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# CHINA DAILY

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## China, India vow to foster sound relations

Xi, Murmu exchange congratulatory messages on 75th anniversary of ties

By ZHAO JIA  
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**\$138.48 billion**

worth of bilateral trade took place between China and India in 2024, marking a 1.7 percent year-on-year increase.

President Xi Jinping reaffirmed on Tuesday his commitment to fostering the healthy and stable development of China-India relations to contribute to global peace and prosperity, as he exchanged congratulatory messages with Indian President Droupadi Murmu on the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In his message, Xi expressed readiness to work with Murmu to bolster strategic mutual trust, expand exchanges and cooperation across various fields, deepen communication and coordination on major international affairs, and jointly safeguard peace and tranquility in the border area.

China and India, both ancient civilizations, major developing countries and key members of the Global South, are at a critical stage of their respective modernization efforts, Xi noted.

The history of China-India relations demonstrates that the "cooperative steps of the dragon and the elephant" is the only right choice for the two sides, aligning fully with the fundamental interests of both countries and their peoples, he added.

Xi called on both nations to view and handle their ties from a strategic and long-term perspective, seek a path of peaceful coexistence, mutual trust and common development as neighboring major countries, and work together to promote a multipolar world and greater democracy in international relations.

Noting that India and China are two neighboring major countries, accounting for more than one-third of the global population, Murmu emphasized that a stable, predictable and friendly bilateral relationship will benefit both nations as well as the world.

She called on the two countries to take the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations as an opportunity to jointly promote the sound and steady development of bilateral ties.

Also on Tuesday, Premier Li Qiang and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchanged congratulatory messages.

Li said that China is ready to work with India to properly manage border issues and advance bilateral relations for the benefit of both peoples.

Modi emphasized the shared responsibility of India and China in promoting peace and development, noting that the two countries' relationship not only contributes to global stability and prosperity, but also supports the realization of a multipolar world.

He expressed confidence that the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations will usher in a new phase in the stable and

healthy growth of bilateral ties. On April 1, 1950, India was the first nonsocialist country to establish diplomatic relations with China. Over the past decades, despite ups and downs, the bilateral relationship has maintained an overall positive momentum of development, with friendly exchanges and cooperation always being the mainstream.

China has remained India's largest trading partner for many years. According to the General Administration of Customs, bilateral trade reached \$138.48 billion in 2024, marking a 1.7 percent year-on-year increase.

In October last year, Xi and Modi met in Kazan, Russia, leading the bilateral relationship to embark on a new journey.

Modi said in a recent interview with an Indian newspaper that it was normal for the two neighboring major countries to have differences and the key was to ensure that the differences do not turn into disputes. He emphasized the need to prioritize dialogue over discord, and acknowledged that strong bilateral ties are not only beneficial for the two nations, but also critical for global stability.

Over the past few months, China and India have engaged in intensive and productive exchanges, culminating in the exchange of the anniversary messages.

Last week, during consultations between the two countries' foreign ministries, both sides agreed to actively promote exchanges at all levels, accelerate efforts to resume direct flights, facilitate personnel exchanges, and support the reciprocal posting of journalists.

Lin Minwang, deputy director of the Center for South Asian Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, said that as key members of the Global South, China and India share the responsibility of safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries, and their coordination in multilateral mechanisms helps contribute to stability in a world that is facing increasing turbulence and uncertainty.

India has pledged full support for China's role as the rotating chair of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization this year and committed to actively participating in various SCO activities hosted by Beijing.

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### Drills as warning

Rocket Force troops (above) and an Air Force aircraft (left, top) of the People's Liberation Army Eastern Theater Command, and a vessel of the China Coast Guard participate in joint military exercises on Tuesday to approach the island of Taiwan from multiple directions. The drills, which also involved the PLA's Ground Force, were conducted in areas around Taiwan Island. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY See story, page 3; Editorial, page 11

## FM lauds Beijing, Moscow's stabilizing role

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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If the United States persists in pressuring and blackmailing China over tariffs, "China surely will be resolute in its countermeasures", Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Tuesday.

In an interview with the Russia Today international media group, Wang, who is visiting Russia and held talks on Tuesday in Moscow with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, responded to a number of questions on topics such as the China-US trade war, Russia-US interactions and the Ukraine crisis.

When asked about the trade war and whether China will impose further tariffs on commodities produced in the US, Wang said that "America First" should not lead to American bullying, nor should the US base its own interests on damaging the legitimate rights and

interests of other countries. He mentioned that the US has used fentanyl as a pretext to impose tariffs on China twice, which is "particularly groundless".

China has provided various kinds of help to the US, but the US has raised tariffs in an unwarranted manner and ill-treated China's kindness in return, he added.

"If the US side really wants to solve the fentanyl issue, it should revoke the unjustified tariff levies and engage in equal consultation with China," he said.

"China has never been subject to power politics and hegemony, and if the US side keeps on pressuring and even blackmailing, China surely will be resolute in its countermeasures."

He emphasized that mutual respect is "an important prerequisite for China-US relations".

China is committed to the stable, healthy and sustainable develop-

ment of China-US ties and "will also take resolute measures to firmly safeguard its own sovereignty, security and development interests", he said. "I hope the US side will see the historical trend clearly and make a rational choice," he added.

When asked about the rebound in Russia-US interaction and the implications, Wang said the two countries "have just taken the initial step toward resuming normal contacts".

"This is conducive to advancing the stability of the landscape of major-country relations, and is helpful in shoring up positive expectations to the international situation where changes and chaos are intertwined," Wang said.

"Major countries should be aware of their international obligations and take the initiative to provide more stabilizing factors in an uncertain world," he added.

See Interview, page 3

WORLD WATCH By Wilson Lee Flores

## Ne Zha 2's 15b record shows boom of Chinese pop culture

Move over Hollywood, China's *Ne Zha 2* is here. The film has stormed the global stage, proving that animated storytelling isn't confined to talking toys or singing princesses, and that Asia is more than capable of producing world-class animation.

This dazzling sequel to the 2019 blockbuster *Ne Zha* isn't just a film; it's a cultural phenomenon, a visual masterpiece, and a reminder that the most compelling stories transcend borders.

With superlative animation, breathtaking special effects, and a narrative that seamlessly blends humor, heartbreak and moral depth, *Ne Zha 2* isn't merely the biggest animated film of the moment — it's a triumphant celebration of China's artistic renaissance and a beacon of its growing soft power.

Picking up where the first film left off, *Ne Zha 2* follows the mischievous, gap-toothed demon boy Ne Zha and his noble dragon prince companion Ao Bing as they navigate a world teeming with gods, dragons and ocean-dwelling monsters. The stakes are higher, the battles more epic, and the emotional punches land with even greater force.

Director Yang Yu, returning from the first installment, masterfully weaves a sprawling mythological tapestry drawn from *The Investiture of the Gods*, a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) novel, ensuring that newcomers can follow the plot. That said, if you haven't seen the first *Ne Zha*, do yourself a favor and watch it before diving into this one. Trust me, you'll thank me later.

What sets *Ne Zha 2* apart is its ability to balance spectacle with soul. The animation is breathtaking — think shimmering dragon scales, gravity-defying celestial palaces, and battle sequences that rival anything Marvel or DC Comics has ever produced. But what truly elevates this film is its focus on the human and demonic emotions at its core.

See *Ne Zha*, page 3

## APPRECIATION EXPRESSED FOR NATION'S QUAKE RESPONSE

Prompt actions by rescue teams in Myanmar save lives, minimize further health and safety risks

By WEI XIAOHAO in Mandalay, Myanmar, LI YINGQING in Kunming and ZHANG XIAOMIN

An elderly woman was successfully rescued by a Chinese rescue team from under hospital rubble in Myanmar's capital, Nay Pyi Daw, on Sunday morning, nearly 40 hours after the magnitude 7.9 earthquake struck on Friday.

"When she was carried onto a stretcher by rescuers, everyone on the scene was excited," said Mu Shuyuan, from China's Yunnan province rescue and medical team.

The 37-member team was the first international one to arrive at the earthquake-stricken area. Eighteen of the team members are from China Railway No 2 Engineering Group's National Tunnel Emergency Rescue Team based in Kunming, the capital



Residents displaced by an earthquake take shelter on Tuesday at the back of a vehicle in Mandalay, Myanmar. SAI AUNG MAIN / AFP See more, pages 2, 7



Online See more by scanning the code.

### In-depth

of Yunnan. They are responsible for rescue efforts, while the others take care of medical needs and help with disease prevention.

Carrying emergency rescue supplies, including life detection equipment, an earthquake early-warning system and portable satellite equipment, the team arrived at Yangon International Airport on Saturday morning.

Upon landing, they immediately joined forces with the Myanmar fire and rescue department, and after traveling for more than nine hours reached severely affected areas in Nay Pyi Daw.

See *Earthquake*, page 2

# PAGE TWO



Left and right: Members from the Chinese Red Cross International Emergency Response Team conduct rescue efforts at residential dwellings on Monday in Mandalay, Myanmar. Middle: A resident rides his motorcycle past debris in Mandalay on Monday. PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

## Earthquake: 'True solidarity shines brightest in times of adversity'

From page 1

"Without taking a break, we brought demolition tools and communication equipment to the designated location, and quickly engaged in rescue work," said Mu, leader of the rescue squad.

At Ottara Thiri Private Hospital, a three-story building was severely damaged, with the ground floor completely collapsed.

Using a sign of life detector, Mu's squad located a survivor trapped under the collapsed floor.

His deputy Xiao Min crawled in front of a crevice in the rubble, shone a flashlight in the space and called out loudly in Mandarin with a Guizhou accent, "Don't be afraid. We are here to rescue you!"

Realizing there was a language barrier, Xiao immediately called for a translator. The translator was able to communicate the message, and a hoarse response was heard emanating from deep within the debris.

A 73-year-old woman, who had previously undergone brain surgery and returned to the hospital for a checkup, was trapped in a narrow space between the second and first floors, alongside bodies of the deceased.

Due to the complex environment, they devised a rescue plan along with local emergency workers.

"During the rescue process, we not only had to consider that drilling vibrations might cause concrete blocks to fall, causing secondary harm to the trapped individuals, but we also had to be vigilant about aftershocks and the risk of collapse," Xiao said.

After drilling two access holes, one running horizontally and the other vertically, they still could not reach the woman. They then drilled a third hole, which enabled them to remove the bodies of two deceased people on top of the woman.

At 4:56 am on Sunday, after being trapped for nearly 40 hours, she was successfully rescued.

"Make sure to lift steadily and slowly," Xiao repeatedly instructed those carrying the stretcher. When she was safely placed in an ambulance, he let out a sigh of relief.

### Heartfelt gratitude

After saving the woman, Mu led the squad to the main building of the hospital, where a trembling elderly

man grabbed his wrist and spoke in a croaky voice to him.

Translators and local firefighters informed Mu that the man was a relative of a victim whose body had been retrieved from the debris.

Despite the outcome not being as desired, he expressed deep gratitude for the hard work of the rescue team.

"Although we couldn't understand each other's languages, his emotions and sincerity deeply touched us," Mu said.

On Sunday morning, Myanmar's leader Min Aung Hlaing visited the hospital and expressed heartfelt gratitude to the entire Yunnan rescue and medical team for their prompt arrival in Myanmar for rescue operations.

Medical team member He Jibo communicated and coordinated with accompanying Myanmar health officials. He said that they were very concerned about the occurrence and spread of infectious diseases due to poor hygiene.

The Chinese team will work with Myanmar's health department and disease control center to further clarify post-disaster health and epidemic prevention needs, He said.

"The rescue operation in the quake-hit area faces various difficulties. Myanmar, both officially and privately, is deeply moved by China's immediate mobilization for disaster relief," said Chin Myint, managing director of Yangon-based Myanmar Weimin Energy Technology Co.

"As far as I know, the number of Chinese rescuers who arrived in Mandalay has exceeded 300," he said on Monday.

Chin said he was on a business trip to Mandalay on Friday when he felt the strong earthquake while checking into his hotel.

He said he immediately went to the hardest-hit area of the city to assist front-line rescue workers and also participated in fundraising for the victims and survivors. "We need to do our best. The buildings have collapsed, but we cannot let hope collapse as well," he said.

### Responsible neighbor

The Yunnan rescue and medical team was joined in Myanmar by a Hong Kong search and rescue team, the China Search and Rescue Team,



China's Yunnan rescue and medical team works at the ruins of Odalatli Hospital in Nay Pyi Daw, Myanmar, on Sunday. WANG CHANGHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY



Rescuers interact with children and local people in Nay Pyi Daw on Sunday. XIONG DAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

the China International Search and Rescue Team, as well as various civilian rescue forces from different parts of the mainland.

The Chinese Red Cross International Emergency Response Team traveled to Mandalay, where its 15 team members were involved in search and rescue efforts, care and transfer of survivors, medical assistance, and provided psychological counseling.

On Sunday, while preparing for departure at Kuning airport, they encountered a middle-aged Myan-

mar overseas Chinese named Sein Yee, who cried with excitement upon seeing the team.

Sein had planned to fly back to Mandalay from Mangshi of Dehong Dai and Jingpo autonomous prefecture, Yunnan, on Friday. Due to the earthquake, the flight was canceled so she transferred to Kuning.

"On one hand, I was moved

because we were in distress, and China promptly came to our rescue," she said. "On the other hand, seeing the disaster scenes sent by friends after the earthquake made me very sad."

"My heart has been aching, hoping more people are rescued as soon as possible," she said.

Ma Yong, a researcher at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, said that China and Myanmar form a community with a shared future. The two countries share "weal and woe", bound by a profound *pauk-phaw* ("fraternal" in the Myanmar language) friendship between their peoples.

"True solidarity shines brightest in times of adversity," Ma said. "Upon learning of the devastating earthquake in Myanmar, the Chinese government immediately extended assistance, with Chinese rescue teams being the first to arrive on the scene."

"They swiftly engaged in relief operations and announced humanitarian aid. The rapid and efficient involvement of Chinese rescue forces has helped people in Myanmar fight the disaster. This has further strengthened the 'heart-to-heart connectivity' between the peoples of China and Myanmar."

Ran Aobo, a researcher at Tsinghua University's Institute for Urban Governance and Sustainable Development, said China, as a responsible big country, had sent emergency response teams multiple times to other countries for disaster relief work.

China is a participant in Integrated Research on Disaster Risk, an international scientific program co-sponsored by the International Science Council and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, he added.

"China has a strong capability and willingness to enhance international cooperation in disaster relief," he said, adding that the country leverages its expertise in technical training and data sharing.

As Myanmar is an important neighbor, China's actions are also proof of the two countries' long-lasting friendship, he added.

Chen Meiling contributed to this story.

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*With a smile and thumbs-up, thanks seen in smallest gestures*



Wei Xiaohao Reporter's log

Upon arriving in Yangon, Myanmar, on Sunday evening, I rushed to Mandalay overnight with the Chinese Red Cross International Emergency Response Team that was carrying supplies.

The bus was loaded with supplies donated by Chinese social organizations. Among them were three large packages wrapped in woven bags placed in the aisles between seats.

I asked what they were and got a chilling answer that brought home the serious nature of the disaster: body bags.

After a night of rough travel, the team arrived in the city around 8 am on Monday.

It took about 14 hours on the road. I heard from the locals that it usually takes half that time to make the journey.

Many main roads were closed, so we had to take detours, and we were stopped and questioned several times by checkpoints set up by the government army.

As we approached Mandalay, the destruction of dwellings along the way increased.

In the city, most residential houses had some kind of damage. Many buildings were in danger of collapse, and lots of residents were camping on the roadside or on sports fields.

After arriving, the team members immediately started rescue work without taking a rest.

I was wearing a Chinese Red Cross rescue uniform, and went around taking photos with the guidance of a local overseas Chinese volunteer.

The feedback from local people was very positive. Some shop owners offered free drinking water, some greeted us in Chinese saying "Ni hao", while others smiled and said "China" while giving a thumbs-up.

