longer than they had intended, regardless of their will. In the end, the outcome was the same — the Hexi Corridor left its mark on them, indelibly.

It is undoubtedly marked — and occasionally marred — many souls who dared to measure its length, whether on foot or atop horses and camels, bound not just by the road, but by the journey itself.

The same holds true for today's travelers. One can only begin to grasp the scale of ambition and the sense of heroism this land once inspired in hearts as people drive through its vast expanses of arid terrain, scattered with Camel Thorn, a spiny, grayish-green shrub that grows in alkaline soil and sustains the camels on their long treks.

The remnants of the Great Wall still stand, as do the eroded ruins of ancient passes — once guarded by soldiers who bore the weight of solitude. Their existence had inspired poets for centuries, shaping a soulful strain of romanticism found nowhere else in Chinese verse. During the Han Dynasty, people wrote on bamboo and wooden slips, binding them with cords to create books and documents. Remarkably, more than half of the Han slips unearthed so far have been discovered in the Hexi Corridor.

The region's arid climate — where annual rainfall in many areas is as low as 80 millimeters — made life harsh, yet it also helped to preserve history. This history, woven into the fabric of China, is so vital that one cannot truly understand the country without understanding what unfolded along this corridor over the past two millennia.

Now, close your eyes and let your mind drift to the Hexi Corridor. What do you hear? The howling of wind and pounding of hooves, the battle cries and clinking of cold glinting sword, the solemn chanting of scriptures and the gentle swishing of a thousand paint brushes ...

History — deep, layered, and heavy with scents and sounds — rises from the dust. It does not simply wait to be remembered — it beckons, relentless and unyielding. Come.

Tong Yunshan contributed to this story.

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The Dafo (Giant Buddha) Temple in Zhangye.

# TALES & TRAILS



The giant Buddha statue is carved into a cliff of sandy rocks at the Tianti Mountain, separated by a dam in the Huangyang River Reservoir in Wuwei, Gansu province. SHEN LONGQUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Buddha's gaze into eternity

How would a son of a great filial piety honor his devoutly Buddhist mother after her passing? Juqu Mengxun (368-433), the second ruler of Northern Liang — a dynasty that partially or entirely controlled the Hexi Corridor between 397 and 439 — answered this by carving Buddhist caves into mountain cliffs, before filling them with statues and covering their walls in sacred art.

He chose Tianti Mountain for this purpose. Less than several kilometers from his power center Wuwei, then known as Liangzhou, this secluded outcrop of the Qilian Mountains was a place of solitude, suited for little but meditation.

While the exact cave resulting from the king's devotion to his mother remains unknown, it is certain that this place became a center of grotto carving, a practice that flourished for centuries to come. An early spring visit, just an hour's drive from Wuwei's city center, brings visitors face-to-face with a magnificent reflection of the legacy: a massive south-facing, 30-meter-high sandstone statue of Shakyamuni Buddha dated to the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

Carved into the sandstone cliff — a process eased by the rock's softness — the Buddha gazes over the vast whiteness of an ice-covered reservoir in winter and its emerald expanse in summer. A serene smile graces his face as he rests his left hand on his knee and raises his right palm outward in a gesture said to have prevented the mountain opposite from advancing.

Though sandstone succumbs easily to the chisel, it erodes quickly in rain. The survival of this Buddha and its grottoes, like many in the region, including the famous Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, is due to the area's arid climate.

To conserve water for agriculture, a reservoir was built in 1958 that once reached the cliffside, submerging the Buddha's knees. Although a dam was later added to hold back the water, the statues and frescoes relocated from smaller caves — there are 17 existing ones — before the reservoir's construction never returned and can now only be seen in museums, including the Gansu Provincial Museum and Wuwei Museum.

Those are treasures that have earned the site its rightful place in all Chinese Buddhist grottoes, says Bao Rui, an on-site guide.

The Buddhist deities depicted here have round faces, thick lips, deep-set eyes and high-bridged noses. Their physiques are strong and well-defined, yet their poses are fluid and graceful, almost dance-like. Draped in delicate, flowing garments, they embody the elegance and allure of iconic Indian beauty, she says.

"The Tianti Mountain Grottoes bear witness to Indian Buddhist art in its earliest, most unassimilated form upon reaching China," she adds.

Within the next century, local adaptation brought classical Chinese aesthetics, along with influences from Confucianism and Taoism. Figures became more slender, their garments more spacious, with flowing belts that added a sense of elegance and refinement.

In 439, the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534) unified northern China by ending the control of the Hexi area by Northern Liang. Following their victory, the Northern Wei rulers relocated nearly all prominent families and artisans to their capital in modern-day Datong city, Shanxi province, about 1,100 km northeast of Wuwei. These craftsmen later contributed to the creation and decoration of Buddhist grottoes in the heartland of China, spreading what one prominent Chinese archaeologist dubbed "the Liangzhou Model".

It's worth noting that in world art history, this style of human statue-making, characterized with natural proportions, expressive faces and the contrapposto pose, are recognized as part of the tradition of Gandhara Art. Flourishing between the 1st century BC and 5th century in present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan, this style, which blended Greco-Roman realism with Indian traditions, emerged through Alexander the Great's invasion in the 4th century BC and the subsequent Greek rule in parts of India. It later received significant patronage under the Kushan Empire (1st-3rd centuries), whose founders are Ruzhi people who once occupied part of the Hexi Corridor and with whom Emperor Wudi of China's Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) had tried unsuccessfully to form an alliance against the Xiongnu raiders.

Keeping this in mind, it's equally intriguing to note that Juqu, the man behind the Tianti Mountain Grottoes, likely had both Ruzhi and Xiongnu blood, a fact that speaks as much about the complicated history of the Hexi Corridor as about the broader

Son's devotion shines down for centuries in a grotto that still fascinates, **Zhao Xu** and **Ma Jingna** report.



From top: A fresco painting from the Tianti Mountain Grottoes in Wuwei. Baita Temple in Wuwei, where the cremated remains of Sakya Pandita are held. YANG JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY, PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

### Must visit:

- **Tianti Mountain Grottoes:** Dengshan village, Wuwei city, Gansu province
- **Mati Temple Grottoes:** Sunan Yugur autonomous county, Zhangye city, Gansu
- **Mogao Grottoes:** Dunhuang city, Gansu
- **Baita Temple:** Baita village, Wuwei city, Gansu

formation of Chinese civilization.

In fact, many scholars suggest that Juqu's efforts at Tianti Mountain were ultimately politically motivated. In a place like the Hexi Corridor, where consolidating power had been no easier than stabilizing sand, Buddhism served as a key unifying force that even a fierce ruler like Juqu would have needed to rely on to win hearts and minds.

And in that, Juqu, if he had lived a long life, would have found a like-minded person in a Mongol prince named Borjigin Godan (Kuoduan in Chinese), grandson to Genghis Khan and son to Ogedei Khan.

In 1247, Godan met with Sakya Pandita (commonly known as Sapan) in Wuwei. A revered Tibetan spiritual leader and Buddhist scholar, Sapan had spent two years traveling with his two young nephews, including 9-year-old Chogyal Phagpa. This meeting paved the way for the inclusion of Qinghai-Tibet Plateau into the rule of Yuan Dynasty, founded by Kublai Khan, another grandson of Genghis Khan, in 1271. One year before, Kublai made Phagpa, then 35, his imperial preceptor.

Today, the place to reflect on that history is Wuwei's Baita (White Tower) Temple, where Phagpa lived until his passing in 1251 at the age of 69. His cremated remains, known as *sarira* in Buddhism, were buried there within the base of a memorial tower built in his honor by Godan, who had adopted Tibetan Buddhism as his belief.

Staying true to its role as a cultural melting pot, the Hexi Corridor was where both Tibetan and Han Buddhism flourished. A notable site for Tibetan Buddhism is the Mati (Horse's Hoof) Temple Grottoes in Zhangye, famously linked to King Gesar, a legendary Tibetan figure whose mount is said to have left its footprint there.

Carved into steep cliffs where birds nest in wind-eroded cavities, these grottoes stretch 30 kilometers and comprise seven small grotto groups. Some are difficult to access — in one case, visitors may need to climb on all fours to navigate the extremely narrow staircases built inside the mountain. These staircases lead to all 21 interconnected caves, which rise in a seven-story pagoda-like formation.

However, no grotto-viewing journey in the Hexi region is truly complete without witnessing the world-renowned Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang — 735 caves carved

into the northern face of Mingsha Mountain, stretching a total of 1,720 meters in an unbroken masterpiece of history and art.

The grottoes, very much like the ancient Silk Road, reached their heyday during the first half of the Tang rule from the early 7th to mid-8th centuries, when vision and valor combined to propel the Chinese dynasty to greatness, transforming its capital Chang'an (the modern-day Xi'an city in Shaanxi province) into a vibrant international metropolis.

The ingeniously constructed wooden temples and pagodas, the elaborate candleholders and incense burners, the divine music and mesmerizing dances once performed at court and in lavish banquets across Chang'an — all found their way into Dunhuang grotto paintings, converging into an ideal world resided by Buddhist immortals. The frescoes' historical value can never be overestimated given the fact that few Tang Dynasty paintings, and fewer pieces of architecture, have survived.

In Chinese, *mingsha* means singing sand. Whenever wind blows across the land, the countless sand grains that cover it rub against each other, producing a deep, resonant sound. Sometimes, it's a hum; other times, a roar.

"Ever-conscious of the Silk Road's perils, ancient travelers would sometimes commission the carving of a Buddhist grotto in Dunhuang before venturing into the unknown, offering prayers in exchange for divine protection," says Zhong Na, a veteran guide.

"In this way, the grottoes, which probably wouldn't have existed if not for the Silk Road, became its guardian, offering comfort and spiritual strength — gifts as vital to a traveler as water."

Today, visitors emerge from the shadows of the caves to watch dance performances inspired by the grotto paintings. With each twirl, the dancers seem to blur the passage of 1,000 years, dissolving the line between history and the present.

And the audience is left in wonder, unaware that they have become part of this eternal dance — a timeless cycle of culture, faith and discovery as enduring as the wind itself.

Tong Yunshan contributed to this story.

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Interconnected caves ascend in a seven-story pagoda-like formation at Mati Temple Grottoes, a site of Tibetan Buddhism. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang once guarded the ancient Silk Road by providing much-needed comfort and spiritual support to travelers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## DPP authorities will be held accountable for each and every secessionist move

Beijing has improved and consolidated its institutional and practical mechanisms to prepare for Taiwan's reunification with the motherland, whether peacefully or by force, in response to the provocations of the Democratic Progressive Party authorities on the island and the collusion of "pro-independence" forces with external actors.