I met an overseas Chinese whose house — a four-story building — collapsed in the earthquake, with only remnants of the top floor.

Upon seeing me, he tentatively asked if the rescue team could help retrieve some important items, including identification cards, that were buried in the rubble. The team leader promised to later find time to help him.

On the first day in Mandalay, the most challenging aspect was the high temperature, with a maximum temperature of 42 C.

Even at noon, the hottest part of the day, the rescue work never stopped.

After returning to their makeshift base at a sports hall, the Chinese rescuers immediately took off their uniforms and lay on the ground.

This trip to Myanmar was the first international rescue mission of the team I had accompanied.

I was deeply moved by the humanitarian spirit and professional capabilities of the team members, who are all from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

Among the 15 members, there is one female member, Chen Ying. She has been engaged in rescue work for 10 years and is responsible for logistics, psychological counseling, and medical assistance on this trip.

Facing my interview camera, she said, "As a member of the Red Cross, our original intention has long surpassed life itself. I hope everyone stays safe."

Zhang Xiaomin contributed to this story.



Members from the Chinese Red Cross International Emergency Response Team conduct rescue efforts on Monday in Mandalay. PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Pipeline hazard



Residents watch as a fire rages on Tuesday in Putra Heights in central Selangor, Malaysia. The fire caused by a gas pipe burst spread to several homes, affecting at least 112 people, with 63 requiring hospitalization. AMIR AFIQ / AP PHOTO

## Interview: Bilateral partnership 'unshakable'

From page 1

As some people hyped that Russia and the US will join hands to contain China, Wang said such an idea is not just treating international politics as a simple transaction, but is also backed by an outdated Cold War-era mindset.

The China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination has been tested by winds and tides in the international situation, and it is "unshakable," he emphasized.

"We fully understand and support Russia in safeguarding its legitimate and legal rights and interests through diplomatic efforts," he added.

As the Ukraine crisis has entered its fourth year, Wang said the situation on the battlefield remains complicated, but recently "the momentum of peace talks on the Ukrainian crisis has emerged." "Although this is only a small step toward peace, this step is positive and necessary. Peace should not be waited for, it needs to be actively pursued," he said.

Wang added that the root causes of this crisis are intricate and complex, and there are still significant gaps among the positions of various parties on a series of critical issues, so "there is still a long way to go in restoring peace."

"China is willing to play a constructive role with the international community, especially the Global South countries, in accordance with the wishes of the parties concerned, and supports settling root causes of the crisis through dialogue and negotiation," he said. The ultimate goal is "to reach a fair, lasting, binding peace agreement accepted by all parties involved, and to truly realize long-term peace and stability" in the Eurasian region and the world, he added.

Regarding China-Russia relations, Wang said the ties are "conducive to promoting multipolarity in the world and democratization of international relations."

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union and the World Anti-Fascist War.

China and Russia were two of the main battlegrounds in Asia and Europe, respectively, Wang said, adding that they should "oppose any attempts and acts of denying, distorting or falsifying the history of World War II" and join hands to safeguard the post-war international order.

## Nation vows to counter interference in Xizang-related issues by the US

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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China urged the United States on Tuesday to stop interfering in its internal affairs under the pretext of Xizang-related issues, saying that it will take necessary measures to "resolutely and reciprocally counter the US' wrongful acts."

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a statement on the State Department's website on Monday announcing visa restrictions on some Chinese officials over access to Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun responded on Tuesday that the US move is gross interference in affairs concerning Xizang, which are China's internal affairs, and the move is a serious violation of international law and the basic

norms governing international relations.

"China strongly deplores and firmly rejects this," he said at a regular news conference in Beijing.

Guo emphasized that Xizang is open and no regulations have been made to restrict foreigners from entering the region.

He cited the fact that Xizang receives a large number of foreign tourists and people from all walks of life every year, and the region received a total of 320,000 foreign tourists in 2024.

Considering Xizang's special geographic and climatic conditions and other factors, the Chinese government has taken some regulatory and protective measures in accordance with laws and regulations regarding foreigners entering the region, the spokesman said, adding that this is completely necessary.

China welcomes foreigners to visit, travel and do business in Xizang, but they "must abide by China's laws and relevant regulations," Guo said.

"We oppose the groundless slander of the status quo of human rights, religion and cultural development in Xizang, and oppose the interference and sabotage practices of foreign officials in the name of performing their duties in the region," he said.

"China urges the US to strictly honor its commitments on issues related to Xizang, stop abetting and supporting 'Tibet independence' forces, and stop interfering in China's internal affairs under the pretext of issues related to Xizang," Guo said.

"China will take necessary measures to firmly and reciprocally counter the wrongful acts of the US," he added.

## Soaring high



A man prepares to release a balloon on Tuesday during a balloon festival to celebrate Eid al-Fitr at Kerbaran Field in Wonosobo Regency, Indonesia. The festival will continue till Sunday. AGUNG SUPRIYANTO / XINHUA

## Ne Zha: Blockbuster serves as bridge between East, West

From page 1

Ne Zha remains the brash, immature kid we fell in love with, but his journey toward self-discovery and redemption is profoundly moving. His bond with Ao Bing, rooted in their shared destiny as two halves of the Chaos Pearl, is both heartwarming and heartbreaking. And let's not forget the tearjerker moments involving Ne Zha's parents, Lady Yin and Li Jing, whose unwavering love for their son will leave you reaching for tissues.

Of course, it's not all heavy drama. *Ne Zha 2* delivers plenty of

laugh-out-loud moments, thanks to its signature potty humor. The film's humor is delightfully juvenile, but it never feels out of place in a story that's ultimately about growing up, finding your place in the world and learning to wield your power responsibly. It's a rare blockbuster that can make you laugh, cry and cheer — sometimes all at once.

But *Ne Zha 2* isn't just a triumph of storytelling and animation; it's a milestone for Chinese cinema and culture. The film's record-breaking box office success — about 15 billion yuan (\$2.07 billion) and counting — is a testament to China's growing

influence in the global entertainment industry, but it's also a celebration of the country's rich cultural heritage.

At a time when the world is increasingly interconnected, *Ne Zha 2* serves as a bridge between East and West, introducing global audiences to myths and legends that have shaped Chinese civilization for millennia. It's a reminder that China's cultural renaissance isn't just about economics — it's about reclaiming a legacy that dates back 5,000 years.

In many ways, *Ne Zha 2* feels like a modern-day echo of the glorious

# PLA conducts drills around Taiwan Island

China's resolve to achieve reunification of country is rock solid, says spokeswoman

By JIANG CHENGLONG  
and ZHAO LEI

The Eastern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army conducted joint exercises involving land, sea, air and rocket forces around the island of Taiwan on Tuesday, stressing that this is a "just and necessary action" to defend national sovereignty and maintain national unity.

Senior Colonel Shi Yi, an Eastern Theater Command spokesman, said in a statement on Tuesday morning that the command has deployed its ground, naval, air, rocket and other forces from multiple directions to approach the island as part of the operation.

The drills mainly focus on sea-air combat readiness patrols, battlefield dominance, strikes on sea and ground targets, blockades of key areas and sea routes and other tactics, in order to assess the forces' joint operational capabilities, he said.

Meng Xiangqing, a professor at PLA National Defense University, said the joint drills have sent a very clear signal — a stern warning and a powerful deterrent to the "Taiwan independence" separatist forces — and he added that the exercises were "reasonable, justifiable and lawful".

Meng noted that comprehensive control includes command of the sea, air, land and information.

"The purpose of these exercises is to test the joint operational capabilities of the theater command's forces in real combat scenarios," he said.

Since 2022, the PLA has conducted at least three previous large-scale military exercises in areas near the island.

Zhang Chi, a scholar at PLA National Defense University, pointed out that in the series of exercises and training maneuvers in areas near Taiwan Island, the PLA has continuously advanced deeper and closer to the island of Taiwan.

"That has helped the PLA become more familiar with and adept at navigating the battlefield environment in the Taiwan Strait," he said.

"I believe this largely indicates that the exercises we are witnessing around the Taiwan Strait have become a new normal. For the PLA and its Eastern Theater Command, these exercises are now everyday business."

The China Coast Guard said on Tuesday morning that it sent its ships to conduct law-enforcement patrols surrounding Taiwan Island.

Zhu Anqing, spokesman for the China Coast Guard's East China Sea Bureau, said: "Taiwan is a province of the People's Republic of China. These operations are concrete actions to exercise legitimate jurisdiction and control over Taiwan Island in accordance with the one-China principle."

In addition, the coast guard of East China's Fujian province organized vessel formations to conduct patrols in waters surrounding the islands of Dongyin and Wuqiu on Tuesday, the China Coast Guard said in a news release.

The drills carried out identifica-

tion and verification, inspection and capture, and control and expulsion operations against unwarranted vessels, it said.

Fu Zhengnan, from the PLA Academy of Military Sciences, said: "With the support and coordination of PLA ships and aircraft, the coast guard fleet conducted law enforcement patrols in waters around islands such as Wuqiu and Dongyin, which the Taiwan authorities claim as restricted areas. These actions continue to consolidate the new normal of managing the island of Taiwan in accordance with the one-China principle."

In addition, Fu said these drills fully demonstrate that the PLA's military options for deterring "Taiwan independence" separatist forces are becoming increasingly diverse.

"They also prove that regardless of the guise, name or method of concealment, 'Taiwan independence' leads only to a dead end," he emphasized.

Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said on Tuesday that the PLA's joint exercises are a resolute punishment for the "reckless provocations" of the pursuit of "Taiwan independence" by island authorities led by Lai Ching-te.

"Lai stubbornly adheres to a separatist stance on 'Taiwan independence', brazenly labels the Chinese mainland as a 'hostile external force', and proposes so-called '17 strategies' to provocatively challenge the mainland, incite anti-China sentiment, obstruct cross-strait exchanges and cooperation, and escalate tensions in the Taiwan Strait," she said.

These actions clearly demonstrate that Lai is a destroyer of cross-strait peace and a creator of crisis in the Taiwan Strait, fully exposing his ugly stance against peace, exchanges, democracy and humanity, Zhu added.

"Taiwan independence" means war, and pursuing "Taiwan independence" means pushing the people of Taiwan into a dangerous situation of military conflict, the spokeswoman warned.

"Our resolve to solve the Taiwan question and achieve national reunification is rock solid, and our capability is indestructible," she said, underscoring that "we will not allow anyone or any force to separate Taiwan from China, nor will we leave any room for any form of 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities."

At a regular news conference on Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said, "Taiwan is an inseparable part of China's territory, and the Taiwan question is purely an internal matter of China, not subject to any external interference."

The Democratic Progressive Party authorities in Taiwan stubbornly adhere to a "Taiwan independence" stance and attempt to split the nation with external support, which is doomed to fail, he said.

"The historical trend of China's eventual and inevitable reunification is unstoppable," Guo said.

It's a film that proves sequels can surpass their predecessors, that animation is a medium for all ages, and that the stories we tell have the power to unite us.

As the credits rolled, I couldn't help but feel a sense of awe — not just at what I'd just watched, but at the cultural awakening it represents. *Ne Zha 2* is more than a movie; it's a movement. As the world embraces this mythical masterpiece, one thing is clear: The future of storytelling is boundless, and a peacefully resurgent China is leading the charge.

The author is a multi-award-winning writer and a columnist for the *Philippine Star* and *Abante newspapers*. The views do not necessarily reflect those of *China Daily*.

## CHINA

# US sanctions slammed as hegemonic

China, HK officials rip Washington for interference; countermeasures vowed

By STACY SHI in Hong Kong  
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Chinese central government and Hong Kong officials on Tuesday condemned the United States for imposing sanctions on six mainland and Hong Kong officials, accusing Washington of using hegemonic "bullying" tactics.

On Monday local time, the US government announced sanctions on six Chinese officials, groundlessly alleging they have been using national security laws to undermine Hong Kong's autonomy.

The officials sanctioned are Dong Jingwei, director of the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR; Paul Lam Ting-kuo, secretary for justice; Raymond Siu Chak-ye, commissioner of police; Sonny Au Chi-kwong, secretary-general of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security of the HKSAR; and two assistant police commissioners in charge of national security affairs, Dick Wong Chung-chun and Margaret Chiu Wing-lan.

The number of HKSAR government officials sanctioned by the US in the past five years has reached 17, including Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun lashed out at the sanctions at a regular news conference on Tuesday afternoon, saying such despicable acts constitute serious interference in HKSAR affairs and China's internal affairs, and grossly tramples on the principles of international law and the basic norms of international relations.

Guo said the Hong Kong Police Force has lawfully taken action against anti-China agitators who fled overseas, while the SAR's judicial authorities independently and impartially handle national security cases in accordance with the law — all fully compliant with international law and common practice, which the US has no grounds to interfere in.

He stressed that Hong Kong affairs are purely the nation's internal affairs, urging the US to abide by the principles of international law and fundamental norms of international relations, and immediately cease all forms of interference in Hong Kong SAR affairs and China's internal matters.

The Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the HKSAR also condemned the US, branding its so-called "Hong Kong Policy Act Report" as "full of lies" and a "malicious distortion of Hong Kong's rule of law and freedoms under 'one country, two systems'".

"China will take resolute measures to counter this reckless US interference," the commissioner's office said. "HKSAR affairs are purely China's internal matters

that brook no foreign interference. Any external intervention is doomed to fail!"

It urged the US to strictly adhere to the principles of international law and fundamental norms of international relations, and immediately cease all forms of interference in the internal affairs of China.

The Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR also sternly warned that any external forces attempting to interfere with Hong Kong's national security efforts will not succeed, urging the US to immediately abandon its bullying tactics.

A spokesperson for the office emphasized that with high-level security safeguards, Hong Kong is destined to achieve higher-quality development and greater openness. Meanwhile, the US' repeated unreasonable unilateral sanctions against Hong Kong remain worthless and cannot stop its inevitable march toward prosperity.

The HKSAR government said the latest move by the US has once again clearly exposed its "barbarity and hegemony" by using exactly the same bullying and coercion tactics it has employed in other countries and regions.

HKSAR officials will continue to resolutely discharge their duties in safeguarding national security, and the government will make every effort to protect the legitimate rights and interests of all personnel, a government spokesperson said.

Lam, one of the sanctioned officials, told reporters that the measures are "unjustified" and "completely ineffective", and are a violation of international law.

The justice secretary criticized the US government's unilateral sanctions, saying they are aimed at intimidating people who are safeguarding national security and are blatantly in breach of the basic principles of international relations, representing nothing more than hegemonic bullying.

The best response to such measures is to remain resolute and united in the face of the threats and remain determined to safeguard national security and interests, as well as Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, Lam said.

On Tuesday afternoon, dozens of members from Hong Kong's largest political party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, staged a protest outside the consulate general of the United States in Hong Kong.

The party's vice-chair Brave Chan Yung denounced the sanctions and the policy report as unlawful interference in China's internal affairs, demanding an immediate end to such political manipulation.



## Joint practice

A student member of an education delegation from Derby, United Kingdom, practices martial arts movements with local students at a primary school in Hefei, Anhui province, on Tuesday. The delegation visited the school in Hefei for an exchange visit. Students immersed themselves during the tour and engaged in martial arts and other activities to experience the charm of Chinese culture.

ZHAO MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## PLA Navy opens its first intl social media accounts

By ZHAO LEI  
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The People's Liberation Army Navy launched its official accounts on social media platforms X, formerly known as Twitter, and YouTube on Monday, in what appears to be a charm offensive targeting global internet users.

In its first post on X, the PLA Navy, which goes under the name ChinaNavy, wrote, "I am Chinese Navy, venturing into the deep blue sea. Welcome to follow us."

A poster was posted below the sentences, showing a sailor holding his rifle and another watching a pigeon. It also carries a brief sentence, written in Chinese and English, "I am @ChinaNavy".

This is the first time that a Chinese military service has opened social media accounts on international platforms. Before the Navy,

only the PLA News Media Center had an X account, which was opened in August 2016.

In its second post, the Navy left a longer post and a video clip.

"I am Chinese Navy. From escort missions in the Gulf of Aden to overseas rescue operations, from ocean-going medical services to humanitarian evacuation, we sail across seas and oceans with responsibility and hope," the post reads, calling the Navy "a guardian to defend sovereignty and every inch of territory" and "a partner to build a maritime community with a shared future".

In the two-minute English-speaking video, a male narrator said, "We are committed to providing public products for maritime security, when piracy threatens the shipping routes and when people long for their safe return from afar."

The statement is accompanied by

footage of Chinese warships patrolling in the Gulf of Aden and Chinese sailors helping foreign evacuees board Chinese vessels.

"The Chinese Navy always arrives in time," the narrator added with footage showing foreign nationals expressing gratitude toward the PLA Navy.

The video also displays the Navy's training scenes, its international exchanges as well as touching moments between sailors, marines and foreign nationals. It ends by showing smiling faces of Navy personnel.

Previously, the Navy had made English-speaking videos and published them on X, YouTube and other overseas platforms run by Chinese media organizations.

Song Zhongping, a military affairs commentator and retired PLA officer, said that the Chinese armed forces, especially the Navy,

used to do good things without publicizing.

"Actually, you need to tell others what you have done and what you want to do. The launch of (the Navy's) accounts on international social media platforms has shown the Chinese Navy's transparency, openness and sense of mission and responsibility. Through the video, viewers can see the Navy's efforts to safeguard peace and stability in the region," he said.

The accounts will also help to clear speculation and sensationalization about "China's military threat", the observer added.

Song suggested that other services in the PLA should open their accounts on overseas internet platforms to enable people outside China to better understand the Chinese military and know about its endeavors to protect world peace and international order.

## Taiwan students visit mainland amid tensions

By ZHANG YI  
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A group of 30 young people from Taiwan are visiting Shandong province on a cultural exchange trip amid increasing cross-strait tensions triggered by the recent secessionist actions of Taiwan authorities.

"As tensions across the Taiwan Strait grow, exchanges are even more crucial," said Hsiao Hsu-tsen, executive director of the Ma Ying-jeou Culture and Education Foundation, the Taiwan-based foundation that organized the trip.

The group will engage with university students in Shandong, participate in a Confucius memorial ceremony, and visit historical and cultural sites, according to Hsiao, who is leading the delegation.

The visitors climbed Taishan Mountain on Monday and encountered a robotic dog carrying items up the mountain, sparking curiosity among the students who eagerly took photos with the robot, he said.

Since this year marks the 80th anniversary of China's victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the group will also visit the memorial hall of the Battle of

Tai'erzhung — which occurred in 1938 — to honor the fallen soldiers and reflect on the value of peace, he said.

The visit came after Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te recently outlined 17 "strategies" to counter so-called "threats" from the Chinese mainland. These include raising public awareness about "risks" associated with mainland travel and limiting cross-strait exchanges.

Hsiao condemned Lai for using administrative measures to restrict cross-strait exchanges, limiting people's freedoms and rights and referring to the mainland as an "external hostile force", thereby pushing the Strait toward a dangerous situation.

He said recently he has received numerous expressions of concern from the public, who feel anxious and even pessimistic about cross-strait relations.

Despite pressure from the authorities led by Lai, the foundation will continue to promote cross-strait dialogue, Hsiao said.

"Only through communication can the hearts of people on both sides be brought closer, reducing divisive sentiments and potentially avoiding



Young people from Taiwan visit the home appliance giant Haier during a cultural exchange trip in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Saturday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

conflicts or even war," he said.

Earlier this year, Hsiao led a group of about 40 Taiwan students to Beijing for cultural and sports exchanges. In late 2024, the foundation invited 40 students and faculty from seven mainland universities to Taiwan.

On Monday, Hsia Li-yan, vice-chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang, the opposition party in Taiwan, led a group to attend the 2025 Yellow Emperor Worship Ceremony in Xinzheng, Henan province. The ceremony celebrates Huangdi, the cultural ancestor of the Chinese nation.

During a meeting with officials from Henan on Sunday, Hsia said that compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the Chinese nation, sharing a common cultural heritage and vision as descendants of the same origin.

The KMT is willing to adhere to the 1992 Consensus, fully leverage its role as a bridge and continuously strengthen cooperation between Taiwan and Henan, to further enhance the well-being of people on both sides, and promote peaceful development of cross-strait relations, he said.

## Digital upgrade transforms Ningbo-Zhoushan Port

By CHEN YE in Ningbo, Zhejiang  
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At the Meishan Port area of the Ningbo-Zhoushan Port in Zhejiang province, self-driving container trucks move seamlessly along designated lanes, while unmanned cranes towering over 50 meters hoist cargo with precision. In a zone where hazardous goods are stored, a patrol robot scans for gas leaks or temperature anomalies, ensuring safety at one of China's busiest shipping hubs.

These are part of the daily routine at the port, according to Chen Xin, deputy general manager of Ningbo Meidong Container Terminal Co,

which manages the port area. "Empowered by technologies such as the internet of things, digital twin, 5G, AI and big data, we have upgraded the port area and set up an intelligent brain for it, including an interactive 3D visualization system that can monitor and measure operations in real time," Chen said. "It has greatly improved efficiency."

Container throughput at the Meishan Port area exceeded 11 million twenty-foot equivalent units at the end of last year. With one container truck passing inspection and entering the port area every two minutes, further increases are expected.

Its strong performance helped push cargo throughput at the Ningbo-Zhoushan Port to 1.37 billion metric tons last year, up 4 percent from 2023, securing its position as the world's leader for the 16th consecutive year.

One beneficiary of Meishan's digital transformation is Wu Qifei, a veteran crane operator who joined the port in 2010.

In an air-conditioned room with fellow operators, Wu twisted sticks and pushed buttons on a control panel as containers were lifted or lowered on a screen.

"The only option for us in the past was to sit in a cabin no more than 5 square meters large up in the air," he

said. "Constantly lowering my head caused great physical stress."

"Now, we can sit in an ergonomic chair in a comfortable office, doing our job remotely in a much easier and safer manner," he said.

The improved working conditions have also made the job more accessible to women, he added, something "unheard of and unimaginable back in the day." Wu's team has four female operators.

The Ningbo-Zhoushan Port is becoming greener as well as smarter.

Relying on wind and solar power, the Meishan Port area has generated more than 30 million kilowatt-hours since late August 2024,

equivalent to a reduction of more than 11,500 tons of carbon emissions. At the Chuanshan Port area, another major container terminal, cumulative green power generation has reached 20 million kilowatt-hours.

The port's environmental efforts have been aided by maritime authorities in Ningbo. In late 2023, the city's maritime bureau launched the "container shipping punctuality and cost reduction" initiative to help shipping companies lower costs, enhance efficiency and save energy.

"The reliability of shipping schedules directly impacts container transportation costs, warehouse operations and terminal efficiency," said Huang Linlin, an official with the bureau.

Previously, schedules at different

ports were managed independently, leading to congestion and delays. Now, maritime authorities release a unified schedule 24 hours in advance to enable punctual berthing.

A mobile app has also been developed for ports, shipping companies and vessels to share shipping data and track schedules.

Since its launch, the initiative has delivered significant environmental and economic benefits, according to the bureau. Fuel consumption has decreased by 30,700 tons, and carbon emissions have been cut by 99,000 tons — equivalent to planting about 5.5 million trees. Ships participating in the initiative have saved more than 9,000 hours in port waiting time, translating to 280 million yuan (\$38.54 million) in cost savings.

## CHINA



**Clockwise from top:** Ulziidelger and his family members have turned the desert around their house in Otog Front Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, into a fertile scrubland. Ulziidelger takes a break on a piece of land he afforested. Residents from Bayan-Uts village in Otog Front Banner pick up garbage during a volunteer event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Villager's 50 years of soil toil turns desert into green oasis

Man's home has gone from having no trees, to 97% vegetation in a generation

By **HOU LIQIANG** in Beijing and **YUAN HUI** in Hohhot

Raised in the arid expanse of the desert in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region's Otog Front Banner, Ulziidelger's deep-rooted longing for lush greenery has woven itself into the essence of his existence. This sentiment has blossomed into his over five decades of resolute dedication to afforest his home area.

The 71-year-old's journey toward greening his hometown has not merely been a personal endeavor, but a testament to the power of collective action and unwavering determination.

Ulziidelger's family, who are from the Mongolian ethnic group, has a tradition of tree planting that dates back to the 1960s. In 1962, when his family moved away from his grandparents into a self-built humble dwelling, one of the first things his mother did was to ask for two willow saplings from a neighbor and plant them in front of the house.

"During that time, my family's economic situation was unfavorable. My mother's words have remained etched in my memory, 'A house truly becomes a home when a tree is planted in front of it,'" he said.

Back then, his family owned almost 570 hectares of pasture. Most

of them, however, were covered by sand. Ulziidelger started participating in tree planting organized by the Bayan-Uts village committee when he was about 11, making use of his time after school.

Soon after his marriage in 1972, he enthusiastically involved his wife in this endeavor. "The harsh ecological conditions resulting from the severe desertification of my home area hardly left any room for development," he said. "And many of my parents' generation held the idea of planting trees to improve the ecological environment, so I was determined to combat desertification and engage in afforestation immediately after getting married."

They didn't have any vehicles to transport saplings, and even if they had one, the challenge of navigating the soft sandy terrain made transportation extremely difficult. What he and his wife could do was to carry the saplings over their shoulders and backs over long distances, he said.

Despite the challenges, they persevered in their tree planting endeavors. The planting locations were carefully selected based on factors such as water availability and soil conditions to ensure the survival of the saplings.

To save time, the couple rarely returned home for lunch. Instead,

“This could very well be my final year planting trees. But the duty will be entrusted to my son and grandson in the years to come.”

**Ulziidelger**, resident at Bayan-Uts village in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region's Otog Front Banner

they frequently prepared millet in an insulated jug with hot water, allowing it to soak for two to three hours before eating it. Occasionally, they would also put some meat into the jug.

"The mixture is neither too thick, nor too thin. It worked as a good solution that could offer us hot food, instead of wasting time to go back home and cook," he said.

Ulziidelger's consistent efforts paid off. Around the new millennium, all of his sandy pasture had been transformed into lush land. But this didn't mark the end of his enthusiasm.

Subsequently, in 2004, when China implemented a national program to financially incentivize environmental conservation, Ulziidelger, who was the Party chief of his village

at the time, opted to rally additional individuals to participate in afforestation, effectively leveraging the funds provided by the initiative.

Backed by the local government, Ulziidelger assembled villagers eager to combat desertification but lacking technical expertise, and arranged training sessions for them. In addition to hosting lectures by forestry experts, he also shared his experiences during these sessions.

The combined efforts have brought about a remarkable transformation in their village. With green vegetation coverage skyrocketing from nearly zero to 97 percent, the once frequent occurrence of flying sand invading people's homes and occasionally burying them has now become a rare sight.

Through the decades, Ulziidelger's efforts had not gone unnoticed. His tireless dedication and innovative approach to combating desertification have earned him numerous accolades, including being recognized as an exemplary Party member, an eco-warrior and a beacon of environmental stewardship.

As Ulziidelger ages, it has become increasingly challenging for him to continue planting trees.

"This could very well be my final year planting trees. But the duty will be entrusted to my son and grandson in the years to come," he said.

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## Idaho group explores trade opportunities in Shanxi

By **ZHU XINGXIN** in Taiyuan and **ZHOU HUIYING**

Entrepreneurs from companies in the state of Idaho in the United States that have operations in China expressed optimism about the potential of the Chinese consumer market during a recent visit to Taiyuan, Shanxi province.

The event is part of a series of activities celebrating the 40th anniversary of the sister relationship between the Chinese province and the US state.

Since establishing friendly relations in 1985, the two sides have maintained close cooperation in agriculture, education and trade.

On March 25, the Idaho-Shanxi Exchange Business Opportunities and Cooperations Seminar began in Taiyuan, with 10 US companies attending to discuss cooperation opportunities with more than 20 Shanxi enterprises.

"Sino-US economic and trade cooperation has always been a mutually beneficial link," said Li Guorong, deputy director of Shanxi's Department of Commerce, at the opening ceremony. "In 2024, the import and export volume between Shanxi and the US accounted for nearly one-fifth of the province's total. The US has become Shanxi's largest export market."

So far, he said that the province has attracted 59 US companies to establish operations in Shanxi.

"As an important energy production base in China, Shanxi is accelerating the construction of a modern industrial system based on its resource endowment and industrial foundation," Li said. "It is promoting the transformation of traditional energy toward green and low-carbon development, with emerging industries such as the digital economy, high-end equipment and biomedicine providing more efficient services and a higher quality environment for global investors."

He emphasized that Idaho has outstanding advantages in agricultural technology and food processing, while Shanxi has enormous potential in the modern agricultural specialty food industry, which shows the high degree of industrial compatibility between the two sides.

Located in the northwestern part of the US, Idaho benefits from fertile volcanic ash soil, advanced irrigation systems and suitable climatic conditions, making agriculture a prominent advantage of the state.

It has cultivated 185 varieties of agricultural and livestock products, with productions of peppermint oil, barley and potatoes taking the lead in the US.

Tom Kealey, director of the Idaho Department of Commerce, expressed in a video that cooperation and exchanges between the state and province will continue to deepen. "Representatives of outstanding Idaho companies will discuss development visions with Shanxi's business community, share development plans in China and jointly explore new areas of cooperation," he said.

"I believe that through the joint efforts of both sides, we will welcome a new era of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation."

Sheng Qingsong, general manager of Simplot (China) Food Co., hopes to find more new development opportunities in Shanxi.

"Since entering China in 1992, we have established very good connections with many agricultural planting partners and downstream customers," he said.

Simplot (China) Food Co. is a subsidiary of the J. R. Simplot Company, founded in Idaho in 1929. It focuses on potato processing and products, covering many high-end catering channels. It was one of the earliest foreign-funded companies to enter China.

Han Taifan, deputy director of the Shanxi Provincial Foreign Affairs Office, said that by facing a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation, both sides will have broader prospects for cooperation. "Serving as ambassadors of Sino-US friendship, entrepreneurs from both sides will make greater contributions to the development of friendly Sino-US relations," he said.

Zhou Xiaoyu, director of the foreign investment management office of Shanxi's Department of Commerce, expressed hope that via the event, both sides can promote substantial projects in the fields of economy, trade, culture, technology and education, jointly composing a new chapter in the development of Shanxi and Idaho.

The entrepreneurs also visited the Jinci Temple, the Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone and Shanxi Agricultural University to conduct research and gain a deeper understanding of Shanxi's history, culture and economic development.

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Participants in the Idaho-Shanxi Exchange Business Opportunities and Cooperations Seminar visit Shanxi Agricultural University in Taiyuan on March 25. **ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY**

## Facility provides home for partially sighted, blind seniors

**SHENYANG** — As the radio echoed through the yard at lunchtime, a group of partially sighted and blind seniors navigated their way to the canteen, their hands gliding along the guardrails.

Chef Bai Yajuan used a microphone to read the menu aloud. Six bowls of varying shapes and sizes, arranged in a set order, each containing a different dish, were served.

"Many blind people mix all their dishes into one bowl at home to avoid trouble and not burden their families," Bai explained.

"To allow them to experience the flavors of each dish, we've designed bowls of different shapes to hold each dish separately, so they can easily get what they need."

On the canteen wall, there is a chart showing the dietary requirements of each senior, ensuring their individual needs are fully respected at this retirement home in Shenyang, Liaoning province.

In addition, each table is labeled with the names of the elders in

Braille, made from stainless steel, and placed at all four corners.

"Blind people prefer fixed seats so they can know who is sitting around them, which helps them feel more secure," said Zhang Yu, head of the Shenyang Haiman Specialist Care Retirement Home.

Established in 2019, the retirement home is the first dedicated facility for the blind on the Chinese mainland.