And it will certainly not waste any chance to take concrete actions to facilitate cross-strait exchanges and cooperation to not only counter the Lai Ching-te authorities' de-sinicization endeavors but also bring tangible benefits to Taiwan compatriots.

Although the Lai authorities think they grasp the initiative in the cross-strait situation with their continual provocations, which they consider to be adroit maneuvers, each time their provocations only reinforce the fact that they are caught on the horns of a self-made dilemma. With the improvement of its comprehensive strengths, it is the Chinese mainland that has firmly gripped the initiative on the Taiwan question, with remarkable progress being continually made in almost all fields related to the island's return to its motherland, including law, policy, economy, infrastructure and the military.

In its latest move, the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council launched a platform on Wednesday through which the Taiwan compatriots can report the secessionists and their bad behaviors to the authorities of the mainland in response to the Lai authorities' attempts to purge mainland elements and influence on the island. Based on evidence collected on the platform, along with other sources, the mainland will hold the diehard separatists accountable in accordance with the law, Chen Binhua, a spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office, said at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

In the news conference, Chen also responded to a host of questions regarding the latest developments with regard to the cross-strait situation. The broad spectrum of the questions, ranging from Lai's foreign patrons to cross-strait collaboration, should leave no party in any doubt that the mainland is steadily advancing its pre-set agenda on national reunification step by step with full confidence.

Compared with the composure and restraint the mainland exercises, the haste with which the Lai authorities have made their reckless moves earlier this month only serves to expose their burning anxiety that they will be abandoned by the United States after the change of occupant in the White House.

By trying to overstep Beijing's red line in claiming the island to be "a sovereign democratic country" and the mainland "hostile foreign forces" in his speech on March 13, Lai is trying to put pressure on the Donald Trump administration to continue with the collusion and patronage that the DPP authorities had grown accustomed to under the previous Joe Biden administration.

By doing so, the Lai authorities have only exposed themselves to the administration's extortionist demands in exchange. The US administration has recently pressed Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company to increase its investment in the US from the \$100 billion it promised to at least \$200 billion. But the total assets of the island's largest semiconductor manufacturer was \$204.22 billion as of the fourth quarter last year.

In a telling sign of their willingness to be a US proxy, the Lai authorities said they are "happy" to see the TSMC deal, which would actually realize TSMC's "Americanization". "Selling" the island's leading company to the US in exchange for the latter's protection in case of "emergency" reinforces the fact that the DPP authorities only care about their own narrow ends, not the welfare of Taiwan compatriots.

Further evidence of that is the DPP authorities trying to build "non-Red" supply chains to try and decouple the island from its motherland in economy and trade, which effectively prevents Taiwan businesses from benefiting from the highly complementary economies of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. These moves will deal a heavy blow to the island's economy. Take the tourism industry as an example. After the DPP authorities blocked tourism exchanges across the strait several years ago, Taiwan's tourism deficit has continued to rise, hitting about NT\$692.2 billion (\$20.92 billion) last year.

The DPP authorities' endeavors to try and sever the cross-strait ties and sell its interests to their foreign patrons will only serve to expedite their own fall.

## Transatlantic rift is not a temporary blip

Speaking on Tuesday with visiting Portuguese Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel, who is now in Beijing for the second China-Portugal strategic dialogue at the foreign ministers' level, Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed that "China regards Europe as an important pole in a multipolar world".

China-European Union relations, which had been strained in recent years mainly due to Brussels embracing the previous US administration's hawkish stance on Beijing to favor with the United States, are seeing signs of warming-up lately — with high-level European officials either speaking positively about the mutually beneficial relationship or visiting the country to seek closer ties.

Apart from Rangel, the French foreign minister and Italy's Senate president are also scheduled to visit China and meet with top Chinese officials this week.

The renewed efforts by China and Europe to strengthen political trust and boost their pragmatic cooperation have been given greater impetus by the change of administration in the United States.

The recent revelation of a Signal group chat among top officials of the Donald Trump administration, which inadvertently included a journalist, has laid bare the arrogant and contemptuous dynamics driving US foreign policy. While discussing military strikes on the Houthis in Yemen, Vice-President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth derided Europe as a "pathetic" free-rider, framing Washington's actions not as collective security measures but as reluctant favors to an ungrateful ally.

The US leader has previously described the EU as "abusive" and "hostile" for allegedly taking advantage of the US. This is emblematic of the transactional and divisive ethos of the Trump administration and underscores a harsh reality: Europe's reliance on US security guarantees is a liability in an age when the US' unilateralism and zero-sum geopolitics are not a temporary aberration but a structural realignment.

For Europe, long accustomed to sheltering under the US' security umbrella, strategic autonomy is no longer a theoretical debate but a practical necessity. This changed reality was evident at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, early this year, when European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen exhibited a marked change of stance, calling for the 27-nation bloc to "deepen" ties with China. The challenge for Europe is not recognizing the need for autonomy, which has long been mooted, but in executing it, as its realization has been hindered by internal EU divisions.

But Trump's tariff attacks and demand for higher EU defense spending prove that any US support will come at a steeper cost and the erosion of European agency, with members of Trump's coterie such as Vance and Elon Musk openly meddling in European politics, amplifying far-right narratives to fracture Europe into subservient "partners".

China's investments during Europe's sovereign debt crisis — purchasing bonds in Greece, Portugal, and Spain, and funding infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe — have demonstrated its commitment to upholding the bloc's stability, not exploiting its divisions.

The Belt and Road Initiative, often misrepresented as a divisive tool, in fact complements EU integration by bridging infrastructure gaps and reducing core-periphery disparities. A cohesive Europe, capable of independent action, strengthens global multipolarity — a vision China actively supports. In contrast, Washington's pressure on Europe to adopt a confrontational stance toward China reveals its aim: to subordinate European interests to the US' agenda to curtail China's development.

The path to European autonomy no doubt appears daunting to Europeans, as it means a break with the familiarity of playing second fiddle to the US. But partnership with China offers a pragmatic way to reduce the risks. While the US sows discord, China invests in connectivity; while Washington demands alignment against Beijing, Beijing advocates dialogue and development.

The choice for Europe is clear: cling to the US, which views it with disdain, or embrace a future of sovereign agency through cooperation with a trustworthy partner on the basis of mutual respect.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the EU and China, it marks an ideal time for the EU to chart its own course rather than letting Washington dictate the heading. China stands ready to support Europe's journey toward strategic autonomy — not as a patron, but as a collaborator in building a stable, multipolar world.

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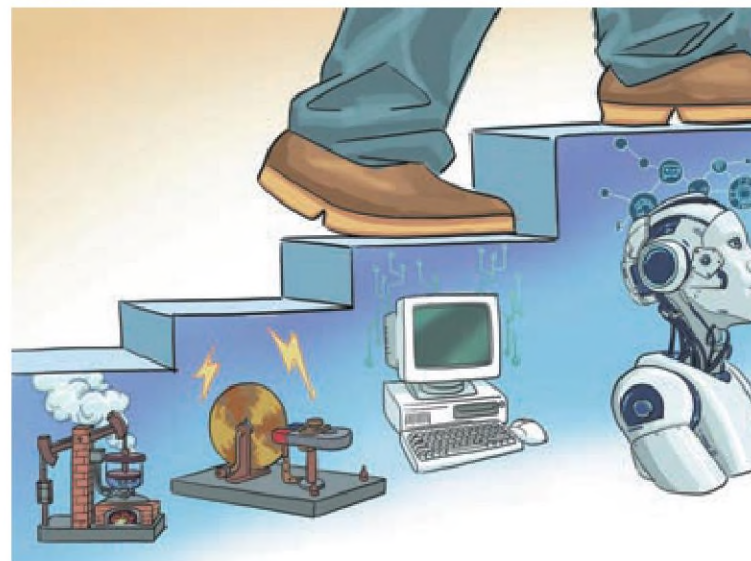
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Jin Ding



## Opinion Line

## Information leak serves to expose US' attitude toward European allies

That senior Donald Trump administration officials discussed classified military plans — such as "air strikes on Yemen's Houthi forces" — on a nonclassified communication app, in a breach of US government security norms, is dramatic enough.

What makes it even more astonishing is the inclusion in that chat of Jeffrey Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Atlantic. This blunder led to the information leak.

Yet, public perception was hardly shaken when US Vice-President JD Vance openly declared, "I just hate bailing Europe out again", while Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth dismissed Europe as "freeloading". Although Europe considers itself an ally of the United States, the Trump administration has undoubtedly demonstrated a dis-

missive demeanor toward it.

Vance lectured European countries on democracy in Munich in February; the European Union even didn't appear at the negotiation table on the Ukraine crisis; the EU is facing almost indiscriminate tariff attacks and threats from the US.

These reflect a US mindset that The Economist magazine captured perfectly with its comment on the information leak "A shambolic leak reveals Team Trump's contempt for allies".

European leaders are well aware of this reality and have long been advocating for strategic autonomy. To the Europeans, an alliance should be based on equality.

While varying national interests may prevent European countries from achieving complete strategic

independence, the pursuit of those should remain a common goal that serves the collective interests of all European nations and is worth striving for.

Adding yet another layer of drama, US Senate Intelligence Committee Vice-Chairman Mark Warner claimed that China was "luring individuals with national security clearance". Blaming China has long been a reflex action for many US politicians when faced with their own missteps.

However, such deflections do little to mitigate the current controversy or help divert attention from the focus of the incident, which is the Trump administration's contempt toward the US' European allies.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## Protection of SMEs protection of economic vitality

A revised regulation ensuring payments for small and medium-sized enterprises, which will take effect on June 1, is expected to strengthen protection for the legal rights and interests of SMEs.

The regulation specifies the responsibilities of all parties concerned, detailing the role of departments at the national and local levels responsible for the comprehensive management of SME promotion, as well as the duties of relevant departments such as the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance in ensuring payments to SMEs.

In terms of supervision and complaint handling, the regulation specifies the responsibilities of county-level or higher governments and their relevant departments.

In addition, it stipulates that in case of severe delays in payments to SMEs, necessary restrictions will be imposed on government agencies and public institutions. Large enterprises will face restrictions in areas such as fiscal funding support, investment project approvals, financing access, market entry, qualification assessments and commendations.

Moreover, there will be penalties for specific individuals. Besides, the regulation clarifies legal liabilities for acts such as retaliation, abuse of power or dereliction of duty by staff members of government agencies, public institutions and large enterprises in matters related to SME payments.

Notably, the regulation clearly stipulates that large enterprises must make payments to SMEs with-

in 60 days of the delivery of goods, projects or services. And in cases where disputes arise but do not affect other parts of the deal, payment for the undisputed parts must be paid promptly.

In reality, some large enterprises often impose unreasonable transaction terms on their SME partners and frequently delay payments after contract fulfillment.

From this perspective, the revised regulation imposes stricter constraints on them, particularly on State-owned enterprises, government agencies and public institutions.

The revised regulation, if well implemented, can help channel more funds into SMEs, increasing employee incomes and subsequently boosting market consumption.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## What They Say

## Vance's visit ups the ante on Greenland grab

US Vice-President JD Vance said that he's joining his wife on a trip to Greenland, starting Friday, suggesting in an online video that global security is at stake.

"Speaking for President Trump, we want to reinvigorate the security of the people of Greenland because we think it's important to protecting the security of the entire world," said Vance, adding that leaders in Denmark and North America had "ignored" Greenland for "far too long".

The office of US Second Lady Usha Vance said on Sunday that she would depart Thursday for Greenland and return on Saturday. Usha Vance and one of the couple's three children had planned to visit historic sites and learn about Greenland's culture. The vice-president said he didn't want to let his wife "have all that fun by herself" and said he plans to visit a Space Force outpost in the northwest coast of Greenland.

However, ahead of the vice-presi-

dent's announcement that he would join his wife, discontent from the governments of Greenland and Denmark had been growing sharper, with the Greenland government posting on Facebook on Monday night that it had "not extended any invitations for any visits, neither private nor official".

Meanwhile, plans for National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and Energy Secretary Chris Wright to also travel to Denmark are further inflaming tensions between Washington and Copenhagen and Nuuk, Greenland's capital.

Officials in Denmark and Greenland have denounced the visits. Greenland Prime Minister Mute Bourup Egede called Waltz's visit in particular "highly aggressive". Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen called the US delegation's visit "unacceptable pressure".

Jens-Frederik Nielsen, leader of Greenland's Demokraatit party and poised to be the island's next lead-

er following elections earlier this month, said the visit showed a "lack of respect for the Greenlandic people".

During his first term, Donald Trump floated the idea of purchasing the world's largest island, even as Denmark, a NATO ally, insisted it wasn't for sale. The people of Greenland have also firmly rejected Trump's plans.

Although Vance's decision to visit a US military base in Greenland has removed the risk of violating potential diplomatic taboos by sending a delegation to another country without an official invite, the way such an uninformed visit is going to unfold for its ulterior purpose is a worrying sign that the Trump administration is trying to break the envelope to push through its territorial grab plan.

The biggest threat to Greenland is not any other country but the one that claims it will protect its security.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

Chen Haiming

## US on the horns of a dollar dilemma

US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose substantial tariffs on imports from the United States' major trading partners to, what he claims, correct the trade imbalance with them. At the same time, he has vowed to preserve the dollar's status as the global reserve currency, threatening to impose 100 percent tariffs on imports from BRICS countries, which he alleges pose a challenge to the US' dominance in the global financial sector.

But his strategy is paradoxical, economically speaking, because the very strength of the dollar as the global reserve currency is based on expanding US trade deficit. Any attempt to artificially balance the US' trade through aggressive tariffs will only increase the financial pressure on US consumers, lead to inflation and constrict the dollar's use in global trade and financial markets. It will also diminish the dollar reserves held by other countries, undermining the greenback's status as the primary global currency.

The Bretton Woods system, established after the end of World War II, laid the foundation of the international monetary order, cementing the US dollar's role as the global reserve currency. Over the decades, the dollar's dominance as the world's reserve currency has been intrinsically tied to the US' perpetual trade deficit. Hence, far from being a weakness, the trade deficit is a necessity for the dollar to maintain its hegemonic status.

The US' major trading partners such as the European Union, Mexico, China, Canada and Japan accumulate dollar reserves despite exporting goods to the

US at competitive prices and thus facilitate global currency circulation. These economies then channel their dollar reserves into global trade, enhancing dollar liquidity and promoting the global flow of goods and services.

Should the US seek to eliminate its trade deficit, the global supply of the dollar would shrink, reducing other countries' dollar reserves, and prompting them to build their foreign exchange reserves on other currencies. In such a scenario, the global demand for the US dollar will dwindle, threatening the greenback's status as the world's leading reserve currency. Measures aimed at correcting the US' trade imbalance — such as imposing high tariffs or restricting imports — will impede the flow of the dollar into the global economy, thereby eroding the very foundation of the dollar's global dominance.

Efforts to maintain the dominant global status of the greenback while eliminating the US' trade deficit are like trying to be the world's banker while keeping all the cash locked in a vault.

The huge advantage the US enjoys because of the dollar's global status prompted former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, when he was France's finance minister in the 1960s, to coin the term "exorbitant privilege" to describe it.

The dollar enables the US government to borrow money at significantly lower costs. Besides, countries with big dollar reserves often reinvest them in US Treasury bonds, and a part of those reserves flows into the US' real estate and other assets, further bolstering its

domestic development.

Moreover, conducting international transactions in dollars allow US businesses and the government to circumvent the complexities and costs of currency conversion, while other businesses and governments have to exchange their local currencies for dollars, often incurring huge losses. This asymmetry not only gives the US a substantial economic edge but also augments the dollar's dominance in the global financial system.

Most important, the dollar's status as the world's primary reserve currency gives the US unparalleled geopolitical leverage. By controlling access to the global payment system, the US exerts significant financial influence, imposing sanctions on other countries, businesses and individuals, cutting off their access to financial networks and seizing their dollar assets.

By doing so, the US isolates its perceived adversaries, disrupts dollar-dependent transactions and compels those entities reliant on the dollar for cross-border trade to comply with its demands. This not only enables the US to shape global diplomacy, deter threat and enforce international norms but also consolidate its position as the preeminent global power.

While often viewed as a negative economic indicator, the trade deficit has not only strengthened the dollar's status as the global reserve currency but also benefited the US in other ways. These subtle but substantial advantages are frequently ignored by US politicians who seek trade equilibrium.

One key advantage of the US' trade deficit is its free access to affordable, high-quality goods. By importing goods from countries with comparative advantages, the US helps its citizens enjoy a higher standard of living by paying relatively less for everyday items. This not only boosts the US people's purchasing power but also helps mitigate the inflationary pressure on the US. As such, by abruptly raising tariffs to reduce the trade deficit, the US will likely drive up consumer prices and exacerbate inflation, instead of alleviating it.

The trade deficit also allows the US to hoard resources and attract human capital. By importing goods from other countries more efficiently, the US can strategically reallocate its resources to industries where it holds a comparative advantage, such as technology, finance, entertainment, education and other high-value services. Its focus on knowledge-based sectors fosters innovation, drives economic growth, and consolidates the US leadership in key global industries.

By focusing on its most competitive areas, the US strengthens its soft power, consolidating its geopolitical standing. In essence, the trade deficit not only supports the US' domestic economic dynamism but also strengthens its role as a global leader in innovation and strategic industries.

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Ejaz Hussain

## CPEC's success hinges on peace in Balochistan

The recent hijacking of a train and holding of civilians and military personnel hostages by the Balochistan Liberation Army in Pakistan's Balochistan province, and its confrontation with security forces highlight Islamabad's ongoing struggle with terrorism.

While the Pakistani military neutralized the immediate threat, such incidents raise serious concerns about the country's internal security and their implications for large-scale infrastructure projects, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Recurrent terrorist attacks deter foreign investment, demoralize the workforce and undermine the viability of development initiatives, especially in the Pakistani provinces bordering Afghanistan.

Foreign direct investment is susceptible to political instability. The insurgency in Balochistan has created an environment of uncertainty, discouraging international investors from committing resources to development projects in the province.

The ability of militant groups to launch deadly attacks exposes the gaps in Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy, and poses a risk to the long-term sustainability of economic ventures. Since the CPEC depends heavily on foreign capital and expertise, the security threats hinder development work, limiting the socioeconomic benefits Pakistan seeks to derive from the economic corridor which is part of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

Beyond investment concerns, persistent security threats demoralize both local and foreign workers involved in CPEC and related projects. Engineers, other workers, and security personnel, essential to the timely execution of infrastructure and energy initiatives, operate under constant fear of insurgents' attacks. This insecurity leads to disruptions in work, delays in project completion, and increases operational costs due to heightened security requirements.

To counter terrorism, particularly in Balochistan, Pakistan needs a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy. While kinetic measures are crucial for eliminating immediate threats, their sustainable resolution requires a broader political consensus. One of the key shortcomings of Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy is the absence of a unified stance on counterinsurgency operations in Balochistan. By wholeheartedly supporting the counterterrorism initiatives, the major political stakeholders would enhance their legitimacy and effectiveness, fostering a more stable environment for economic development.

Policymakers ought to keep in mind that the insurgency in Balochistan is fundamentally a political issue that must be addressed through political means. In Baloch people's eyes, decades of social marginalization, economic deprivation and inadequate political representation have fueled resentment, creating the scope for militant groups to build resistance by spreading baseless narratives. To counter this, the Pakistani government should engage with local political and social groups in a manner that ensures their meaningful participation in governance and the development process. A viable counterterrorism strategy could include the following elements.

Empowering local leaders and ensuring their representation in the decision-making process can help bridge the trust deficit between the Pakistani government and the Baloch people.

Prioritizing socioeconomic development through targeted economic initiatives, increased employment opportunities and better access to education and healthcare can mitigate the sense of exclusion among the local people. The CPEC has the potential to realize these objectives.

Initiating dialogue with local leaders, especially the existing and emerging middle class, can foster reconciliation and thus diminish support for militant groups.

Hard security measures, in most cases, provide short-term stability; they cannot lead to a permanent resolution to the Balochistan issue. Hence, a politically driven approach that prioritizes micro-level empowerment, political and administrative inclusion, and socioeconomic development is essential for fostering peace in this region.

Durable peace, rather than temporary suppression of insurgency, is a prerequisite for the CPEC's success and the realization of Pakistan's economic and strategic objectives. To secure the CPEC infrastructure and keep its workforce motivated, the Pakistani authorities have to work closely with their Chinese counterparts to devise a coordinated plan of action.

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**To counter terrorism, particularly in Balochistan, Pakistan needs a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy.**

Li Yunong and Yang Mengkai

## Inland Sichuan a new frontier of opening-up

Sichuan province, located in the upper Yangtze River Valley in the southwestern part of China, does not share its borders with any country nor does it have a coastline. Due to its mild climate and fertile basin, Sichuan has been renowned as the "Land of Abundance" since ancient times.