It currently accommodates 107 seniors, 90 percent of whom are completely blind.

It was built with a donation from an entrepreneur whose sister is also blind to help more blind individuals live comfortably in their old age.

"Guardrails with raised Braille are installed in all corners of the facility, allowing the seniors to walk and exercise safely, both indoors and outdoors," Zhang said.

Zhang, who previously worked in human resources management, has an uncle who was also blind and witnessed the challenges faced by

partially sighted people. When she learned about the retirement home for the blind in Shenyang, she didn't hesitate to send in her resume.

The retirement home has 22 employees, including nurses, housekeepers and counselors, many of whom had never worked with blind individuals before.

To better care for the seniors, a special room has been created where staff members experience life in total darkness once a month, helping them understand the challenges faced by the blind. This exercise lasts for about two hours.

"One time, a staff member came out of this room and went to a senior's room. When she saw someone struggling to open a delivery package, she was deeply moved and immediately began crying."

Since then, she has been delivering packages to the rooms every day and, with the seniors' permission, helping them open them," Zhang said.

Zhang Li, 80, a resident of the

retirement home, has not only found a home but also love.

"I can sing and play cards with my friends every day, and there are people to take care of me. During Spring Festival, my children wanted to take me home, but I didn't go. I don't want to go anywhere. Isn't this home?" Zhang Li said.

Here, she met Wang Mingshan from Shanghai. Despite a 10-year age gap, their shared hobbies, such as growing flowers and singing, as well as similar life experiences, have brought them closer.

Wei Yuying, 87, a native of Kunming in Yunnan province, has found more laughter since coming here.

"After my husband passed away, I was lonely at home, and it was difficult for me to go downstairs and get out every day. When I heard about this retirement home, I asked my children to take me here," said Wei, who has lived here for almost five years.

To enrich the lives of the elderly, trips have been organized to various

destinations, both home and abroad.

On the first floor of the retirement home, a world map made entirely of Braille dots adorns the wall, with red dots marking the places the seniors have visited.

"Many people wonder, what is the point of blind people traveling? When they visit different places, they can breathe in new air, experience different customs and taste different foods. Every time they return, they are in an especially good mood," Zhang Yu said.

The seniors especially enjoy taking photos. "They can't see them themselves, but they can send the photos to their relatives and let them know that they're living a good life now, so there's no need to worry," she added.

According to the China Association of Persons with Visual Disabilities, there are currently over 17 million partially sighted and blind people in China. With an aging society, the need for elderly care among blind individuals is becoming more pressing.

Last year, Haiman opened its second retirement home for the blind

in Zhengzhou, Henan province. It plans to open at least five retirement homes for the partially sighted and blind in China, covering the central, western, southern, eastern and northeastern parts of China.

China is vigorously promoting home-based care for seniors who are unable to take care of themselves, including the blind.

In February, China began implementing a basic specification for home-based elderly care bed services, the first national industry standard for family elderly care. This includes senior-friendly facilities, smart equipment and home care services to ensure that seniors can enjoy continuous, stable and professional high-quality aged care services.

Statistics show that there are currently over 350,000 elderly care-related enterprises in China. Of these, more than 70,000 were registered last year. The number of registered elderly care enterprises has been steadily increasing year by year over the past decade, reaching its peak last year.

XINHUA

## WORLD

## Le Pen banned from French presidential election in 2027

By MOHAMMAD ARIF ULLAH  
in Paris  
For China Daily

France's far-right is in crisis after Marine Le Pen, grandee of the National Rally, or RN, party was banned from running for public office following her conviction for misusing public funds.

Analysts have warned there could now be a succession vacuum and reputational damage to RN, although Le Pen has said she plans to appeal.

Le Pen, a three-time presidential candidate and long-standing figure from the French far-right, was sentenced on Monday by the Paris Criminal Court to two years of prison and five years of ineligibility. She was also handed a 300,000 euro (\$325,000) fine.

During an interview on national TV channel TF1 on Monday evening, Le Pen called her conviction a "political decision" meant to block her from running in the 2027 presidential election.

Camille Dubois, a political analyst writing in Liberation's political column on Monday, described the verdict as "a judicial thunder-clap that strips RN of its central figure at a critical time". She said the decision not only targets Le Pen but leaves the entire party in disarray.

Le Pen was found guilty of complicity in the embezzlement of public funds from the European Parliament, where she was a member. The case focused on the misuse of EU money, with assistants formally employed to support members of the European Parliament, or MEPs, found to be working for RN's domestic political operations.

**'Misuse of public funds'**  
Clara Riviere, a legal expert, told France Inter radio: "Even if she appeals, the court has cut off her political future for now. The verdict stands as a warning against systemic misuse of public funds."

Le Pen left the courtroom without commenting and headed directly to the party's headquarters in Paris. There, she held a

closed-door crisis meeting with party president Jordan Bardella, French politician Bruno Bilde, and MEP Catherine Griset, who was also convicted in the same case.

Later that afternoon, Le Pen's lawyer, Rodolphe Bosselut, confirmed an appeal would be filed. However, under French law, the ban remains in effect during the appeal process.

The court concluded that the initiative caused an estimated loss of 4.4 million euros to the European Parliament, with 1.8 million euros directly linked to Le Pen's tenure.

Riviere said the case was "not about minor administrative mistakes but about a carefully constructed system set up for the benefit of a political organization". She added, "The court was clear — public money was misused for partisan interests."

The presiding judge, Benedicte de Perthuis, stated in her ruling that "one cannot be 100 percent dedicated to party work and claim to be a full-time assistant to a European Parliament member". She said the system was designed to shift financial responsibilities from the party onto EU funds.

Pierre Lambert, editor of Le Monde Politics, wrote on Monday: "This verdict is a moment of reckoning for a party built around one personality. RN must now rebuild, fast."

He warned that RN faces dual challenges, namely "finding a new leader capable of carrying national ambitions, and restoring voter trust ahead of the European elections".

Dubois added: "This is not just a political blow; it's an identity crisis. The party was shaped around Marine Le Pen — and her name is now tied to fraud."

Bardella is widely seen as the front-runner to replace Le Pen, having led the party since 2022.

However, questions remain about his experience and ability to hold together RN's complex coalition of supporters and regional leaders.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



French far-right leader Marine Le Pen leaves the National Rally headquarters after a court convicted her of embezzlement in Paris on Monday. THOMAS PADILLA / AP

## Briefly

SOUTH KOREA  
Court to rule on Yoon's impeachment on Friday

South Korea's Constitutional Court will issue its long-awaited ruling on President Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment on Friday, months after he was suspended for declaring martial law. The court has held weeks of impeachment hearings to determine whether to officially remove Yoon from office after he was impeached by lawmakers over his short-lived suspension of civilian rule. The Constitutional Court has until June to decide Yoon's fate, but it has typically issued rulings within weeks on past presidential impeachment cases.

UNITED STATES  
Wildfire in California prompts evacuations

A wildfire erupted in central California over the weekend. It has prompted evacuations in multiple counties. According to the emergency services agency Cal Fire, the blaze, dubbed Silver Fire, ignited at 2:11 pm on Sunday in Inyo County near the state border with Nevada and quickly grew in size.

On Monday morning, the fire spread to 5.06 square kilometers with zero containment, Cal Fire said, noting strong winds and gusts reaching up to 56.3 kilometers per hour fueled the fire, which "created hazardous conditions, grounding some firefighting aircraft and complicating containment efforts".

ETHIOPIA  
Cholera vaccination kicks off for 1m people

The Ethiopian government has launched a cholera vaccination campaign in the southwestern part of the country, targeting about 1 million people at risk. In a statement issued on Sunday, the Ethiopian Ministry of Health said the vaccination will be conducted in all zones of the country's Gambella Region and refugee camps during the coming week. It came as the World Health Organization and various other humanitarian agencies called for concerted efforts to contain the "rapidly spreading" cholera outbreak across the Gambella Region, bordering South Sudan.

XINHUA—AGENCIES



## 'Lego' pagoda

Workers set up Buddha's birthday pagoda at Gwanghwamun Square, the center of the city, to mark Buddha's birthday which falls on May 5 this year, in Seoul, South Korea, on Monday. KIM JAE-HWAN / GETTY IMAGES

## US consumers brace for tariffs

Economists warn move could affect jobs and 'weaken' domestic competitiveness

By BELINDA ROBINSON  
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Experts suggest that US consumers will bear the brunt as President Donald Trump prepares to launch reciprocal tariffs on key trading nations worldwide in what he has dubbed "Liberation Day".

The tariffs, expected to go into effect on Wednesday, will shake up international trade relationships, say economists, as they will impose reciprocal dollar-for-dollar levies on any nation that taxes US goods. Other analysts suggest the cost of cars, electronics, pharmaceuticals and metals will rise, stinging US consumers.

Thomas Fullerton, an economics professor at the University of Texas at El Paso, told China Daily, "This policy will be implemented in addition to the more problematic tariffs on steel, aluminum, automobiles and auto parts."

The administration is targeting countries that have "trade barriers" with the US.

Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday that the tariffs may start with "all countries".

The previously paused tariffs of 25 percent on Mexico and Canada are scheduled to kick back in on Wednesday. China is already subject to a 20 percent tariff and other charges.

"This will be the Golden Age of America! Will there be some pain? Yes, maybe (and maybe not!)," the US president posted on Truth Social in February.

Jessica Riedl, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a center-right US think tank, said the tariffs could equate to the largest peacetime tax hike since World War II.

The shake-up by the government is causing widespread concern among trade partners. Some governments have promised to hit back



Workers sort avocados at a packing plant in Uruapan, Mexico, on Nov 27. Experts predict avocado prices will rise in the event of tariffs on Mexican imports. ARMANDO SOLIS / AP

In addition, the proposals have raised questions about the status of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which Trump helped negotiate in his first term.

## Fears of recession

On Wall Street, uncertainty over the impending tariffs has unsettled the stock market amid fears of a recession. On Friday, the Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged 716 points but rebounded by 418 points on Monday. The S&P and Nasdaq on Monday closed out their worst quarters since 2022.

A 25 percent tariff on imported autos also will go into effect on Thursday.

Arthur Laffer, an economist awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Trump in 2019, said that the auto tariffs could add \$4,711 to the cost of a vehicle for US buyers.

"A 25 percent tariff would not only shrink, or possibly eliminate, profit margins for US manufacturers but also weaken their ability to compete with international rivals,"



If the current combination of tariff schedules is kept in place very long, it will increase inflationary pressures and possibly lead to stagflation as businesses begin to falter."

Thomas Fullerton, an economics professor at the University of Texas at El Paso

Laffer told The Associated Press. Trump responded to NBC News: "I couldn't care less if they (the tariffs) raise prices, because people are going to start buying American-made cars."

As the auto sector is heavily reli-

ant on goods manufactured in Mexico and Canada, some warn that manufacturers will likely shift to other countries.

"In some sectors, tariffs create no new jobs in the US, as trade is diverted to third countries rather than inducing new domestic production," Mary Lovely, professor emerita of economics at Syracuse University and senior fellow of the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, DC, told China Daily.

While Trump's plan has received widespread support on the right, a handful of Republicans, such as Senator Susan Collins of Maine, have expressed concern over potential levies on Canada.

Senator Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, said: "I really strongly disagree because trade has made us so rich, and really has made the world a better place. The more we trade... the less we fight."

Tariffs are sales taxes on goods produced outside of the boundaries of the countries that import those goods. Any US company that purchases a product from abroad must pay some of the item's price to the government.

"If the current combination of tariff schedules is kept in place very long, it will increase inflationary pressures and possibly lead to stagflation as businesses begin to falter," Fullerton said.

The US imports more than \$3 trillion worth of goods a year.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a speech to The Economic Club of New York in February, "Access to cheap goods is not the essence of the American dream."

Former vice-president Mike Pence responded on X that "free trade lowers the costs of goods and improves the quality of life for every American".

If tariffs ignite a recession, there will be 3.5 million fewer jobs by 2027, according to Moody's Analytics.

## Shoppers feel the squeeze as prices rise at retailers

By RENA LI in Los Angeles  
renali@chinadailyusa.com

For Jerry Yang, a 54-year-old resident of Irvine, California, shopping at Costco is becoming increasingly costly. She used to purchase groceries every two weeks for about \$150 — which was sufficient to meet her family's needs for food, beverages and other household essentials.

However, with rising prices, she now finds herself buying only the bare minimum — eggs, vegetables and fruits per trip, spending more than \$200 on average to stock up on household items.

"I feel that my wallet is losing value; everything has become so expensive," she told China Daily.

Business experts attribute the surge in prices to rising production costs, supply chain disruptions and the impact of tariffs on imported feed and packaging materials.

Costco CFO Gary Millerchip acknowledged that customers could face higher prices as a result of the tariffs during a December earnings call

prior to the implementation of tariffs. "When it rains, it rains on everybody," Millerchip said. He also noted that Costco would work closely with its vendors to manage the increased costs caused by tariffs.

Major retailers like Costco and Walmart are grappling with the financial strain of increased tariffs. US President Donald Trump's recent decision to raise tariffs has disrupted supply chains, ultimately affecting US consumers.

In response to rising costs, retailers have sought to shift the tariff burden onto their Chinese suppliers, pressuring them to lower prices. Costco has requested price reductions from its suppliers, following a similar move by Walmart, according to the Financial Times.

Walmart, which reduced its reliance on Chinese imports from 80 percent in 2018 to 60 percent in 2023, is now negotiating price cuts with its suppliers on a case-by-case basis.

A Bloomberg report revealed that Walmart has asked some of its Chi-

nese suppliers — particularly those producing clothing and kitchenware — to lower their prices by up to 10 percent per round of tariffs.

"We aim to maintain everyday low prices," CFO John Rainey told CNBC. "There probably will be cases where prices will go up for consumers."

## Frustrations voiced

However, those moves have been met with resistance from Chinese manufacturers, many of whom have taken to social media to voice their frustrations. They argue that they have "no room to lower prices in response to US tariffs" and reject the attempt to shift costs onto them.

"The big ones, they have the muscle to do it. What do you do if you're us? You're stuck with no choice," a Costco supplier posted.

As major retailers such as Walmart, Target and Costco intensify pressure on Chinese suppliers to reduce costs, China has begun to voice its discontent.

China's Ministry of Commerce firmly responded to Walmart's demands, noting China should not bear the blame for US tariffs.

"Our relevant departments have reached out to Walmart to further understand the situation, and the company has provided an explanation," said He Yongqian, a spokeswoman for the Commerce Ministry, during a news briefing in mid-March. A LendingTree survey found that 61 percent of the people in the US are stressed about rising grocery costs, with 88 percent adjusting their shopping habits in response.

"Consumers are as focused as ever on quality, value and newness, but they are becoming increasingly selective in where they spend their dollars," Millerchip said. "The uncertainty is ahead; we're navigating an unpredictable economic environment due to ongoing trade tensions," Walmart's latest earnings report acknowledged.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## WORLD



## Beirut in shock

A man clears debris from wrecked vehicles following an Israeli airstrike on a building in Beirut, Lebanon, on Tuesday. The strike on the city's southern suburbs killed four people, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry. The Israeli military confirmed it killed a Hezbollah official, Hassan Bdeir, in the strike. IBRAHIM AMRO / AFP

## US focus on raising tariffs to strain ties

Economists laud Beijing's diplomatic push, urge leaders' communication

By CHINA DAILY

China's leadership is pursuing a "charm offensive" domestically and internationally, while the United States remains focused on tariffs, an approach that US economist Stephen Roach described as "a tariff offensive".

Roach, a senior fellow at Yale University's Jackson Institute of Global Affairs and a senior lecturer at the Yale School of Management, said his firsthand experience in China reinforced that view.

"China's senior leadership is engaged in a fairly aggressive charm offensive, both domestically and internationally," he said.

Speaking at the 11th annual Yale US-China Forum on Sunday, Roach said the approach "stands in contrast to the US approach", which he characterized as focused on tariffs.

He shared insights from his recent trip to China, where he attended the China Development Forum and the Boao Forum for Asia.

China's charm offensive started with the stimulus actions of September, when China's central bank announced a stimulus package to boost the stock market, leading to a quick initial rebound before settling within a stable range since the post-Sept 24 rebound, Roach said.

The charm offensive also targeted domestic tech executives with a widely publicized meeting on Feb 17, where President Xi Jinping sought to bolster business sentiment within China, he said.

In terms of the foreign-facing charm offensive, Xi also met with more than 40 representatives of the international business community in Beijing on Friday, he added.

"Unlike past meetings, this one was not dominated by US CEOs. There were 12 US CEOs, but by my count, close to 20 European CEOs. The composition of this group tells you something about where China sees potential opportunities — possibly more in Europe than in the US," Roach said.

The contrast is also reflected in how leaders speak about their respective economies, he said.

Xi is optimistic about China's future, while US President Donald Trump acknowledges the disruptions caused by tariffs, which is "uncharacteristic of the way the president usually deals with the common prospects in the US", he added.

Susan Thornton, former acting assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs at the US State

Department, affirmed the importance of communication between the US and China and spoke about leader-to-leader diplomacy.

Throughout the history of US-China relations, the most important stabilizer has been communication, especially at the leadership level, Thornton said.

"There have always been major areas of difference between the US and China, yet cooperation is also necessary.

"This complex dynamic makes it essential for the two leaders to meet and send signals to their governments about the need to balance these competing tendencies. Without communication backed by political will, problems arise.

"For now, we are in a state of suspended animation, waiting for a signal on Trump's intentions for US-China relations."

Meanwhile, a new round of US tariffs is set to be announced on Wednesday, which could "further escalate tensions", she added.

"The more strained the situation becomes, the harder it will be to arrange a leader-level meeting, though such a meeting is very much needed at this time."

## 'Polar opposite'

David Firestein, president and CEO of the George H.W. Bush Foundation for US-China Relations, discussed the "clearly radically changed" US policies toward China, that "in many cases, or most of these cases, are the polar opposite of what we used to assume".

The first assumption is the transition from viewing China as a partner to considering it an enemy, Firestein said. He also pointed out the shift in perception of China, from a major player within the international system to a country seeking to supplant the US as the world's top superpower.

Other changes include a move away from engagement with China, with some in Washington advocating for disengagement or even decoupling.

Mutual dependency, once seen as stabilizing, is now regarded as destabilizing. Similarly, the US once believed in collaborative efforts with China on issues such as the Korean Peninsula and trade, but now views the relationship through a zero-sum lens.

"Every one of the new assumptions that we're making about China is dead wrong," Firestein said.

"And that's why our policies are failing to achieve the results that our leaders, the implementers of these policies, want them to achieve."

## Cultural events mark 75 years of China-India relations

By APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY in New Delhi and XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong

China and India are stepping up efforts to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges as part of celebrations marking 75 years of diplomatic relations.

April 1 marked the milestone anniversary, with both countries organizing a series of activities to deepen mutual understanding and cooperation, including cultural and educational events.

During a commemorative reception in Kolkata on Monday, Chinese Consul-General Xu Wei said people-to-people exchanges have played an important role in promoting the sound and stable development of bilateral relations.

He underscored the significance of growing personnel exchanges and robust trade between the two countries, emphasizing the need for both sides to view each other as partners,

contributing to each other's success. Bilateral trade volume in goods amounted to \$138.5 billion last year, he said, adding that the two countries' economic output accounts for half of Asia's economy and one-fifth of the global economy.

The two sides are actively implementing the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, Xu said, adding that bilateral relations are developing good momentum.

Attending the reception were representatives from the government, academia, the Indian Chinese community and Chinese companies in India.

Surendra Gupta, a senior official in the West Bengal government who attended the event, said that as major economies China and India share the common responsibility of promoting peace, stability and sustainable development.

Xu said win-win cooperation has always been the main theme of China-

India relations, and a healthy and stable bilateral relationship is not only in the fundamental interests of the two peoples but also of great significance to the development of Asia and the world.

An international conference was held on Tuesday and Wednesday at Visva-Bharati University in West Bengal to mark 75 years of China-India diplomatic ties and 101 years since Indian scholar Rabindranath Tagore's first visit to China.

Co-organized by the university — founded by Tagore — and the Chinese consulate general in Kolkata, the event welcomed nearly 20 Chinese scholars and artists, the largest such delegation to India in years.

In 1924, Tagore, invited by the Chinese Cultural and Literary Society, spent nearly 50 days in China, delivering speeches that deepened cultural ties between the two neighbors.

Beyond Tagore's legacy, scholars at the conference were to discuss broader aspects of bilateral exchanges,

where "many common points will emerge", said Avijit Banerjee, head of the university's Department of Chinese Language and Culture. The event will strengthen cooperation between the two countries in various areas, he added.

Manoranjan Mohanty, former director of the Developing Countries Research Centre at the University of Delhi, said cultural exchanges and people-to-people interactions provide new insights and frameworks for resolving disputes.

In January, China said it agreed with India to resume direct flights. Mohanty said restoring direct flight services and revitalizing cultural ties, tourist visas and scholar exchange programs would further strengthen bilateral relations.

Aparajit Chakraborty is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

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## Myanmar observes minute's silence for quake victims

MANDALAY, Myanmar — Myanmar observed a minute's silence on Tuesday in tribute to victims of a catastrophic earthquake that has killed more than 2,000 people, buckling roads and flattening buildings as far away as Bangkok.

Four days after the magnitude 7.9 earthquake struck, many people in Myanmar are still sleeping outdoors, either unable to return to ruined homes or afraid of further aftershocks.

Sirens rang out at 12:51:02 — the precise time the quake struck on Friday — bringing the country to a standstill in remembrance of those lost.

Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city with 1.7 million inhabitants, suffered some of the worst destruction.

Outside the Sky Villa apartment complex, one of the city's worst-hit disaster sites, rescue workers stopped and lined up with hands clasped behind their backs to pay respects.

Officials and attendants stood behind a cordon, with relatives further back, as sirens wailed and Myanmar's flag flew at half-mast from a bamboo pole tied to a rescue tent.



Rescuers observe a minute of silence to remember the earthquake victims in Mandalay on Tuesday. SAI AUNG MAIN / AFP

mar's flag flew at half-mast from a bamboo pole tied to a rescue tent.

The moment of remembrance is part of a week of national mourning, with flags to fly at half-mast on official buildings until Sunday "in sympathy for the loss of life and damages".

Myanmar's leader Min Aung Hlaing said on Tuesday that 2,719 people have been confirmed dead, with more than 3,900 injured and 270 missing. At least 20 people died in neighboring Thailand.

The toll is expected to rise significantly as rescuers reach towns and villages where communications have been cut off by the quake.

In one miraculous development, a woman was rescued in the capital Nay Pyi Daw on Tuesday, after having been trapped inside debris for 91 hours.

More than 1,000 foreign rescuers have flown in to help, and Myanmar state media reported that nearly 650 people have been pulled alive from ruined buildings around the country.

International aid efforts since the quake have included an emergency appeal from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for \$100 million to help the victims.

The Philippines sent the first batch of a 91-strong team to Myanmar to help in search and rescue operations early on Tuesday.

The Lao People's Army deployed a team of 33 personnel, with essential equipment, to assist Myanmar on Monday.

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## US sanctions on HK officials called 'groundless'

By LINDA DENG in Seattle  
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The sanctioning of six government officials in Hong Kong by the United States has drawn sharp criticism from Chinese officials and other observers of bilateral ties.

"The US side is in no position to make groundless accusations on this matter. We urge the US side to respect the facts, stop meddling in Hong Kong affairs and interfering in China's internal affairs, and stop smearing Hong Kong's democracy and rule of law," the Chinese embassy in Washington said in a statement Monday.

On Monday, the US announced sanctions against the officials of Chinese central government agencies in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government and released the "2025 Hong Kong Policy Act Report", alleging the officials were linked to entities or actions that engaged "in the coercing, arresting, detaining or imprisoning of individuals" under the authority of the Hong Kong national security laws.

The six officials sanctioned are Dong Jingwei, director of the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR; Paul Lam Ting-kwok, secretary for justice; Raymond Siu Chak-ye, commissioner of police; Sonny Au Chi-kwong, secretary-general of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security in HKSAR; and two assistant police commissioners in national security — Dick Wong Chung-chun and Margaret Chiu Wing-lan.

Guo Jiakun, a newly appointed spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hosted a news briefing in Beijing, saying the "Hong Kong Policy Act Report" is "composed of falsehoods and disinformation" and is a "vicious attack" on China's "one country, two systems".

Huiqiu Wu, chairman of the board of the Association of the Promotion of Peaceful Unification of China in Washington, told China Daily on Tuesday that the sanctions are "very unwise".

"Hong Kong is China's Hong Kong, and the US government's use of its own domestic law to impose

sanctions on other countries is really long-arm jurisdiction and has no legal effect," Wu said.

Wu said the sanctions unnecessarily escalate tensions between China and the United States, undermining the mutual trust and cooperation that both nations and their peoples desire.

"We have clearly seen from overseas that since the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law and the National Security Ordinance, the city has enjoyed greater stability, economic growth and a thriving business environment.

"The rights and freedoms of its people remain fully protected. Looking at Hong Kong with tinted glasses often leads to a very wrong conclusion," Wu said.

The embassy statement also said that the "SAR police have taken lawful actions against overseas anti-China rioters, and the SAR judicial authorities have independently and impartially tried national security cases following legal procedures".

The Hong Kong office of China's Foreign Ministry said the sanctions

again exposed the ill intention of the US to undermine the city's prosperity and contain China's development.

Anthony Moretti, department head and an associate professor in the Communication and Organizational Leadership Department at Robert Morris University, said because the US has built a negative narrative about China, it has to feed it at every opportunity.

"That means whether the issue relates to Hong Kong, Taiwan, the military, trade or something else, China must always be criticized," Moretti told China Daily.

"Viewing Hong Kong through a biased lens only leads to misguided conclusions. US officials should assess the situation objectively to avoid damaging their own credibility with unfounded accusations. Constructive dialogue, not confrontation, is the path to mutual benefit and a stable bilateral relationship," Wu added.

Yifan Xu in Washington DC contributed to this story.

## BUSINESS

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## PRIVATE ECONOMY

## State-owned lenders to better serve private firms

By TAN GUOLING  
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Major State-owned commercial banks are aiming to continuously improve the quality and efficiency of services provided to private enterprises to firmly help the private sector address challenges such as financing difficulties and high costs, according to their 2024 annual results announcements.

"Bank of China plans to provide over \$5 billion for intended financing of private enterprises in 2025, pledging enhanced financial assistance for their deep engagement in the Belt and Road Initiative," said Zhang Hui, president of BOC.

"BOC will strengthen cross-border financing, international settlements and overseas investment services to facilitate private companies' global expansion. It is committed to reducing financing costs for private businesses, offering tailored global cash management solutions to help enterprises reduce risks and improve capital utilization efficiency," Zhang said.

Agricultural Bank of China aims to ramp up credit support for private enterprises, with loans to the sector projected to exceed 7.5 trillion yuan (\$1.03 trillion) by the end of 2025. ABC will provide fast, convenient and suitable financing solutions for private businesses, providing tailored services such as allocating dedicated credit resources, said Liu Hong, vice-president of ABC.

"The bank aims to enhance its capabilities in serving the private sector by innovating financial product and service models, cultivating professional talent teams and exploring new risk management approaches. These efforts are designed to promote the sustainable and high-quality development of private enterprises," Liu said.

"Industrial and Commercial Bank of China plans to provide no less than 6 trillion yuan in investment and financing support for private enterprises over the next three years,

pledging robust assistance to help private enterprises strengthen industrial capabilities," said Zhang Shouchuan, vice-president of ICBC.

Zhang Shouchuan said that ICBC will further improve service mechanisms, leveraging financial tools to drive high-quality development of private enterprises.

China Construction Bank will implement its 2025 action plan to support the high-quality development of the private sector economy, pledging to deliver more resource guarantees, provide more targeted customer services, build better optimized long-term mechanisms and explore deeper multiparty collaboration, said Zhang Yi, president of CCB.

These plans laid out in the lenders' 2024 annual results announcement conference showed that major State-owned commercial banks are capitalizing on their strengths while responding to national policies to deliver high-quality financial services for the development of private enterprises, said Lou Feipeng, a researcher at Postal Savings Bank of China.

"These measures effectively address financing difficulties and high costs faced by private businesses, streamline loan accessibility and amplify the positive role of private enterprises in driving China's economic development," Lou said.

By expanding credit supply to private enterprises and reducing financing costs, banks have adopted highly targeted measures to alleviate the financing difficulties and high costs faced by micro, small and medium-sized private sector firms, he added.

Looking ahead, Lou said that banks need to intensify market research tailored to private enterprises of diverse scales and industries, focusing on targeted financing difficulties, to enhance the precision of financial services and elevate efficiency in serving the private sector.

Liu Zhihua contributed to this story.



Visitors check out vehicles during an auto show in Beijing. DU JIANPO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Five cities eye globally attractive consumption

Move among strenuous efforts to boost shopping, including by foreign tourists

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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China will accelerate the transformation of five major cities — Shanghai; Beijing; Guangzhou, Guangdong province; Tianjin; and Chongqing — into global consumption centers on par with New York and London, and create globally attractive retail environments, as part of the country's latest moves to boost consumption.

The document, formulated by the Ministry of Commerce, said China aims to further expand domestic demand and promote high-standard opening-up.

The country will actively promote the debut economy by supporting high-quality domestic and foreign brands to launch new products and exhibitions, and providing Customs clearance convenience for new imported products.

The government will support the holding of events such as fashion weeks and car expos in these five cities. It will also work to attract high-quality global brands to launch their first stores, establish research and development design centers as well as regional headquarters, the document said.

It is critical to adapt to local conditions for developing the debut economy. Shanghai has been doing well in attracting debuts of global brands in China and launching pop-up stores, the ministry said.

In the recently delivered Government Work Report, boosting con-

sumption was listed as a top priority among this year's tasks.

As part of measures to build global consumption centers, China plans to further expand its unilateral visa-free entry policy in an orderly manner, and better leverage the role of tax refund stores and tax refund policies by opening more such stores and optimizing tax refund procedures for overseas visitors.

Since late 2023, China has launched unilateral visa-free policies for multiple countries, encouraging more overseas travelers to visit the nation. Last year, the number of inbound foreign visitors in the abovementioned five cities doubled the 2023 figures, said the National Immigration Administration.

"In those five cities, the number of tax refund stores for overseas visitors accounted for 60 percent in the country last year, and total sales made up for over 70 percent of the value nationwide," said Li Gang, director-general of the department of market operation and consumption promotion of the Ministry of Commerce, during a news conference earlier in Beijing.

Besides trendy products, foreign tourists have also favored domestic time-honored brands and specialty products. Tong Ren Tang, a venerable traditional Chinese medicine pharmacy, has seen a growing number of foreign visitors take advantage of tax refund procedures at its stores in the Qianmen area of Beijing, and the products they buy mainly include traditional Chinese

patent medicines and medicinal materials.

Compared to overseas metropolises, there is still a gap between China and developed countries. The government will guide the building of a group of featured commercial complexes, and encourage sales of more domestic trendy products at tax refund stores, the ministry said.

In addition, China plans to organize various large-scale consumption promotion activities, support the hosting of more high-level international sporting events and performances, and increase the supply of high-quality services.

In late March, the 2025 Formula 1 Chinese Grand Prix took place in Shanghai, attracting fans from home and abroad. The guideline noted that China plans to hold more motor racing events, foster new consumption scenarios such as recreational vehicle camping, and further expand the aftermarket consumption of automobiles.

Meanwhile, China will encourage the innovative growth of the cruise market and low-altitude tourism. The country will also promote the application of technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality and big data in the consumption market, and accelerate the promotion of smart home appliances, new energy vehicles and other smart products, the document said.