However, the rugged routes connecting Sichuan to the rest of the country have become obstacles to the region's economic and social development, and its exchanges with other regions of the country and the outside world. Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Li Bai once wrote that the road to Shu (the ancient name of Sichuan) is more dangerous than that to the sky.

China's economy has developed rapidly since the launch of reform and opening-up in the late 1970s. However, Sichuan, constrained by its geography, was unable to fully participate in and benefit from China's coastal development policy.

Opening-up is a necessary path to achieving prosperity and development. Hence, Sichuan regards the construction of an efficient transportation network as an important means to overcome its geographical constraints and pursue high-level opening-up.

Accordingly, Sichuan has completed the "7 plus 5" international rail-sea network, and has been operating trans-border railway services, which connect it with European countries, and Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar, as well as the new western rail-sea routes. This connectivity is helping Sichuan more actively promote the Belt and Road Initiative.

In August 2024, China launched its first "China-Europe railway express plus low-altitude logistics" delivery services at the Chengdu International Railway Port to facilitate the free flow of cross-border e-commerce. In October, the Asia-Chengdu-Europe rail-sea train began operations from the Chengdu International Railway Port, connecting destinations such as Aarhus in Denmark and Los Angeles in the United States.

Sichuan's international train routes have since expanded to 115 overseas cities, connecting the province to more global markets. The province has also expedited the construction of cross-border roads. With the first batch of *Tian Fu* shuttle trucks rolling out in 2021, Sichuan has built regular road routes connecting it to destinations in Russia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Europe. The shuttle trucks have made more than 2,000 trips, transporting goods worth more than 10 billion yuan (\$1.37 billion) to global markets.

It may surprise many people that Norwegian salmon can now be flown to Chengdu in just 36 hours. That's because



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

**Despite its geographical constraints, Sichuan has gradually turned its inconvenience into convenience, setting an example of sustained development in China's central and western regions and working hand in hand with its foreign partners to realize win-win cooperation.**

Sichuan is developing Chengdu, the provincial capital, into an international aviation hub, with more than 20 regularly operating international cargo routes.

Also, Sichuan is leveraging its inland water transport advantages to build a shipping center in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River. Since December 2024, Luzhou and Yibin river ports in the province, approved as temporary open waterway ports by the central authorities, have been shipping machinery, chemicals and other products to different destinations.

The development of transportation has helped Sichuan to overcome its geographical constraints and become the first province in central and western China to transport goods worth more than 1 trillion yuan since 2022.

In addition to its traditional goods,

Sichuan should seize the opportunity to capitalize on the emerging sectors, a wave it is currently riding.

Cross-border e-trade in the "new three major items" (electric vehicles, lithium batteries and solar cells) has increased tenfold over the past three years, exceeding 100 billion yuan in value, while services trade reached 150 billion yuan. The figures reflect the vitality of Sichuan in e-commerce and the popularity of Sichuan products in global markets. For instance, Sichuan Runzhaohao, a fishery company, has over 12 percent share of the global caviar market, with rising demand overseas. In the next three years, Sichuan's caviar production capacity is expected to account for 45 percent of the global market.

New transportation channels have also helped Sichuan attract more foreign direct investment. Since 2020, the province has been receiving the highest FDI among the central and western provinces, with its FDI reaching a record 24.52 billion yuan in 2023. And about 5,390 foreign enterprises have been operating in Sichuan.

More important, in January 2024, Airbus opened its comprehensive service center in Sichuan, the company's first such center outside Europe. And in April, Albemarle, a specialty chemicals producer, commenced production at its lithium hydroxide battery material factory in Meishan, Sichuan, with an investment of \$900 million (Albemarle's highest in China) and a production capacity of 50,000 tons a year.

Creating more opportunities for international exchanges and cooperation, Sichuan has hosted several major international conferences, exhibitions and other events, including the 19th Western China International Fair, and the Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games. This year, Chengdu will host the 2025 World Games, the first such games to be held on the Chinese mainland. These conferences and games can also boost service and consumption.

Enhanced connectivity promotes openness and boosts development. Despite its geographical constraints, Sichuan has gradually turned its inconvenience into convenience, setting an example of sustained development in China's central and western regions and working hand in hand with its foreign partners to realize win-win cooperation.

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# GLOBAL VIEWS

KHAIRY TOURK

## Lifting the gloom

The BRI is driving new era of globalization that is bringing benefits to both developing and developed nations

Globalization refers to the increasing connectedness of the world's economies through the widespread international movement and exchanges of goods, capital, technology, services and information. Western economics textbooks



describe the period from 1870 to 1914 as "the Golden Age of Globalization", from the non-Western point of view, however, nothing could be further

from the truth. The 19th century was the century of imperialism, with most nations in Asia and Africa being colonized by the great powers, which forced them to sign unequal treaties. Under these treaties, colonies were prevented from setting import duties higher than 3 percent. Unable to have an industrial policy of their own, they could only produce raw materials and agricultural products. It is interesting to note that all Western countries enacted industrial policies during their takeoff stage.

The second wave of globalization, under the Pax Americana, roughly from 1980 to the present, increased global trade, capital flows and communications. The United States, motivated by geopolitical considerations, helped countries in East and Southeast Asia to modernize in order to act as a shield against the expansion of the Soviet Union. The problem with this system is that it practically excluded other regions. Washington also used multinational institutions (e.g. the International Monetary Fund) as a tool to impose its neoliberal economic system on developing nations. This included the unfettered movement of speculative capital, which result-

ed in the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Recent protectionist moves enacted by President Donald Trump have signaled that the US is no longer the champion of free trade, and for all practical purposes US-led globalization is now at an end.

The question that thus poses itself is what's next. On the surface, the picture tends to be gloomy as the slowing growth rate of global trade and decline in foreign direct investment have been accompanied with the decline of the economic fortunes of rich nations and serious challenges (e.g. debt issues) facing poor and emerging economies. This point of view, however, is unduly pessimistic. The reason is that it does not take into account the long-term impact of the China-led Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI focus is on modernizing infrastructure, spreading industrialization, and people-to-people exchanges. Through the BRI, China is supplying the world with global economic public goods in the form of low-cost funding and the sharing of its successful experience of development. China is a natural member of the Global South. At root, the BRI is a distillation of Chinese wisdom combined with Beijing's pragmatic understanding of present geopolitical challenges. An appreciation of the initiative is incomplete unless one recognizes that most of the participating developing nations share with China the "painful" experiences of modernization under the West-led order.

The BRI is the largest development initiative in history. China's share of the world's manufacturing output is expected to increase from 30 percent in 2024 to 45 percent in 2030. As China climbs the technological ladder and the price of labor goes up, many Chinese companies

are moving their production facilities to BRI countries, thus accelerating the growth of new supply chains. The industrial hubs formed represent new growth engines. Overtime, the integration of these hubs will form industrial clusters in the six BRI corridors.

According to the Lowy Institute, in 2001, some 80 percent of economies worldwide did more two-way trade with the US than with China. Over 20 years later, there has been almost complete reversal: Now China lies at the heart of international trade. Around 70 percent of economies trade more with China than they do with the US and more than half of all economies now trade twice as much with China compared with the US. Furthermore, the value of China's trade with BRI partners exceeded 50 percent of its world trade for the first time in 2024. Chinese trade with BRI nations now exceeds that with the US, the European Union and Japan combined. Trade with BRI countries has totaled \$1.3 trillion, outpacing China's trade growth by 7.4 percent. In the case of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Chinese exports to its members, all of whom are BRI partners, exceeded that of the US in 2023.

There has also been an irreversible trend in the destination of Chinese FDI. In 2016, the developed countries received 70 percent of China's outbound investment, largely in mergers and acquisitions. However, Chinese FDI going to developed nations decreased to only 28 percent in 2023. In the same year, the Global South received 70 percent of China's outbound FDI, mostly in greenfield investments. In ASEAN countries, for example, Chinese FDI increased from less than \$4 billion in 2010 to \$19 billion in 2023. One-third of



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this investment was in the manufacturing sector.

Thanks to the BRI, China is sharing its valuable development experience with other partners. In Africa, for example, countries such as Ethiopia and Rwanda have achieved double-digit growth rates. These nations have been learning from the Chinese model of development. Thousands of their officials and students have been involved in people-to-people exchanges with their counterparts in China.

Africa is also a region where the BRI is making a unique change. As has been the case in ASEAN countries where overseas Chinese represent a dynamic entrepreneurial class, more than 1 million Chinese, who have decided to make Africa their second home, could form another dynamic class of entrepreneurs — introducing new methods of management, and helping the

technology transfer process. This bodes well for accelerating the rate of economic growth in the continent.

With the European economy stagnating and the US economy growing at an anemic rate, the Western media paint a pessimistic picture of the future of the world. This is the same media that have painted the BRI with a tar brush. The result is that the West is blinded by its ignorance of the fact that new supply chains, quietly being formed in the Global South, are laying the foundation for the new coming globalization.

For long, the West has sold non-Western nations the narrative that it and it alone can deliver prosperity. The continued success of the BRI, however, is bound to disabuse the West of that delusion. The Global South, with 40 percent of global GDP, is already contributing

around 80 percent of global growth. More importantly, unlike previous globalizations where the rules were made solely to serve the interests of the West, the developing nations are now playing a major role in setting the rules of the coming globalization in a way that reflects the interests of the majority of humanity. Thus, the present gloom about the future of the world is certainly unwarranted. This should be a cause for celebration.

*The author is a former professor of economics at the Stuart School of Business at the Illinois Institute of Technology and the author of The Belt and Road Initiative: Chinese Solution to a Deficient Global Order. 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.*

SÉBASTIEN PÉRIMONY

## Pursuit of a polyphonic world

Goal of the global majority should be less financial speculation and more physical production, less division and more cooperation

Looking back at the different paths the world has taken over the past 30 years can help us determine which one will benefit all of humanity in the next 50 years. What China has achieved in the past decades is what the Global South may have to achieve in the future.



The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has acknowledged that over the past decade

China has made "the greatest anti-poverty achievement in history".

Since the first ministerial conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was held in Beijing in 2000 to 2020, China has helped African nations build and modernize over 13,000 kilometers of roads and railways, nearly 1,000 bridges and 100 ports, as well as 66,000 km of power transmission and distribution networks. China has financed over 130 medical facilities, more than 170 schools, and established over 3,500 businesses. These companies have directly and indirectly created millions of jobs, with over 80 percent of those positions filled by locals. For example, in agriculture — a sector vital to national sovereignty — China has become the second-largest destination for African agricultural exports. It has established agricultural cooperation mechanisms with 23 African countries and regional organizations, signing 72 bilateral and multilateral agreements. Since 2012, 23 agricultural demonstration centers have been set up in Africa, 7,456 African trainees have received agricultural training in China, and over 50,000 Africans have benefited from projects under which Chinese

agricultural experts have been sent to the continent.