In the first two months, total retail sales of consumer goods in China reached 8.37 trillion yuan (\$1.15 trillion), up 4 percent year-on-year, with the growth rate 0.5 percentage point higher than the whole year figure last year, the ministry said.

## AI tech prowess attracting investors

By LIU YUKUN  
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China's advancements in artificial intelligence have captivated global attention and emerged as a pivotal draw for foreign investment, said Hoffman Cheong, EY China North managing partner, at the just-concluded ZGC Forum in Beijing.

Cheong highlighted the evolving industrial landscape in China, with a focus on high-tech sectors like artificial intelligence, information technology and green energy. He said China's rapid progress in these cutting-edge fields has offered investors fresh strategic prospects.

"At the onset of this year, China's AI advancements have not only captured global interest but also reshaped the world's perception of products labeled 'Made in China.' With a slew of technological breakthroughs coming to the fore, foreign investors are witnessing the innovative capabilities and market potential of Chinese tech firms, underscoring China's growing tech prowess as a pivotal factor in attracting foreign investments."

"Over the years, China's government has implemented a series of policies to support the growth of strategic emerging industries like AI and new energy, fostering a conducive environment for tech companies to thrive and enticing more multinational corporations to actively establish operations in China," he said.

According to China's Ministry of Commerce, the number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises nationwide grew 9.9 percent to 59,080 last year. Investments in high-tech manufacturing reached 96.29 billion yuan (\$13.25 billion), constituting 11.7 percent of the total foreign capital usage. Notably, foreign capital inflows into the medical equipment and instrument manufacturing industry, professional technical services industry, and computer and office equipment manufacturing industry, saw significant spikes of 98.7 percent, 40.8 percent and 21.9 percent, respectively.

Experts said China's commitment to openness and stability in foreign investments has encouraged foreign firms to deepen their engagement in the country. As the world's second-largest consumer market, China offers significant investment and consumption opportunities. Its emphasis on high-quality development and transition to greener, more digitalized and intelligent industries has attracted foreign companies that are looking for collaboration. Moreover, strategic policies have successfully supported the growth of foreign enterprises in China through tangible actions, optimizing the business environment and dismantling access barriers.

"As China's opening-up broadens, it is cultivating a market-oriented, rule-of-law-based business environment. The government has launched a slew of policies aiming to stabilize the economy, attract foreign investments and enhance intellectual property protection. These efforts create favorable opportunities for domestic and foreign enterprises, boosting confidence in long-term investments in China," said Cheong.

Cheong said the government's support for strategic industries like high technology and new energy will create more investment opportunities, increasing China's appeal to foreign investors.

"We look forward to more progress in cross-border data flows, city internationalization and improved convenience for foreigners," he said.

## Safe railways



Workers from China Railway Taiyuan Bureau Group realign tracks on the 347-kilometer Datong-Taiyuan Railway as part of work to ensure safe transport across the network. JI XIAOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Briefly

## Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 7 pips to 7.1775 against the US dollar on Tuesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

## Huawei reports rise in sales revenue

Chinese tech firm Huawei generated 862.1 billion yuan (\$120.1 billion) in sales revenue in 2024, up from 704.2 billion yuan the previous year, according to its 2024 annual report. The company generated 62.6 billion yuan in net profit last year, the report said, adding the company's performance was in line with forecasts. In 2024, Huawei invested 179.7 billion yuan back into research and development, which accounted for approximately 20.8 percent of its annual revenue.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Nation doubling down on innovation for growth

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
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China is making strategic moves to secure long-term sustainable growth by doubling down on innovation, with a sharpened focus on emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, said Ben Simpfordorfer, a partner at consultancy Oliver Wyman.

"China is making all the right moves to secure long-term sustainable growth," Simpfordorfer said during an exclusive interview with China Daily. "The country is turning from the world's factory to the world's innovation hub. We've seen developments across clean tech, artificial intelligence, as well as biopharmaceuticals that are all very encouraging."

The shift is crucial as China moves away from its traditional reliance on labor and capital, transitioning toward a model driven by productivity gains, he noted.

"China has been searching for a lever to improve productivity over the last 10 years and move on from old growth models. Artificial intelligence provides that lever," he added. "It's a real driver of long-term growth."

He said China has significant advantages in AI adoption, includ-

ing a vast domestic market to scale products, a robust manufacturing sector for integrating products, and State-led strategies to mobilize resources. "The combination of those three things will drive AI throughout the economy and potentially, and most likely, achieve the type of productivity gains that will drive long-term growth higher," he said.

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

The mass application of AI across industries — including manufacturing, healthcare, education, and finance — will be critical. "It's not just about chasing frontier artificial intelligence, finding the next and the best model. It's about mass application of artificial intelligence, rewiring the entire economy," Simpfordorfer said.

Lin Shen, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, empha-



Ben Simpfordorfer

zied the structural transformation of the Chinese economy, where new growth drivers are replacing traditional ones. "Our new quality productive forces, supported by AI, have integrated well with manufacturing and the real economy. The next step will be significant advancements in application scenarios," he said.

Lin also pointed out that government policies promoting innovation and emerging industries will further support economic momentum. "Policies designed to foster innovation and develop emerging industries have been steadily implemented. Fiscal policies and other innovation-friendly measures will play a crucial role in sustaining economic growth throughout the year," he said.

China is prioritizing the development of new quality productive forces and technological innovation in its economic agenda for the year. Policymakers recently announced a series of supportive measures to create new growth drivers for the

world's second-largest economy.

The National Development and Reform Commission recently unveiled plans to establish a national venture capital guidance fund, aiming to enhance, strengthen and expand innovative enterprises. The fund is expected to attract nearly 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) in capital from local governments and the private sector.

Meanwhile, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, announced plans to launch a science and technology board with other related departments in the bond market this year to provide financial support for technological innovation.

While China still faces near-term economic headwinds, Simpfordorfer believes its long-term prospects remain strong. "China needs to double down on its pursuit of innovation — less focused on the potential short-term impact of US tariff hikes, and more focused on what the long-term benefits are of continuing to invest in more advanced sectors."

"Pursuing innovation-led growth will secure the country's economic future over the next few decades. So it's not just a nice-to-have. It's a need-to-have if the country wants to continue on a sustainable trajectory," he said.

## BUSINESS



A visitor captures images of a humanoid robot performing calligraphy during the 2025 Zhongguancun Forum in Beijing on Thursday.  
WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

## Robotics sector goes full throttle for self-reliance despite headwinds

Critical components manufactured at home gradually replacing imports

By LI JIAYING  
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With breakthroughs in critical technologies, China's robotics industry is gaining significant momentum as it strides ahead, experts and industry insiders have said.

Qiao Hong, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and director of a laboratory of multimodal artificial intelligence systems, said domestic humanoid robots have seen continuous technological advancements — in fields from component manufacturing and machine tool processing to control systems — and are now aligning with internationally advanced standards.

For example, in manufacturing, critical components are gradually replacing imports while achieving comparable levels of precision, especially in industrial applications, she said.

"By combining these technologies

with well-developed, independently built robotics supply chains, the country has established a solid foundation for final complete system integration," Qiao added.

"Over 95 percent of the components in our full-size humanoid robots are now domestically produced," said Zhang Dapeng, an executive at Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based humanoid robotics company Leju (Shenzhen) Robotics Co Ltd.

This is a result of accumulated technological breakthroughs and a stable domestic supply chain, Zhang said.

With the delivery of its 100th full-size humanoid robot in January, Leju Robotics has turned itself into a global leader in terms of announced delivery volume. The company said it expects to deliver approximately 1,000 units this year.

However, achieving higher precision in complete humanoid robot

systems still requires further breakthroughs in integrated platform technologies that usually involve AI, perception technology, and even brain science, Qiao noted.

"Making humanoid robots act more like humans calls for the integration of unit and generalized technologies, as well as that of traditional automation knowledge and brain-inspired intelligence," she said.

Qiao said brain-inspired intelligence is used to mimic human characteristics from the inside out, designed to replicate human mechanisms and structures and to achieve higher levels of performance and humanlike behaviors.

"We analyze key regions of the human brain to bring the perception and attention mechanisms of humanoid robots closer to those of humans," she said, explaining that brain-inspired intelligence grants humanoid robots greater flexibility and reliability, enabling more fluid and natural movements.

Incorporated with brain science, AI and more, the country has successfully developed an integrated

software platform for humanoid robots, the first of its kind in the world, the academician said.

Called "mega factory," the platform is designed to improve hardware performance through software simulations, eliminating the need for physical manufacturing and instead using AI-driven simulations to predict potential hardware system issues. It can, therefore, help accelerate design optimization, streamline upgrades, enhance overall robotic performance and speed up iteration cycles, Qiao explained.

Looking ahead, while the mass production of cost-effective but relatively low-performance and low-precision robots is now a reality, the challenges extend beyond large-scale manufacturing, the academician said.

"For specialized and major scenarios in industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, services and healthcare — where robots must meet stringent demands for performance, precision, reliability and safety — widespread deployment will still take time," she noted.

## Fabarta CEO: Enhancing productivity key role of AI

By CHENG YU  
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Artificial intelligence can reshape every industry in China, but only if it enhances productivity, said Gao Xuefeng, founder and CEO of Chinese tech firm Fabarta Co Ltd, at the 2025 Zhongguancun Forum in Beijing on Monday.



Gao Xuefeng

Gao said: "China's AI momentum, spurred by government support and market demand, is emerging as a key engine of economic growth. But AI must be transformed into productivity to have real vitality."

Fabarta, a proprietary multimodal knowledge engine and an industry-wide intelligent agent platform, aims to build a robust data infrastructure for the coming AI era. Highlighting how past cycles of AI enthusiasm have faded when the technology failed to integrate deeply into real-world industries, he emphasized that the current wave of AI — driven by deep learning — is more resilient due to its increasing relevance with industrial operations.

To embrace such opportunities, Gao said the company is focused on a data-centric AI architecture rather than the traditional model-centric approach, which can better mitigate issues like model hallucinations and data security risks.

Model hallucinations are tendencies by large language models to sometimes concoct facts, invent unsolicited fictions or produce confident responses that belie an underlying falsehood.

Gao made the comments as Fabarta teamed up with Sinochem Information Technology Co Ltd and the College of Computer Science and Technology at Jilin University to establish a joint laboratory for AI and new materials.

The partnership, announced at the Zhongguancun Forum on Saturday, aims to embed AI into the full research and development cycle of new materials.

The lab will focus on four key areas — developing AI-powered vertical domain models to boost efficiency in materials research, building industry-specific data assets, enhancing intelligent tool platforms and integrating fundamental theoretical research with talent development.

Ge Shuang, Fabarta's co-founder and chief operating officer, said: "This joint lab is a testament to our commitment to using AI to drive industrial upgrades. Such a cooperation among three parties is expected to unlock AI's vast potential in materials science, foster an open and cooperative AI ecosystem and accelerate the transition to a smarter economy."

At this year's Zhongguancun Forum, several AI panels drew a packed house over the weekend, with attendees filling every seat and standing along the walls to listen. The overwhelming interest mirrored the prominence AI commanded, which could also be seen at the recently concluded Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025 and the China Development Forum.

As DeepSeek has become a popular topic at this year's forum, Gao said that after DeepSeek's breakthrough, many Chinese companies no longer hesitate to invest in AI.

"Every few months, new technological advances emerge. Companies can't afford to wait — they must integrate AI into their business and industry now," Gao said. "Every sector can be reimaged through AI in the years to come."

Gao added that in China's industrial AI landscape, large model deployment will likely begin with State-owned enterprises and major industry players, which have the necessary scale, infrastructure and data resources to invest in AI innovation.

## China's tech advances boon for global firms

By FAN FEIFEI  
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China is emerging as an innovation-centric economy, with technological advances setting the stage for global shifts, while foreign companies can leverage their expertise around the world to help Chinese businesses bolster digital transformation, said Samantha Zhu, chairperson of Accenture Greater China.



Samantha Zhu

"For businesses in China looking to boost their productivity and maintain competitiveness, technologies led by artificial intelligence present an unprecedented opportunity to create value, respond dynamically to change and build resilience," Zhu said in a recent exclusive interview with China Daily.

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

Now it is a pivotal moment for both Chinese and foreign companies to drive productivity and growth, boldly innovate and position themselves at the forefront of the next wave of change, Zhu said, adding that Accenture has been strengthening capabilities in data and AI, and expanding practices in key areas like high-tech and life sciences.

The consultancy estimates that adopting a holistic approach to productivity, with generative AI acting as a multiplier, could boost companies' productivity growth from 1.9 percent to 15.9 percent. While investments in AI continue to grow, it's important for companies to harmonize technology and human staff members to fully

realize the power of reinvention that AI provides.

It is noteworthy that Chinese companies are accelerating the adoption of generative artificial intelligence. According to a report from Accenture, 87 percent of surveyed Chinese companies plan to ramp up AI investment in 2025 — a year of rapid change — while 58 percent of the interviewed business executives in China feel that their enterprises' AI development is proceeding faster than expected.

Chinese enterprises' current investment in generative AI is mainly focused on core technology infrastructure and data, like AI platforms, cloud and data management, and talent and skills development, the report said.

The top three reasons for higher investment in generative AI are capitalizing on advances in the technology, maintaining business competitiveness and increasing confidence in managing associated business risks. The report interviewed 790 company executives and 687 employees in 22 industries across the Asia-Pacific region.

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

Zhu also said she believes that the country's policy measures to further accelerate innovation and boost productivity, expand market access for foreign investors in key industrial sectors, lift restrictions and improve services will help the country deliver broad-based growth in a sustainable way.

"We believe the experiences China has gained from past reforms and its determination to continue leading high-quality growth will give the country a strong start in the years to come."

She said foreign firms, together with their Chinese counterparts, will be able to make the best use of their innovations and practices to improve returns on investment and achieve incremental growth.

## Ajlan & Bros hails policy steps as confidence boosts

By ZHENG XIN  
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Ajlan & Bros Group, the largest Saudi Arabian private sector conglomerate in China, said it has been benefiting from the country's improving business environment and further opening-up, citing a surge in new foreign investments as evidence of the market's growing appeal.

Mohammed Al Ajlan, deputy chairman of Ajlan & Bros Group, said the policies implemented by the Chinese authorities in recent years to optimize the business environment for foreign companies are yielding tangible results.

"Ajlan & Bros Group has been benefiting from the series of policies introduced and implemented by the Chinese authorities to optimize business environment for foreign-invested enterprises," said Al Ajlan, who is also chairman of the Saudi-Chinese Business Council.

He highlighted data showing that there were over 59,000 newly established foreign enterprises in China in 2024, a 9.9 percent year-on-year increase, as proof of the market's strong attraction.

"We are deeply encouraged to see that further opening-up at a high level has once again been emphasized in the 2025 Government Work Report, which we believe is expected to offer more opportunities for Ajlan & Bros Group to explore cooperation with leading Chinese companies in various fields," he said.

"It gives us strong confidence in China — a more open, resilient and dynamic market."

"In the future, we expect the business environment in China to become more optimized and dynamic, and we look forward to seeing more policy support in emerging areas such as artificial intelligence and new energy," Al Ajlan added.

Wang Lining, director of the oil market department under the economics and technology research institute of China National Petroleum Corp, said China's commitment to green energy and its rapid technological advancements are making it a magnet for global energy companies.

China's carbon neutrality goals and massive investments in renewable infrastructure are key factors drawing international firms seeking market diversification and leadership in the evolving global energy landscape, he said.

Ajlan & Bros, which entered the Chinese market in 1990 as the first Saudi private sector company after the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two nations, has grown to become the largest Saudi private conglomerate in China.

Al Ajlan highlighted the company's 35-year investment history in China, witnessing firsthand the achievements of China's reform and opening-up. He specifically lauded the Belt and Road Initiative and the establishment of free trade zones for enhancing global connectivity and benefiting Ajlan & Bros.



Ajlan & Bros' booth is seen during a services expo in Beijing.  
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"China's efforts to open up wider to the rest of the world have not only intensified bilateral trade between China and Saudi Arabia, but also provided strong support for the integration of the BRI and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030," he said.

"China's action plan to stabilize foreign investment in 2025 will be creating more opportunities for foreign firms and contributing to China's modernization drive."

Ajlan & Bros has established several strategic partnerships with Chinese companies across diverse sectors, like logistics, fintech, mining, manufacturing and technology, as China's market shows a clear trend of consumption upgrading, especially in e-commerce, logistics and gaming, amid a large middle-income population and continuously rising consumption power.

"These partnerships not only facilitate Chinese companies' expansion into the Middle East and North Africa region, or MENA region, but also contribute to Saudi

Arabia's Vision 2030, as Chinese partners bring advanced technologies and industry expertise, aiding Saudi Arabia's economic diversification goals."

Looking ahead, Ajlan & Bros plans to focus on investments in energy, logistics, mining, manufacturing and gaming in China, as the company is optimistic about China's commitment to developing the digital economy, enhancing financial market openness and promoting a green economy, seeing these as further opportunities for global businesses.

"We maintain a long-term and unwavering confidence in China's high-quality economic development, considering China's vast market potential and innovation prowess," he said.

"As the gateway to the MENA region for Chinese companies, we are eager to see continued progress in both traditional and emerging sectors through strengthened China-Saudi collaboration."

## BUSINESSFOCUS

## Sportswear enjoys sprinting sales in China

Anta Sports leads pack among peer firms based domestically

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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Leading global sportswear brands are capitalizing on the substantial growth potential of the Chinese market, which is driving their expansion and investment strategies.

Among these brands, Lululemon Athletica Inc has emerged as a standout performer, reporting impressive financial results for the fourth quarter and fiscal year ending Feb 2. The company's growth trajectory in China has been a key contributor to its performance.

In the Chinese market, Lululemon recorded an impressive 46 percent year-on-year surge in net revenue for the fourth quarter, while full-year revenue grew 41 percent compared to 2023.

The company has been proactive in expanding its presence, culminating in the operation of 151 stores in China by the end of the fiscal year. In 2025, the company plans to see revenue growth in China of between 25 percent and 30 percent.

On a global scale, Lululemon's net revenue increased by 13 percent, reaching \$3.6 billion in the fourth quarter. International sales played a crucial role, climbing by an impressive 38 percent, while revenue from the US market showed a more modest increase of 7 percent. For the entire fiscal year, Lululemon reported a 10 percent net revenue growth year-on-year, totaling \$10.6 billion.

This growth was largely driven by a 34 percent increase in international sales and a 4 percent rise in the US market, with gross profit for the year growing 12 percent to \$6.3 billion on a yearly basis.

Calvin McDonald, CEO of Lululemon, attributed these results to a mix of product innovation and heightened brand engagement.

"Our fourth quarter results exceeded expectations as we continued to introduce more newness and innovation into our product assortment," he said, highlighting the company's commitment to evolving its offerings to meet consumer demands.

In line with its ambitious growth strategy, Lululemon has actively pursued store expansion, opening 18 net new locations in the fourth quarter and an additional 56 stores throughout 2024. This growth brings the total number of Lululemon stores globally to 767.

The company has set its sights on making China its second-largest market globally by 2026.

Meghan Frank, chief financial officer, underscored the company's dedication to increasing brand awareness in international markets. Currently, unaided brand recognition in China is in the mid to high



Top: A view of a Li-Ning store in Shanghai in February. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY  
Above: Customers shop at an Arc'teryx store in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in January 2024.  
LONG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

teens, compared to the 30s in the US.

"We expect to open 40 to 45 net new company-operated stores in 2025 and complete about 40 optimizations. We expect overall square footage growth of about 10 percent. Our new store openings in 2025 will include about 10 to 15 stores in the US market, with the rest of our openings planned in our international markets, the majority of

which will be in China," Frank said.

To enhance its presence in China, Lululemon is leveraging various marketing initiatives, including high-profile events like the Formula 1 races in Shanghai, which feature brand ambassador and star F1 driver Lewis Hamilton. The three-day racing event attracted over 220,000 spectators, surpassing last year's attendance.

Additionally, local engagement

initiatives such as the Sweat Games and World Mental Health Day have allowed Lululemon to enhance relations with local communities.

Product innovation has been a crucial factor behind Lululemon's strong performance in the fourth quarter, particularly in categories such as outerwear and sporty accessories.

McDonald said: "Our unique approach to innovation is ground-

ed in creating technical apparel with diverse and adaptable use cases. This continual introduction of newness into our product lineup fosters guest loyalty and drives repeat purchases."

Nike has also reported its fiscal 2025 third-quarter results for the period ending Feb 28, highlighting its strategic transformation within the highly competitive Chinese market. Nike China generated \$1.7 billion in revenue during the quarter.

However, Nike has faced challenges due to ongoing promotional activities that have impacted both revenue and gross margins, particularly within digital channels. In response, the company is taking proactive steps to optimize and clean up inventory to prioritize the long-term health of its retail partnerships.

Elliott Hill, Nike's president and CEO, acknowledged the need for urgency.

"Sport is growing in China, and we must accelerate our pace. Our brands remain strong, but our actions to energize the marketplace will take time. We remain focused on creating brand distinction through sport, product innovation and hyper-local products. China specifically is where we're being the most proactive and cleaning up the marketplace and we'll get back to inspiring the Chinese consumers in a more meaningful way," Hill said.

Dong Wei, chairman and CEO of Nike Greater China and Global CEO of All Conditions Gear, highlighted the company's focus on inventory management, operational efficiency and consumer-driven innovation,

expressing strong confidence in Nike's long-term development in China.

Nike's product innovations continue to resonate with Chinese consumers, as evidenced by strong demand for the Pegasus Premium and Vomero 18 running shoes, coupled with notable growth in Kobe Pro Basketball sneakers during the "Year of the Mamba" campaign in 2025. Additionally, locally designed products, such as the Spring Festival collection, have garnered significant market attention, according to the company.

To further expand its reach, Nike is actively engaging with female consumers in China. The recently relaunched Nike Air Superfly, a women-focused running-inspired lifestyle shoe, has gained traction and popularity among both sports enthusiasts and fashion-forward consumers.

Meanwhile, German sportswear brand Adidas posted results in March with double-digit growth in 2024, with a 12 percent increase on a currency-neutral basis and improved operating profit by over 1 billion euros (\$1.08 billion), reaching 1.337 billion euros. The Chinese market contributed to this success, achieving 10 percent growth for the year. In the fourth quarter, Adidas experienced an accelerated top-line growth in China, jumping to 16 percent.

Meanwhile, Fujian province-based Anta Sports Products Ltd reported strong year-end performance, with revenue rising to 70.83 billion yuan (\$9.74 billion), representing a 13.6 percent year-on-year increase for the fiscal year ending Dec 31. The company's profit from operations climbed 8 percent, reaching 16.60 billion yuan. Euro-monitor International has recognized Anta as a leader in the Chinese sportswear market, capturing a market share of 23 percent. This positions Anta ahead of its competitors, including Nike (20.7 percent), Li-Ning (9.4 percent) and Adidas at 8.7 percent.

Anta's results can be attributed to strong growth across all brand segments. The flagship Anta brand reported a 10.6 percent revenue increase year-on-year, totaling 33.52 billion yuan, while operating profits for this segment rose 4.5 percent to 7.04 billion yuan. The Fila brand also performed well, with a revenue up 6.1 percent at 26.63 billion yuan. Additionally, revenue from the company's other brands surged 53.7 percent to 10.68 billion yuan, with operating profits for these brands jumping 61.7 percent to reach 3.05 billion yuan.

E-commerce continues to play a vital role in Anta's growth strategy, with revenue in this segment rising 21.8 percent year-over-year. E-commerce now accounts for 35.1 percent of the group's overall revenue, reflecting a significant shift in consumer purchasing habits toward digital platforms. The company plans to expand its retail presence further, aiming to operate 6,900 to 7,000 stores by the end of 2025.

## Local brands bagging bigger piece of luxury market

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

China's domestic handbag brands are making a significant impact in the premium market. Despite many unit prices exceeding 1,000 yuan (\$138) — and some even soaring beyond 10,000 yuan — interest among consumers remains robust.

Brands such as Songmont and Duanmu are not only experiencing impressive sales, but also successfully positioning themselves as formidable competitors to established international luxury labels.

Once perceived primarily as budget-friendly options, Chinese handbag brands are undergoing a substantial transformation, redefining their image through a combination of quality craftsmanship, compelling storytelling and an expanding retail footprint in high-traffic areas.

Christine Cui, a fashion insider based in Shanghai, highlighted the enormous development potential for these and other domestic handbags.

"Consumers are no longer chasing logos, but are more focused on value for money. Our domestic handbags are on par with international light luxury brands in terms

of aesthetics and materials. If international luxury brands do not innovate in design and continue to emphasize only their brand logos, they will inevitably face significant challenges," Cui said.

Market data as of February 2025 illustrate this evolution — seven domestic brands are now among the top 15 handbag labels on Tmall for products priced over 1,000 yuan, directly challenging well-known players like YSL and Gucci.

Among them, Songmont and Qiuzhen closely follow Coach in sales rankings, while brands like Grotto and Songmont have surpassed the 2,000 yuan threshold, showcasing a foray into the premium segment.

To consolidate their presence in this competitive landscape, domestic brands are tapping into international exposure, enlisting renowned designers and enhancing their craftsmanship.

For instance, Dissona made headlines by hiring former Hermes artisan Thomas Maurice, which allowed Dissona to become the first Chinese leather goods brand to showcase at Milan Fashion Week in 2017.

Songmont highlighted its offerings at Paris Fashion Week 2024

through a pop-up exhibition, aligning closely with global luxury trends.

Beyond craftsmanship, these brands are forging emotional connections with consumers through narrative-driven marketing strategies.

Songmont's podcast, "Sound Under the Mountain," features insightful conversations with female influencers, reinforcing the brand's intellectual and cultural identity. Meanwhile, Dissona incorporates traditional Chinese bamboo weaving into its designs, appealing to consumers who value heritage and artistry.

Initially starting as online-first labels, many of these brands have transitioned into upscale retail locations, placing themselves alongside established international luxury houses. Their retail sites are thoughtfully designed with immersive themes. For instance, Songmont's Chengdu IFS outlet in Sichuan province recreates a serene bamboo valley, while its Shanghai Huaihai Road store features flowing curves reminiscent of wind patterns through a valley, and its Shenzhen, Guangdong province venue reflects the patterns of ocean waves.

Zhang Qi, a Beijing-based entrepreneur in her 40s, describes the Songmont store as more than just a retail space.

"It is a relaxing Zen cafe where I can hang out with my friends. I enjoy the tranquility and Chinese style the space embodies, along with the philosophy that the brand represents."

Celebrity endorsements have played significant roles in enhancing the desirability of these brands. For example, Songmont has partnered with actress Wen Qi and tennis star Li Na to boost its visibility. Additionally, the brand has collaborated with Kelly Rutherford, best known for her role in *Gossip Girl*, leveraging her association with "old money" aesthetics to elevate its aspirational appeal globally.

The rising popularity of domestic handbag brands can be attributed to their ability to meld style with functionality.

Domestic brands have capitalized on the popularity of "hobo bags" by offering stylish, large-capacity options suitable for both professional and casual environments.

For instance, Songmont's store on Tmall boasts 1.79 million followers, with its signature hobo bag priced at



A woman checks a display of handbags at an exhibition in Shanghai in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

2,280 yuan. The product's image of relaxation and easy functionality has resonated with many white-collar urban women, making it their go-to bag choice.

Moreover, many consumers view these handbags as a sophisticated alternative to international luxury brands, free from the so-called "logo tax". For some buyers, opting for a domestic handbag serves as a meaningful statement of identity.

Affluent professionals in first-tier cities consider these brands to be subtle, refined alternatives to overt luxury logos, making them particu-

larly suitable for corporate settings. Meanwhile, younger consumers are increasingly drawn to brands like Grotto for their unique appeal and fresh aesthetics.

Despite the rapid growth of China's high-end handbag market, long-term success will hinge on these brands' ability to transcend marketing techniques and cultivate enduring trust with their audience, said fashion insider Cui. "We've seen the innovations and breakthroughs from Coach this season as well. The rise of domestic peers has certainly pushed up the level of the industry."

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## PLA's joint exercises demonstrate capability to thwart any push for 'Taiwan independence'

The joint exercises by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Eastern Theater Command around the island of Taiwan that began on Tuesday are an indispensable measure to safeguard China's national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

Unlike previous military drills, which were mostly officially described as "routine" or "regular", the latest military exercises were given an unusually high profile by both the civil and military authorities on the Chinese mainland.

The military's message was stern and explicit, with Shi Yi, spokesperson for the theater command, highlighting the comprehensive scope of the exercises, which involve the coordinated operations of the army, navy, air and rocket forces converging on the island from various directions.

The drills, which have been specifically tailored to address the challenges posed by the Lai Ching-te authorities on the island, primarily focus on enhancing sea-air combat-readiness patrols, seizing comprehensive superiority, conducting assaults on maritime and ground targets, and implementing blockades in key areas and sea lanes to evaluate the joint operational capabilities of the troops.

If a mainland blockade of the island had recently been considered a matter of fanciful talk, what happened on Tuesday was a pointed indication of what may be in store for the separatist forces on the island should they cross a glaring red line.

Contrary to any clamor suggesting otherwise, the exercises are a necessary and lawful action to uphold China's sovereignty and national unity. Since taking office, Lai has persistently pursued a separatist agenda, employing provocative rhetoric to brand the Chinese mainland as an "external hostile force" and advocate separatism.

That is only pushing the people of Taiwan into "a dangerous situation of war", as Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said.

Given the historical fact and internationally accepted legal truth that Taiwan is a part of China, the PLA has every right to guarantee the country's territorial integrity by any means, including by force.

The two sides across the Taiwan Strait have lived in peace for decades generally, as long as the authorities of the island uphold the 1992 Consensus that both sides of the Strait belong to one China.

But Lai, as the present Democratic Progressive Party chair and the leader of the authorities, has significantly escalated separatist endeavors in a bid to create what he fantasizes as Taiwan "sovereignty". He has audaciously propagated a revised version of the "two states theory" and brazenly called the island "a sovereign democratic state" for the first time in a speech last month, when he also vowed to take a series of measures to purge mainland elements from the island.

The law-enforcement patrols being conducted by China Coast Guard vessels around the island, in accordance with the one-China principle, complement the joint exercises by the PLA Eastern Theater Command. The coast guard's actions signify practical steps to assert legitimate jurisdiction over the island in alignment with the one-China principle, reinforcing Taiwan's status as an integral part of the People's Republic of China.

Having worked alongside his immediate predecessor as Taiwan's deputy leader, Lai knows well what red lines the mainland has drawn for Taiwan's "independence" seekers, and where they lie. But he just keeps pushing the envelope. And, for all the warnings from the other side of the Strait, he refuses to mend his ways.

For Lai and those like him, who have gotten lost in the daydream of "Taiwan independence", the latest military drills should serve as a reality check, prompting them to refrain from further provocations.

They demonstrate that the PLA has the proficiency to effectively carry out joint operations, the ability to strike at key targets on the island, and the capability to seize air superiority, maritime dominance, and information control.

As the spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office said, "Taiwan independence" means war. By recklessly upping the ante with his words and deeds, Lai simply reveals himself to be the "destroyer of cross-strait peace" and a "Taiwan Strait crisis maker".

The latest exercises should awaken him to the reality that there is no room for any form of "Taiwan independence".

## US' HK smears and sanctions face-saving move

The recent actions taken by the United States against Chinese officials related to Hong Kong, coupled with the issuance of the "2025 Hong Kong Policy Act Report", once again highlight the reason why there are ongoing tensions between the two countries.