In contrast, since the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001, the European Union and NATO have launched wars, in the name of fighting terrorism that have led to the devastation of countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Somalia. According to a study by Brown University in Rhode Island in 2023, more than 4.5 million people have died in these wars, and this figure continues to rise. These countries have seen their basic economic infrastructure nearly obliterated, while terrorism and drug trafficking, instead of diminishing, have only spread, including into new regions such as West Africa.

Despite this, some EU officials continue to claim that the West is a "garden", and most of the rest of the world is a "jungle", which could invade the garden. In a world where some are attempting to redivide the global order into blocs under the pressure of such Western organizations as NATO — which endeavors to claim regional authority following the Ukraine crisis — the idea of European power has resurfaced. We hear more and more European leaders, such as the French president, calling for "Europe's strategic autonomy" so that Europe may

avoid being a vassal of the US in the illusion of a global competition, a zero-sum game in which one side wins everything. Yet, any rational person can see that only a polyphonic world, based on mutual development and new agreements for a global development and security architecture that includes all nations, is and will remain the only solution to the problems of our time.



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It is also becoming increasingly clear that a new system is emerging, with intense discussions in the Global South on how to establish a

France and Europe should serve as a bridge and catalyst for a new paradigm where the G7 does not oppose "BRICS Plus", and the West no longer conflicts with the rest of the world. Europe's goal should be

de-dollarized system, for instance, through an expanded "BRICS Plus" grouping. At the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan in October 2024, it was announced that nine countries joined as new "partner states".

The "BRICS Plus" group now represents over 4.6 billion people, or about 57 percent of the world's population — certainly the global majority now.

There is no fundamental conflict of interest between China and Europe, because China and certain European leaders are willing to engage in win-win cooperation. Together, they aim to better preserve and develop global industry and supply chains, whose stability and fluidity benefit the entire world. Indeed, the development of Africa and certain Asian and Latin American countries can only take place within the framework of international cooperation, not through the geopolitical divisions of blocs as seen during the Cold War. This second option will inevitably lead the world into a third world war.

France and Europe should serve as a bridge and catalyst for a new paradigm where the G7 does not oppose "BRICS Plus", and the West no longer conflicts with the rest of the world. Europe's goal should be

to create a harmonious humanity where systemic rivalry is replaced by mutual benefit, and the clash of civilizations is avoided in favor of a genuine dialogue among civilizations.

In this context, France can and must play a leading role, as it has maintained stable and friendly relations with China since January 1964, when General Charles de Gaulle officially recognized the People's Republic of China. We celebrated this long-standing collaboration with our Chinese friends last year in France.

I am delighted that cooperation between France and China recently gained momentum. In 2022, an official cooperation agreement was announced. This agreement covers seven projects worth more than \$1.7 billion, focusing on infrastructure, environmental protection and new energy. These investments will take place in regions such as Africa and Central and Eastern Europe. These projects include hydroelectric power, and the modernization of ports and roads in Africa. This is great news for France, China and, of course, Africa. The world needs good news more than ever.

This can be the goal of the global majority: to create one world — less financial speculation and more physical production, less division and more cooperation. This is the path to success for the world. After all, we all live under the same sky.

*The author is a researcher at the Schiller Institute, France. 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.*

## BUSINESS

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# China to expand cross-border financing access

Move aims to bolster private high-tech firms

By ZHOU LANXU  
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China is mulling raising the foreign debt ceiling for high-technology enterprises while expanding the reach of policies that facilitate corporate foreign exchange management, as part of the country's all-round efforts to enhance financial support for private enterprises, said the State Administration of Foreign Exchange.

Executives and experts said the moves will support private, tech-oriented enterprises to obtain more overseas financing and help private sector exporters save on costs and enhance efficiency, thus sharpening their international competitiveness while offsetting US investment and trade barriers.

"We will increase the quota for nationwide eligible high and new-tech firms, 'little giant' companies and tech-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises to autonomously borrow external debt at an appropriate time," a SAFE official said in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

High and new-tech enterprises are government-recognized companies that engage in high-tech innovation and research and development. "Little giant" companies refer to specialized and sophisticated SMEs that produce novel and unique goods and services.

This would be part of the country's efforts to deepen the reform of foreign exchange management to extend support for the private sector, including efforts related to cross-border investment and financing, foreign exchange rate risk management and foreign exchange policies to facilitate international trade.

"We will optimize and expand facilitation policies, tilting toward private entities with genuine need and good compliance, to better support the stability of foreign trade," the administration said.

Noting that private sector enterprises are playing an increasingly important role in foreign trade — not only in the growth of trade but also in terms of economic restructuring and innovative development — the administration said it is committed to providing strong financial support for the healthy development of the private economy and helping private enterprises "grow stronger and better".

"A series of measures will be gradually introduced, including optimizing and upgrading the cross-border cash pool policy for multinationals, simplifying the foreign exchange management of direct investment, expanding the facilitation quota for cross-border financing of innovative and tech enterprises, and optimizing the policy of facilitating foreign exchange receipts and payments under the capital account," SAFE said.

The external borrowing quotas for eligible enterprises selected based on the "innovation credit system" — a system proposed by the Ministry of Science and Technology to quantify and reward innovative achievements — will be raised, the administration said, while enhanc-

ing quota adjustment mechanisms to better support enterprises with promising development prospects in key industries and sectors.

"Raising the foreign debt quota will enable high-tech, private SMEs to further overcome net asset limitations and secure more funding for research and development and business expansion, offsetting any negative impact from US investment restrictions," said Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics' School of International Trade and Economics.

"In a broader sense, this will help accelerate the commercialization of scientific advancements and strengthen China's position in the global industrial chain," Liu said.

Huang Yanxiang, co-founder & CEO of Shanghai CarbonNewture, a high-tech private enterprise serving as a decarbonization services platform, said that obtaining low-cost overseas green funding can help the company invest more in artificial intelligence applications and supply chain carbon tracking, thus better leveraging global resources to pursue internationalized development.

The administration said it will provide more convenient foreign exchange payment procedures for new forms of trade entities — including private enterprises — and further reduce the cost for enterprises managing risks associated with foreign exchange rate volatility.

"The ongoing policy efforts to facilitate foreign exchange payments and settlements in cross-border e-commerce are important for Chinese companies going global to provide a better customer experience," said Huang Zhengjie, general manager of ECHOLAC (Jiangsu) Co Ltd, a private suitcase manufacturer and exporter.

Hoping to see further cost reductions and procedure simplification regarding forex receipts and payments, Huang said cutting the cost of exchange rate hedging is also "of great necessity" for improving exporters' profitability, which is under pressure amid intensified international competition and tariff uncertainties.

Under the guidance of SAFE, the China Foreign Exchange Trade System announced this month a full exemption of trading fees for derivatives with maturities of two years or more in the interbank foreign exchange market, effective next month.

SAFE also guided the CFETS to waive trading fees for closing foreign exchange hedging positions for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises from 2022 to 2025.

Last year, enterprises used foreign exchange derivatives worth \$1.6 trillion to manage exchange rate risks, with more than 38,000 new first-time participants in exchange rate hedging exercises, a relatively high level on record, SAFE said.

In terms of facilitating cross-border financing and investment, more than 1,000 multinationals had registered for the domestic and foreign currency cash pool policies as of the end of February, benefiting more than 18,000 enterprises at home and abroad, SAFE said.

Dong Yilang contributed to this story.

## Briefly

### Heraeus launches Shenyang quartz plant

German technology company Heraeus Group on Tuesday officially launched its new quartz manufacturing plant in Shenyang, capital of Northeast China's Liaoning province, in its latest move to deepen Sino-German manufacturing cooperation. With a total investment of nearly 600 million yuan (\$83.6 million), the plant is Heraeus' largest semicon-

ductor project in China.

### Chinese mainland shares close lower

Chinese mainland stocks closed lower on Wednesday, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index down 0.04 percent to 3368.7 points. The Shenzhen Component Index closed 0.05 percent lower at 10643.82 points.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



Customs officials check imported coffee beans at a warehouse in Kunshan, Jiangsu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Yunnan coffee winning fans worldwide

By ZHONG NAN  
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Pu'er, a city located in a mountainous region of Southwest China's Yunnan province, is famous for its Pu'er tea, a type of fermented tea. However, of late, it has also quietly become a major production hub for China's coffee industry, boasting the nation's largest cultivation area, highest yields and most refined beans.

At Yunnan Simao Beigui Coffee Co Ltd's plantation in Pu'er's Nandaohe Village, workers and farmers are busily involved in washing, pulping, fermenting and drying fresh coffee beans. Each step of the process has been meticulously crafted to ensure the preservation of flavor and quality.

Soon, these beans will be loaded onto trucks and begin their journey to reach coffee shops in booming Chinese cities such as Shanghai and Chengdu, Sichuan province, and also boutique roasters in countries like the Netherlands and Germany.

"Compared with previous years, the coffee cherries of the 2024/2025 harvest season (from October 2024 to March 2025) are larger and glossier, attracting buyers from around the world," said Zhou Zhiyan, the plantation's manager.

The company exported 1,800 metric tons of green coffee beans in 2024, she said.

With its distinctive flavor, Yunnan coffee is winning fans around the

world. The province's coffee exports reached 140 million yuan (\$19.28 million) in the first two months of 2025, a year-on-year increase of 339.3 percent, data from Kunming Customs showed.

During the same period, Yunnan exported 2,788 tons of coffee, up 114.1 percent on a yearly basis.

Global coffee buyers, especially in Europe, the United States, South Korea and Japan, are actively looking for new origins to diversify their supply chains. Yunnan's emergence fills this need, offering both reliability and novelty, said Li Hong, vice-president of Yunnan Agricultural University, which is headquartered in Kunming, provincial capital of Yunnan.

"Yunnan coffee is known for its clean cup, floral aroma, fruity notes and mild bitterness — qualities that make it competitive on the global stage," said Li. "As farming techniques and processing methods improve, overall consistency and quality of Yunnan coffee have become increasingly attractive to international buyers."

According to Kunming Customs, Yunnan's coffee exports jumped 358 percent year-on-year to 32,500 tons in 2024.

The coffee was shipped to 29 countries and regions — including the Netherlands, the United States, and Vietnam — firmly securing Yunnan's position as the top coffee-exporting region in China.

Zhang Yuebin, vice-president of Kunming-based Yunnan Academy of

Agricultural Sciences, said China's own booming domestic coffee culture has also led to better beans.

As domestic consumers demand higher quality, it has pushed producers in Yunnan to innovate and refine their techniques, and raised the country's coffee import volume, said Zhang.

This is in line with the latest data.

China's imports of coffee, tea and spices amounted to 22.14 billion yuan in 2024, surging 13.4 percent year-on-year, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Domestic demand for coffee — especially premium varieties with diverse flavor profiles — has seen a significant increase, and this upward trend will continue this year, said Xing Xiaojing, manager of Customs affairs at Suzhou Mingdoufang Technology Co Ltd, a Suzhou, Jiangsu province-based coffee bean importer and storage services provider.

Xing said the company imported over 8,000 tons of green coffee beans in 2024. They were sold and distributed to downstream businesses like coffee roasters and retailers from the company's storage facilities in Kunshan, Jiangsu.

Kunshan, a major coffee roasting base in China, saw imports of green coffee beans soar 46 percent year-on-year to 1.63 billion yuan last year, accounting for 53.8 percent of the city's total agricultural product imports, according to Nanjing Customs.

# StanChart optimistic about China prospects

By LIU ZHIHUA  
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Standard Chartered PLC is firmly optimistic about China's economic prospects and has actively aligned its business strategies with economic trends, such as the high-quality development of the private economy and the rapid application of artificial intelligence technologies, in the world's second-largest economy, its top executive said.

"It's entirely possible for China to hit the economic targets that it has set as it had in recent years," Bill Winters, group chief executive of the bank, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily, pointing to the positive advancements in China while analyzing the challenges.

"We know that consumer confidence has been relatively weak, but we see very concrete actions that are being taken to support confidence and encourage consumers to spend more freely," Winters said.

"We also know that the source of some of this lack of confidence has had to do with the weak property market. But there are signs of stabilization certainly in the tier-1 and tier-2 cities and support coming from the government and the banking sector and elsewhere, which I think will help support this confidence."

Winters highlighted the "outstanding growth" made by China's private sector, in particular, the significant advancements made by private companies in climate-related new technologies and AI. China's leading positions in these new and emerging



Bill Winters, group chief executive of Standard Chartered, speaks during the recent China Development Forum in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

sectors, he said, "will provide an ongoing source of growth in the foreseeable future."

"China is extremely advanced in the development of these large language models and the AI tools that are built around them," he observed. "The pace with which those tools are being embedded into everyday life, whether it's a consumer life or business life, is very rapid."

Winters said the bank uses cloud applications and partners with leading Chinese tech companies. Additionally, Standard Chartered provides financial services to these companies, including lending and support for their international expansion.

He pointed out the opportunities for Chinese companies to distribute their products and technologies globally, making more contributions to world economic development.

"We've seen some pushback in the EV sector, for example, out of the United States and Europe. But through clever management of the various stakeholders around the world, I think China can take its technical lead and really make that a great basis for distribution of Chinese intellectual property around the world in a way that benefits its customers outside of China and benefits companies back home as well."

Standard Chartered, with a long

history in China, has actively aligned its business strategies with the country's economic trends, he said, citing the bank's focus on cross-border businesses and its ability to support Chinese companies in their international expansion.

As for the prospects of tariffs and trade disputes that could perhaps prompt a global growth slowdown, he believes many of the tariffs that have been suggested around the world will not happen because everybody loses from tariffs.

Even if there are very substantial tariffs applied by the United States on Chinese imports, that would have a "noticeable but not overwhelming" impact on Chinese economic growth, he said, adding that is because China has tools at its disposal, like targeted fiscal stimulus and monetary stimulus, to offset such an impact.

Winters expressed support for the Chinese government's efforts to promote the high-quality development of the private sector. He emphasized the importance of policy consistency and predictability for private companies to thrive. "The messages are very supportive of the private sector," he said, "I'm very encouraged about the opportunities for private sector growth in China."

"We are very confident in the Chinese economy and in the private sector"

# Province still prime investment destination

By ZHENG CAIXIONG and LI WENFANG in Guangzhou

South China's Guangdong province remained a prime destination for foreign investment in the first two months of the year, indicating that global enterprises continue to have a positive outlook on the province and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Despite geopolitics and tariff frictions between the United States and major economies around the world, Guangdong, a global production base, attracted 3,484 new foreign-funded enterprises with an actual foreign investment of 23.31 billion yuan (\$3.2 billion) in the two months ending February, up 16.8 percent and 5.9 percent year-on-year, respectively, said a senior provincial commerce official.

Zhu Xiaojun, deputy director of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Commerce, said Guangdong's foreign investment growth outperforms the national average and major peers at home, demonstrating the province's strong foreign investment attraction and economic vitality.

Guangdong relies on foreign investment and trade to help support its sustainable economic construction, and is one of the major provinces that utilizes offshore investment in the country.

The province has effectively helped promote multiple high-quality projects to increase capital and expand production since last May, with the help of a new round of foreign investment incentive policies, he said.

Zhu made the remarks at a news conference in the Guangdong provincial capital, Guangzhou, on Monday.

Liu Zhihong, deputy director of Huizhou Bureau of Commerce, said Japan's AGC Group, a key glass product manufacturer in the world, has increased its investment and production six consecutive times, leading to a total investment of \$1.25 billion in its AGC Display Glass (Huizhou) Co Ltd.

To intensify efforts to attract overseas investment, Liu Dezeng, deputy director of Guangdong Board of Investment Promotion, said that earlier this month his board formulated several measures to encourage overseas sovereign wealth funds to invest in Guangdong, and to support and encourage them to continue increasing their greenfield investments in key areas such as strategic emerging industries and future industries within the province.

The measures aim to overcome the problems of "inability to enter" and "difficulty in investment" for sovereign wealth funds through innovative investment methods, providing a more competitive development environment for overseas sovereign wealth funds, he said.

Zhu said investments from developed countries and regions enjoyed a year-on-year growth of 52.2 percent in the first two months. Guangdong has attracted seven foreign-funded projects, with actual investment exceeding \$100 million for each project, with actual foreign investment worth more than \$1.5 billion, from January to February.

Guangdong's manufacturing sector played an outsized role in growth, with used foreign investment valued at 7.41 billion yuan in January and February, a year-on-year increase of 34.5 percent, 28.6 percentage points higher than its overall growth rate.

According to a recent report released by the American Chamber of Commerce in South China (AmCham South China), Guangzhou and Shenzhen ranked as the two most popular destinations for foreign investment on the Chinese mainland, with the two southern metropolises followed by Shanghai and Beijing.

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## WORLD

# Revived US tariffs spark chilling effect

Long-term risks loom for Middle East over lower oil prices, high interest rates

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE  
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As the United States imposes tariffs on many countries, even some of its closest allies, businesses in the Middle East are bracing for a chilling effect — a triple threat of depressed oil prices, non-oil export tariffs and high interest rates.

While the measures primarily target North America, the European Union and China, analysts say economies in the Middle East and North Africa remain vulnerable to secondary effects.

This month Goldman Sachs cut its 2025 GDP forecast for the US from 2.4 percent to 1.7 percent, citing uncertainty over tariffs.

Nader Habibi, a professor of economics of the Middle East at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, said: "We are moving toward the risk of trade wars, and that in itself increases the risk of a global recession. As we've seen in the past, global recessions tend to have adverse effects on Gulf Cooperation Council economies because they can bring down the price of oil."

In the short term Middle Eastern economies could benefit from tariff-led trade conflict between the US and its major partners, but they face longer-term risks of lower oil prices, tariffs on their own non-oil exports and high interest rates, said Sarah McEvitt, an analyst with the global business consultancy Alvarez & Marsal in the Middle East.

The US is an important trading partner for many regional countries, she said. "As higher tariffs and stricter trade regulations loom, businesses in the region must prepare for potential impacts."

The US now imports about 70 percent of its aluminum supply, with about 60 percent coming from Canada, tariff-free. The Gulf region is the second-largest supplier to the US of primary aluminum, accounting for about 16.3 percent last year. The US also accounts for nearly 6 percent of the region's extra-regional export volumes of steel.

"The tariffs on steel and aluminum are likely to push up industry costs in the US that are reliant on imported material," the newspaper The National quoted Edward Bell, acting group head of research and chief economist with the Middle East banking group Emirates NBD, as saying.

"Manufacturers that make cars, for instance, or oil and gas drilling (equipment), which make extensive use of steel, will face higher costs because of the tariffs."

US tariffs could indirectly affect energy sectors of the Middle East and North Africa, which could result in reduced demand as US policy uncertainties lead to a weaker demand outlook, experts said.

The imposition of tariffs has increased global trade risks and is not conducive to Middle Eastern countries' energy exports, though the total trade volume and trade deficit of the US in the region are



Strengthening domestic demand resilience continues to be the best lever to immunize local economies from global external shocks."

Carla Slim, an economist with Standard Chartered in the Middle East

relatively low, said Jiang Yingmei, an associate researcher of the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies, part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

In addition, this would ricochet across the region because many currencies are fixed to the dollar. If interest rates stay higher for longer it could inhibit credit demand in these economies and dent their economic diversification hopes, she said.

"With inflation likely to rise further in the US, higher tariffs will lead to further dollar flows back to the US and will affect project financing and economic reforms in Middle Eastern countries as foreign direct investment is an important source of financing for the economic development of Turkey, Egypt and many others."

## 'Best lever'

Carla Slim, a Standard Chartered economist in the region, told CNBC television, "Strengthening domestic demand resilience continues to be the best lever to immunize local economies from global external shocks."

Since 2014 many Middle Eastern and North African economies have implemented structural reforms and diversification programs to reduce their dependence on oil revenue.

Despite these efforts, oil "still accounts for the largest single share of income," said Bell of Emirates NBD. "For an economy like the United Arab Emirates that is highly open to trade and acts as a global trade facilitator through extensive infrastructure and logistics links, a drop in global trade will also be an externally imposed headwind to growth."

In his first term, US President Donald Trump signed a travel ban shortly after taking office, barring citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries, namely Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, from entering the US.

If Trump implements a more stringent policy in his second term it will certainly have a negative effect on normal exchanges between the US and Muslim countries in the Middle East and the income of overseas remittances, Jiang said.



Lee Jae-myung (center), leader of South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party, arrives at court in Seoul on Wednesday. KIM HONG-JI / AFP

## Court acquits S. Korea opposition leader

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong  
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A South Korean appeals court on Wednesday acquitted main opposition leader Lee Jae-myung of an election law violation, reducing the risk that he may not run in a potential early presidential election.

After a session of about 100 minutes, the Seoul High Court overturned a ruling by a lower court in November that handed Lee a one-year sentence, suspended for two years, Yonhap News Agency reported.

Lee, leader of the Democratic Party, or DP, was charged with breaking the country's election law by making false statements about a real estate development project in Seongnam during the 2022 presidential election campaign. He served as mayor of the city near Seoul in 2010-18.

Following the ruling, Lee's supporters and DP lawmakers cheered outside the court. Demonstrators in the opposing camp protested against the ruling and some were reduced to tears.

"I would like to thank the court for delivering a proper ruling based on truth and justice," Lee said.

Instead of concentrating on his trial, Lee said there should be more focus on preventing wildfires that continue to ravage the country's southeast regions, or improving people's lives.

The ruling gained wide attention as Lee is considered the DP's most likely candidate in an early presidential election if President Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment is upheld.

The Constitutional Court has 180 days to decide whether to remove or reinstate Yoon, who was impeached in December by the opposition-led National Assembly over his brief martial law declaration that triggered turmoil in the country.

If Yoon is removed from office, an early election must be held within 60 days.

Although prosecutors can appeal to the Supreme Court on the Lee verdict, he has largely resolved judicial risks of being disqualified from the next presidential election.

## 'Deep regret'

Kwon Seong-dong, floor leader of the ruling People Power Party, expressed deep regret over the court's ruling.

Kwon said he believed prosecutors would appeal against the verdict so the Supreme Court could make its judgment and end the legal controversy.

The ruling in Lee's case would have no effect on Yoon's impeachment trial because it is an independent case, he said.

"The DP should not expect the public sentiment toward it to change," said Shin Dong-uk,

spokesman for the People Power Party, noting that Lee has four prior convictions and is still facing 12 charges and five trials.

DP chief spokesman Cho Seung-rae said the ruling was fair and just. He asked the ruling party to accept the court's decision.

"We also urged the Constitutional Court to set the date (for Yoon's impeachment trial) as soon as possible," Cho said. "People are eagerly waiting for the chaos to end."

In a Facebook post, Park Joo-min, a DP lawmaker, said the ruling represented a victory for common sense and justice.

"The verdict on (Yoon's) impeachment is the only thing left," Park wrote.

It has been a month since the Constitutional Court concluded the final hearing of Yoon's impeachment trial.

The ruling on former president Roh Moo-hyun's case was delivered 14 days after the hearings concluded, and it took 11 days for a ruling in former president Park Geun-hye's case to be delivered.

Observers initially expected the Yoon ruling to come in mid-March, but the court has not announced a date yet.

Considering that the court typically announces a verdict date two to three days in advance for security and preparation reasons, the ruling could be pushed back to next month.

## Anti-war protests erupt in north Gaza

CAIRO/GAZA CITY — Palestinians have protested in northern Gaza demanding an end to the current conflict, according to videos circulating online.

The videos, which appeared to be authentic, showed hundreds of people taking part in an anti-war protest in the destroyed northern town of Beit Lahiya on Tuesday. People held signs saying "Stop the war", "We refuse to die" and "The blood of our children is not cheap".

Some could be heard chanting, "Hamas out!" Other videos appeared to show Hamas supporters dispersing the crowds.

"We are sick of the bombing, killing and displacement," said Ammar Hassan, a young man from Beit Lahiya who took part in the protest.

It started as an anti-war protest with just a few dozen people but then swelled to more than 2,000, with people chanting slogans against Hamas, he said.

"It's the only party we can affect," he told The Associated Press by phone. "Protests won't stop the (Israeli) occupation, but it can affect Hamas."

Northern Gaza is one of the most devastated areas of the enclave. Most buildings in the densely populated area have been reduced to rubble and much of the population has moved several times to escape the conflict.

"The protest was not about politics; it was about people's lives," said Mohammed Abu Saker, a father of three from the nearby town of Beit Hanoun, who joined the demonstration.

"We want to stop the killing and displacement, no matter the price. We can't stop Israel from killing us, but we can press Hamas to give concessions."

The posts began circulating widely late on Tuesday. Reuters was able to confirm the location of the video by buildings, utility poles and road layout that matches satellite imagery of the area.

Reuters was unable to independently verify the date of the video. However, several videos and photographs shared on social media showed protests in the area on March 25.

A statement issued by community leaders from Beit Lahiya expressed support for the protests against Israel's offensive and its tightened blockade.

They also said the community fully supports armed resistance against Israel and rejects "any attempt to exploit legitimate popular demands by a fifth column", apparently referring to opponents of Hamas.

The protests erupted a week after Israel effectively ended its cease-fire with Hamas by launching a surprise wave of strikes. Gaza's health authorities said on Wednesday that at least 830 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory since March 18.

Earlier this month Israel halted deliveries of food, fuel, medicine and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million population.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Food for thought

Protesters raise glowing hazard lights at a demonstration in Paris on Tuesday. The event, organized by NGOs and celebrities, called for urgent global action to combat malnutrition and its devastating effects worldwide. THIBAUD MORITZ / AFP



## Sri Lanka goes green with an urban focus

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong  
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Work on a major project that aims to promote environmental protection in Sri Lanka is likely to begin within days, and it is a timely initiative that will encourage sustainable urban living in the country, observers say.

Michael Edesess, an adjunct associate professor in the division of environment and sustainability, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, said the Model Urban Green Zones project makes sense for Sri Lanka because undertaking such projects later will become more difficult as the country "gets bigger and more heavily populated, more industrialized and urbanized and more polluted."

One advantage in launching the project now is that the country's urbanization rate is still relatively low, with about 20 percent living in cities compared with 36 percent in India, and more than 80 percent in

the United States, Edesess said. In addition, Sri Lanka's cities are relatively small, with none having populations of more than 1 million.

"(Sri Lanka) is likely to get more urbanized, so it is good for them to try to keep the environment as clean as they can before it gets worse."

The Model Urban Green Zones project is part of the Clean Sri Lanka program, set up in January, which aims to foster cultural, ethical, social and environmental revival, the government said last week.

The project aligns with the green city concept and will be executed as an urban planning initiative with the participation of both the public and private sectors, the government said.

By replacing concrete-dominated areas with lush green environments, it aims to provide residents with a healthier and more nature-friendly urban lifestyle, fostering both physical and mental well-being, it said.

Edesess said implementation is

more important than setting a target. That said, the program reflects "an ambition or desire to do well", he said.

"Like many other similar countries, (Sri Lanka) needs to develop cleaner methods to dispose of waste and to avoid pollution."

Derek Hung Chiu-wah, Sri Lanka's honorary consul in Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, said he was impressed with the amount of land covered by lush green trees in the cities of Colombo, Kandy and Sigiriya when he traveled to Sri Lanka this month.

## Clean energy push

The Sri Lankan government is gearing up to promote the adoption of electric cars and clean energy, he said. "Besides providing more public car-parking spaces, they have to also provide more electric charging facilities."

Hung, who is also a board member of the Hong Kong Association for External Friendship, has visited

an ecological park in the city of Habarana that is popular for guided safaris to observe elephants and various other animals in the wild.

Animals live in harmony in the park, he said, and clean water, soil and air are essential to preserving wildlife in the country.

There is huge potential for Sri Lanka's tourism industry to rebound after taking a heaving blow during the pandemic, and environmental protection efforts will be critical to the country in this regard, he said.

In addition to a clean environment, friendly atmosphere, rich natural resources and cultural heritage are the most valuable assets for attracting overseas travelers, Hung said.

Priantha Fernando, former chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, said: "Sri Lanka's economy is heavily dependent on tourism. Axioms such as reducing carbon footprint, sustainability, etc, should not be confined to buzzwords but need to be practiced at every level and by all."

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Job crisis uproar



Security forces detain a member of the Indian Youth Congress during a protest against rising unemployment, in New Delhi, India, on Tuesday. AMARJEET KUMAR SINGH VIA GETTY IMAGES

## WORLD

# Tariffs' impact on ag exports raises concern

In US Northwest, where agricultural exports are key to economy, reciprocal levies feared

By LINDA DENG in Seattle  
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A Washington state commerce official said that while trade imbalances are a legitimate concern, tariffs have historically harmed the state more than they've helped.

"Tariffs often function as a tax on American consumers and businesses," said Joe Nguyen, state commerce director, in an interview with Seattle's public radio station KUOW. "We've found that nearly 93 percent of tariffs are passed on to consumers, driving up costs."

Nguyen expressed particular concern for agricultural communities, which depend on global exports for apples, cherries and hops. He emphasized the need for predictable trade policies to foster economic stability.

"Washington state can't fully insulate itself from reckless federal policies. Trade decisions made on a whim have global consequences. Our focus must be on protecting local businesses, workers and consumers as much as possible," Nguyen said.

Washington, one of the most trade-dependent states in the nation, relies heavily on international commerce, with 40 percent of its jobs tied to trade and approximately \$60 billion in annual exports.

China is Washington state's third-largest export market, according to a fact sheet released by US Senator Maria Cantwell. The 2023 Washington-grown or processed food and agriculture exported to China was valued at \$857 million.

"When retaliatory tariffs strike our farmers, just as they did in the first Trump administration, it's not going to be fun. It's going to be a nightmare for our farmers," Cantwell said in a Senate meeting on March 4.

Oregon Treasurer Elizabeth Steiner said the tariffs could increase inflation, trigger job losses and slow long-term economic growth.

"Government should be predictable and steady. Businesses and families rely on rational policymaking," Steiner said.

Economists estimate the tariffs on Canada, Mexico, and China — three of Oregon's top four export markets — could cost households an

additional \$1,200 annually.

"For too many Oregonians, budgets are already stretched thin. An unasked-for \$1,200 expense is unsustainable, especially for families struggling to save," Steiner said.

In 2024, Oregon exported \$34 billion in goods, with nearly half going to Mexico (\$6.3 billion), China (\$5.9 billion) and Canada (\$3.3 billion). Any disruption to those markets would have far-reaching consequences for the state's economy, Steiner said.

An industry expert also expressed concerns, saying that the US lost long-term market share in China's fresh produce sector due to the trade war, and regaining it requires more than just lifting tariffs. Structural changes in global supply chains and China's strategic diversification could mean the damage may be permanent.

"While we may want to bifurcate the agricultural relationship, they do not want to bifurcate that relationship," said Alexis Taylor, chief global policy officer at the International Fresh Produce Association, at a food policy summit in Washington DC on March 17.

"It is interconnected because they know it is leverage in the United States as well. I think what China saw in 2017, '18 is the US wasn't a reliable trading partner, and that they needed to diversify their suppliers," she said.

Taylor said that more and more of Brazil's production is coming online, such as corn, soy and beef. She said China is opening new market access to Brazil because it is a new supply chain.

"When I look at the numbers from the fresh fruit and vegetable exports, we (the United States) haven't recovered from that trade war with China," she said. "On average from 2005 to 2017, we were exporting about \$500 million or \$450 million worth of products."

Taylor said that has dropped on average to \$200.36 million worth from 2020 to 2024.

"So, when you lose some of these markets, it's very hard to get them back," Taylor said, adding that businesses "will look for alternative supplies and then they stay with those alternative supplies. And I think we've seen that in China."

## Big win



Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra poses with coalition lawmakers after a no-confidence motion against her was defeated in parliament in Bangkok on Wednesday. Paetongtarn survived the vote after securing enough support among lawmakers to remain in office. ATHIT PERAWONGMETHA / REUTERS

## Canada snap poll seen as economic power play

By YANG GAO in Toronto  
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The decision by Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney to call an early federal election could be an attempt to maintain Liberal Party support before economic troubles deepen, a political expert says.

"There was always talk of an earlier election call, for a variety of reasons," said Andrea Perrella, an associate professor of political science at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario.

"Carney's overwhelming victory in the leadership campaign, and the apparent comfort that many voters appear to have in him is an asset that may have a fairly short life span."

The timing of the election, Perrella said, is partly influenced by economic concerns.

"It is likely that Canada will see a weakening in the economy, and even though most people can blame that on (US) tariffs, the incumbent government will not avoid voter discontent."

"It is not improbable for Carney and his advisers to figure that an early election may precede the worst of the economic decline."

In Ottawa on Sunday as he announced the snap election, Carney said Canadians "are facing the most significant crises of

our lifetimes" because of President Donald Trump's "unjustified trade actions and his threats to our sovereignty".

"Our response must be to build a strong economy and a more secure Canada. President Trump claims that Canada isn't a real country. He wants to break us so America can own us. We will not let that happen."

Polling averages published by the national broadcaster CBC showed support for the Liberal Party weakened throughout 2023 and 2024. At the same time, support for the Conservative Party soared.

### Rebounding trend

However, the polls indicate that the Liberals have rebounded since Justin Trudeau stepped down as prime minister on March 14. The latest averages indicate that 37.5 percent of Canadians back the Liberals, while 37.1 percent support the Conservatives.

"Many disaffected Liberals appear to be returning, with some regions showing a rebound to previous levels, especially in places like Atlantic Canada," Perrella said.

While a majority government is within reach, "there is still a lot of campaigning left to do, so anything can happen, and polls will likely tighten," he said.

Despite those advantages, Perrella said, the electoral inexperience of Carney, a former governor of the

Bank of Canada and of the Bank of England, poses challenges.

"His credentials as an economist may not matter in a campaign's demands to respond quickly to hostile and acrimonious attacks," Perrella said.

For the Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, the snap election has complicated matters.

"Trudeau was the one target that helped maintain the Conservative lead in the polls," Perrella said.

"Since Trudeau's departure, the Conservatives have struggled to find a communications strategy that resonates with voters beyond their core base."

The Conservatives are now focusing on issues such as housing, cost of living and immigration and pushing to eliminate carbon taxes at the industrial level.

However, one of the issues most strongly helping shape voter sentiment is Canada's relationship with the US, Perrella said.

On top of Trump repeatedly suggesting Canada could be the 51st state of the US, the US is set to impose sweeping and "comprehensive" reciprocal tariffs on all of its trading partners, on April 2.

"Many Canadians are now flat-out scared, and they may believe that voting in this election can put in power those who are best positioned to protect Canada," Perrella said.

## Briefly

### UNITED STATES

#### Waltz calls leaked Yemen chat 'embarrassing'

US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz has assumed "full responsibility" for a leaked group chat discussing an upcoming military strike in Yemen. Waltz made the point in an interview with Fox News Channel on Tuesday. "It's embarrassing. We're going to get to the bottom of it," Waltz said. Jeffrey Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Atlantic, wrote on Monday that he was invited on March 11 to join a group chat named "Houthi PC Small Group" on Signal, a popular encrypted messaging app used by journalists and government officials. Upon joining, he discovered that several high-ranking officials were discussing plans for a forthcoming strike on the Houthis in Yemen. The incident is widely considered a major national security breach, prompting Democratic lawmakers to demand answers from the White House in numerous letters.

### ARMENIA

#### Lawmakers vote for kicking off EU bid

Armenia's parliament passed a bill Wednesday launching the country's bid for European Union membership. Adopted in final reading with 64 votes in favor — all from lawmakers of the ruling Civil Contract party — and seven opposition members of parliament voting against it, the bill calls on the Armenian government to initiate the process of EU accession. So far, no EU member state has publicly endorsed the idea of Armenia's potential accession to the 27-nation bloc.

### FRANCE

#### 3 survive crash of air force acrobatics jets

Three people were "found conscious" after two jets of the French air force's acrobatics team apparently collided near an air base in north-eastern France on Tuesday, authorities said. The Alpha Jet planes are thought to have collided near an air base west of Saint-Dizier in northeastern France, the French air and space force told AFP. Three people, two pilots and one passenger ejected and were "found conscious", according to the military. One person suffered multiple injuries, a source told AFP. One of the planes crashed into a silo, sparking a fire. There were no civilian casualties. Defense minister Sebastien Lecornu confirmed the accident on his X account.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

## German parliament reconvenes with expanded far-right bloc

By EARLE GALE in London  
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Germany's newly elected parliament, or Bundestag, convened on Tuesday for the first time since last month's federal election, with the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, taking up a record number of seats but no role in government.

The AfD, which finished second in the Feb 23 poll that ended the center-left government of (the now caretaker chancellor) Olaf Scholz, has been excluded from coalition talks aimed at forming the next government.

The conservative bloc comprising election winners the Christian Democratic Union, or CDU, and the Christian Social Union, or CSU, has instead spoken to third-placed fin-

ishers the Social Democrats, or SPD.

The AfD, which doubled its share of the vote to 20.8 percent and has 152 seats in the 630-seat legislature, is now the largest far-right bloc in a German parliament since 1945 and has railed against its exclusion — with parliamentary leader Bernd Baumann saying: "Your tricks won't prevent our rise."

Friedrich Merz, leader of the CDU-CSU alliance, will become the country's next chancellor after his coalition with the SPD is formally in place. Like all German leaders since 1945, he has vowed not to work with the AfD because of its anti-immigrant, far-right philosophy that is reminiscent of Germany's fascist past. However, unlike leaders before him, Merz will find it difficult to

ignore the far-right because of its size.

While the talks between Merz's CDU-CSU alliance and the SPD continue, the new parliament, known as the 21st session of the Bundestag, convened with Merz saying "trust is growing" between his party and the SPD, and predicting that his new government will be in place by April 20.

"I am very confident that we can do this," the broadcaster Deutsche Welle quoted him as saying. The broadcaster said the coalition talks have been held up on disagreements over taxes, welfare policy and migration.

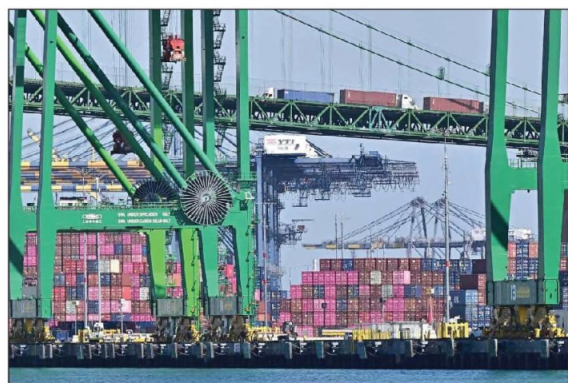
Merz, who campaigned on fiscal responsibility and adhering to Germany's so-called debt brake, has also surprised supporters by promising to rescind the measure that prohib-

its unfettered government borrowing, and increasing spending on infrastructure, environmental projects, and the military.

The new parliament began this week by electing former minister Julia Klöckner to serve as its speaker, or parliament president — a role that is technically subservient only to the president and superior to that of the chancellor.

Klöckner, who was agriculture minister from 2018 to 2021 in Angela Merkel's final government, said she will endeavor to ensure all voices are heard in the new parliament.

"I will take care that we deal with each other in a civilized way — and if we don't do that, learn to (do that)," The Associated Press quoted her as saying.



Shipping containers are stacked high on March 4 at the Port of Long Beach in California. AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Author warns of risks of dollar dominance

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
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The author of a new book has emphasized the importance of wisely managing the US dollar, given its status as the world's dominant currency.

"We have this great power, and that means we have a commensurate amount of great responsibility," said Paul Blustein, author of *King Dollar: The Past and Future of the World's Dominant Currency*.

He made the comments during a book talk this month at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC. Blustein, formerly a reporter with The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal, is a senior associate with the Economics

Program and Scholl Chair in International Business at the center.

In *King Dollar*, Blustein looks at how the dollar became the world's most important currency and talks about the many predictions that it will not remain so.

People often point to the likes of Bitcoin, China's renminbi, or the US' growing debt and rising prices as reasons the dollar may lose its power. However, Blustein believes the dollar will remain the top currency unless the US government makes bad decisions.

For example, he noted how the United States uses the dollar to sanction countries such as Russia. Even though Russia tries to push back, it has had little success — demonstrat-

ing that the dollar still gives the US a lot of control in the world.

Blustein said the resilience of the US dollar stems from its unique strengths, particularly the liquidity of US Treasury securities. "When a crisis happens, everyone's desperate to get their hands on cash," he said. "You can buy and sell huge amounts without making the prices go up and down."

### Geopolitical weapon

Blustein, however, pointed to the US' growing reliance on the dollar as a geopolitical weapon, particularly through sanctions enforced via the Clearing House Interbank Payment System, or CHIPS, which handles more than 90 percent of global dollar transactions.

"If you're transacting in dollars, you really have to have a connection to CHIPS," he said.

While sanctions proved effective during the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Blustein warned of unintended consequences.

"Sanctions inflict pain on the poor, on innocent bystanders," he said. "The bullying that's involved by the US government will infuriate other countries, alienate allies and provoke adversaries."

He said overreach could push nations to explore alternatives, though it is neither easy nor happening soon. He also criticized recent US policy moves, calling high tariffs and threats against allies shameful.

"The threats against Canada are the most egregious example," he added, warning that such actions could fracture alliances vital to the dollar's stability.

## Majestic view



Greek fighter jets fly past the Acropolis hill in Athens during a military parade commemorating the Greek Independence Day on Tuesday. Greeks celebrate the day to commemorate the war for independence against the Ottoman Empire. THANASSIS STAVRAKIS / AP