The US government's move to sanction six officials under the guise of "transnational repression" and alleged threats to US interests in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is a clear example of its political posturing and interference in China's internal affairs.

The US State Department's accusations of the central government and SAR government officials using national security laws "extraterritorially to intimidate, silence, and harass 19 pro-democracy activists who were forced to flee overseas, including a US citizen and four other US residents" have been met with a strong rebuttal from the Chinese embassy in the US. The embassy also denounced the report for smearing Hong Kong's democracy, rule of law, human rights and freedoms with false accusations.

The report and sanctions are clearly an unjustifiable intrusion into China's sovereignty and a blatant violation of international norms.

The SAR government's efforts to address the challenges faced in 2019 and strengthen its legislative framework have served to demonstrate its commitment to maintaining stability and security in the SAR. The so-called "pro-democracy activists" championed by the US were radical elements whose actions posed a threat to national security.

The Hong Kong government acted firmly to maintain order and uphold national security since the enforcement of the National Security Law for Hong Kong in 2020 in response to the activities of the anti-China elements in the SAR. The SAR police's actions against these anti-China agitators and the impartial trials subsequently conducted by judicial authorities have been in full accord with legal procedures and have been imperative to safeguard the SAR's stability and prosperity.

Since the Chinese central government resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, it has fully, faithfully and firmly implemented the principles of "one country, two systems" with Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong and a high degree of autonomy.

The US' continued attempts to undermine Hong Kong's progress and stability through sanctions and groundless accusations are nothing but a desperate ploy to advance its own agenda. In doing so, it is the one denying Hong Kong the high degree of autonomy it enjoys under the framework of "one country, two systems". It is evident that the US' motivations in smearing the actions of the Hong Kong authorities are driven by its own strategic interests rather than genuine concerns for the well-being of the SAR and its residents. Its series of sanctions and incessant criticisms are intended to undermine the progress made by the SAR in upholding security, democracy and the rights of its people.

The actions the Hong Kong government has taken are legitimate steps to maintain order and uphold national security. Since the enactment and implementation of the National Security Law for Hong Kong and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, the SAR has restored order and it once again enjoys promising prospects for development, as evidenced by the all-time high in the number of registrations of non-Hong Kong companies. The reason why the US administration is still trying to play the "Hong Kong card" is that it knows that it will have no chance to realize its scheme of turning the city into a bridgehead for nationwide disruption if the SAR is able to maintain peace and stability.

It was the chaos and turmoil that the US sponsored in the SAR over the past years that prompted the introduction of the National Security Law for Hong Kong and the plugging of the loopholes in the SAR's legal and governance systems. Now the US is trying to protect its proxies who have fled the SAR where there is no longer any space for their subversive activities, which they vainly persist with overseas.

The US should respect the fact that Hong Kong is part of China, and its affairs are purely China's internal affairs. China strongly condemns and firmly opposes any meddling in its affairs, and it will take countermeasures to protect its sovereignty, and core national interests.

Luo Jie



## Opinion Line

## Weaponization of university funding harms free expression

Three US federal agencies, namely the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the General Services Administration, jointly issued a statement, on Monday, announcing a review of \$255.6 million in contracts between Harvard University, its affiliated institutions, and the federal government, as well as a \$8.7 billion multiyear federal grant commitment.

This move is widely seen as part of a broader action by the US administration. Earlier, on March 7, the administration revoked \$400 million in federal grants and contracts to Columbia University, citing the university's failure to protect Jewish students from harassment during campus protests against Israel's actions in Gaza last year. That order too came from the Department of Health and Human Services, the General Services Administration, and the Department of Education.

These actions have sparked intense debates across the United States. Supporters argue these are necessary steps to curb what they see as "far-left extremism" in US universities. However, critics condemn the moves as excessive overreach, warning that they "undermine academic freedom and free speech".

In a signed article in The Atlantic on March 19, Christopher Eisgruber, Princeton University president, wrote that the US administration's recent

"attack" on Columbia University presented "the greatest threat to American universities since the Red Scare of the 1950s".

On Monday, the American Association of University Professors and the American Federation of Teachers sued the Trump administration for the cancellation of \$400 million in federal funding to Columbia. Leveraging financial assistance to the University "underscores the threat to academic freedom", they said.

Calling for an end to the Palestine-Israel conflict and sympathy for the sufferings the Jewish people have undergone in history are compatible and often interlinked, both arising out of a common concern for humanity. While it is absolutely necessary to curb anti-Semitic voices on campus and elsewhere, those who brand calls for peace in the Middle East as anti-Semitism have actually mixed up the two concepts, which in turn leads to disparity, antagonism, and huge divides in universities.

An article in The New York Times on restricting funding to Columbia University quoted Ilana Cohen, a Jewish woman and recent Barnard graduate, as saying she found it hard to believe "they're acting out of care for Jewish students".

"In the past year, I have felt that Jewish voices on this campus have been treated like a pawn in a political game," she said.

The misuse of anti-Semitism to

include voices calling for peace and stopping the bloodshed in Gaza is unfair to those being wrongly blamed, in fact even to the Jewish people and to the universities that feel their academic freedom is being violated.

The way the US administration is interrupting normal functioning at Columbia University and Harvard University, namely by cutting or threatening to cut funding, also raises significant concerns about academic freedom. While federal oversight of funding is not unusual, such actions can have a chilling effect on research, discourse, and institutional autonomy. If funding decisions are influenced by political motivations, universities may feel pressured to self-censor or align their policies with government expectations, rather than fostering open academic inquiry.

The move is also part of a broader pattern of scrutiny of elite institutions. Critics say that withholding funds based on perceived political or social stances will undermine the core principles of intellectual independence. While universities must ensure accountability and prevent even an iota of racism from creeping into campuses, the weaponization of funding risks eroding trust in higher education and weakening free expression of thought — a fundamental pillar of modern societies.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Bomb threat not conducive to Middle East peace

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Monday the United States would receive a strong blow if it acts on the US president's threat to bomb Iran unless Teheran reaches a new nuclear deal with Washington.

The US leader reiterated his threat on Sunday that Iran would be bombed if it does not accept his offer for talks outlined in a letter sent to Iran's leadership in early March, giving Teheran a two-month window to make a decision.

"The enmity from the US and Israel has always been there. They threaten to attack us, which we don't think is very probable, but if they commit any mischief they will surely receive a strong reciprocal blow," Khamenei said. "And if they are thinking of causing sedition inside the country as in past years, the Iranian people themselves will deal with them."

A watershed incident in the international efforts to resolve the Iran nuclear issue is that the US withdrew from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action during the current US president's first term in 2018. He also reimposed sweeping US sanctions on Iran.

In other words, it is the US that has tried to hijack the agenda of the Iran nuclear issue for its own narrow ends, presumably to help its closest regional ally, Israel, to eliminate what it sees as the biggest security threat.

That intention appears more obvious today. The rising tensions between Washington and Teheran are closely connected with Israel's appeals

for the US to help it disable Iran's nuclear project, despite Teheran's repeated assertions it is for civil use.

The US' recent attacks on the Houthis, a militant group supported by Iran in Yemen, serve to scratch Israel's back, as unlike the Hamas and Hezbollah targets near its borders, the Houthi targets are more than 2,000 kilometers from Israel.

Thus Teheran has enough reasons to believe the US' latest threat does not originate from its good faith to properly resolve the Iran nuclear issue but to meet the immediate demands of Israel. And its tough response is also understandable as, if it succumbs to US pressure, the whole situation in the Middle East will instantly take a turn in favor of its archrival Israel.

The Iran nuclear issue has dragged on for more than two decades, ever since the International Atomic Energy Agency launched its investigation into Iran's nuclear project in 2002. Now, with the US trying to push through its own agenda, the resolution of the issue seems to be more distant than ever, and is at risk of being derailed from the track of diplomatic resolution.

If the US really intends to resolve the Iran nuclear issue, it needs to show its commitment to a peaceful settlement of the issue through political and diplomatic means. That means it should end its illegal sanctions and coercion, and refrain from taking any actions that might escalate the situation.

All the parties involved should

actively work to create conditions for the resumption of dialogue and negotiation.

The resolution of the Iran nuclear issue requires balancing rights and responsibilities, and upholding common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. On the one hand, Iran should continue honoring its commitment to not developing nuclear weapons. On the other hand, all other parties should fully respect Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy as a State Party to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

China hopes that all parties will resume dialogue and negotiation as early as possible with the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action being cherished as the basis for consensus.

Since the Iran nuclear issue and the Middle East crisis are intertwined, all relevant parties need to bear the bigger picture in mind and support a step-by-step approach. Acting from a position of strength will only make the situation more complicated which serves no party's interests, including those of the US and Israel.

As Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei tweeted on Monday, "An open threat of 'bombing' by a head of state against Iran is a shocking affront to the very essence of international peace and security. Violence breeds violence, peace begets peace. The US can choose the course and concede to the consequences".

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Biljana Vankovska

## Local governance in China, West differs

The elections in countries that call themselves liberal democracies seem never-ending. Regular or early elections, from presidential to parliamentary and local, create the illusion that "something is happening". But it is all merely a façade, a recycling of the same, visibly inefficient and desperately flawed, politics. Citizens are told that elections are a "celebration of democracy", masking the truth that democracy is lived every day, if it exists at all, not just when one steps into a voting booth. The quality of daily life is the true measure of democracy, but whatever remains of democracy is fast fading into insignificance.

North Macedonia is just one of many countries holding local elections this year at the municipal level. Political parties are drafting their election programs, gauging public opinion, compiling lists of citizens' demands translated into campaign promises, and even launching pre-election campaigns to win public support. While working on a joint project with colleagues from China, a thought crossed my mind: how does such a vast country address local issues?

In other words, what is considered "local" in such a context? I asked my younger colleague from Shanghai what is meant by local governance in China. In reply, he said: "What exactly do you mean by 'local'?" After all, my country, North Macedonia, is all of 25,000 square kilometers with barely 2 million people, which could be a "local community" in China.

He then explained that the term "local" in China carries multiple meanings. First, in relation to governance, "local" refers to a government multiple levels below the central government, including provincial, municipal and district governments. A local government comprises an administrative structure supported by the central government, but it maintains a certain degree of autonomy depending on the context.

Second, geographically speaking, "local" may refer to a specific region, province or city. For instance, "local" may refer to regional culinary traditions such as Sichuan, Cantonese and Yunnan. Economically, it signifies "domestic" or "regional" as opposed to imported.

Additionally, local businesses might be those operating within a single province or city rather than on a national scale. In political discourse, when Chinese leaders discuss "local" reforms or development, they usually mean policies

implemented at the provincial, municipal or rural community levels.

In North Macedonia, it is often unclear what is local and what is national. More often than not, in many local people's eyes local governance is "feudalized" by some local sheriff who wins an election thanks to party influence and oligarchic power, with little concern for citizens' voices. It also means political fragmentation, division along ethnic or political lines. There is no coherent social system or harmony, whereas harmony and social order are what sustain a country as vast as China.

I visited at least four cities in China last year. My first impression was how orderly and clean everything was. Residential complexes in China are self-sustaining units, providing their inhabitants with everything they need within walking distance.

With my Western-influenced mindset, my first concern was security. Perhaps people live in concentrated residential communities to protect themselves from theft or other risks. But my hosts laughed, with one of them saying: "No, our nation is built on the foundation of community and collectivity, from the lowest to the highest levels."

It reminded me of our lost tradition of neighborly connection — the *karshi kapitshik* — the neighbor's door directly across from yours, which you could knock on anytime, whether for good or bad reason. We've lost this tradition because of Western-style alienation, self-isolation and detachment.

My Shanghai colleague said that the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, was focused on devising policies to improve the quality of people's lives across the country. Unlike the West, which has become "individualistic" and failed to build communities, in China, the collective spirit is nurtured.

In China's vast network of communities, provinces, municipalities and districts, the focus is on the collective good. Unlike the West, there is no system collapse or lawlessness in China. Chinese authorities value both unity and diversity, so instead of a uniform approach, they adopt policies to promote or even experiment with local initiatives at a local level before implementing them nationwide. Agricultural reforms, and urbanization and environmental protection policies are frequently tested in this way. The local Party and administrative structure is

solid yet responsive to challenges, resolving local issues through a "network of mediators".

A particularly charming aspect of local engagement in China, as my Shanghai friend said, is the presence of "aunts from the neighborhood committee" (usually retired women overseeing day-to-day matters in residential complexes). In rural areas and smaller cities, public meetings are regularly held, local officials are openly criticized, and citizens' petitions convey their dissatisfaction to higher authorities.

Zhang Weiwei, a professor at Fudan University, has elaborated on this issue. He emphasized the concept in his talk, "selection plus election", in the North Macedonian capital of Skopje last year. Within the Communist Party of China's structure, there is the spirit that drives officials to be competent, accessible and to gain public trust. And before advancing politically, officials have to prove their ability in local communities. One cannot lead a country without first proving oneself in a district or province — for at least two successful terms.

A Macedonian friend who has lived in China for many years shared an interesting fact with me.

He said that contrary to stereotypes of "authoritarianism" and centralized power at the "top", China also has a key "decentralized" feature.

The 2025 Chinese national budget data showed the central government's transfer payments to local governments will reach 10.34 trillion yuan, exceeding 10 trillion for the third consecutive year. Fiscal transfer payments are taken from developed provinces and used in underdeveloped regions to address regional fiscal imbalances and promote equalization of basic public services.

In contrast, in the United States, a so-called "federation", the ratio between central and local financial distribution is about 50 to 50, and in European countries, on average, the distribution is 80 to 20 in favor of the central government. This shatters the myth of Western European democracies being champions of local self-governance.

In this regard, China's self-governance model is efficient and effective. China may not be a democracy based on party struggles and political discord, but it is a democracy that focuses on solving problems, moving forward and improving people's lives and livelihoods.

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*The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Mohammad Saiyedul Islam

## Beijing's gift to Dhaka strengthens bonds

Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and the chief adviser to Bangladesh's interim government, visited China from March 26 to 29, marking the beginning of a new chapter in Dhaka-Beijing relations. His visit yielded significant economic and social benefits for Bangladesh that promise to bolster the South Asian country's development and help improve the lives of millions of Bangladeshis.

For example, China will continue to offer duty-free and quota-free market access to Bangladeshi products until 2028, extending the trade benefits for two years after Bangladesh is likely to become a developing economy. At their March 28 talks, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Yunus highlighted the importance of mutual political support and the Belt and Road Initiative in promoting Bangladesh's development.

A joint news release issued by the two countries outlined the priorities for bilateral cooperation, including boosting infrastructure build-up in Bangladesh and aspects such as free trade and maritime cooperation. "The two sides underscored the importance to initiate negotiations on the China-Bangladesh Free Trade Agreement at an early date and officially start negotiations on optimizing the China-Bangladesh Investment Agreement," the statement said.

As the crescent moon at the weekend ushered in the joyous occasion of Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan,

Bangladeshi people celebrated not only their spiritual triumph but also the extraordinary goodwill gesture of China — a testament to the deepening ties between the two countries and Beijing's commitment to foster friendship and cooperation with Dhaka.

Beijing's decision to extend Bangladeshi goods' duty-free and quota-free access to the Chinese market even after it transitions from a least-developed country to a developing country is a lifeline for Bangladesh's export-driven industries, particularly its readymade garment sector which employs millions of people and accounts for more than 80 percent of the country's total export earnings.

Beijing's decision is all the more welcome, especially because the European Union and other Western markets have indicated they may phase out duty-free access once Bangladesh achieves a developing nation status, posing a challenge to Bangladesh's more than \$55 billion readymade garment industry.

Moreover, China's openness to negotiating an FTA with Bangladesh presents an opportunity to diversify exports, because an FTA could open the door for pharmaceuticals, leather goods, jute products and agricultural exports, reducing the country's over-reliance on a single sector. That China is the world's second-largest economy will ensure the extended tariff-free access to Bangladeshi products will enable the country to remain competitive, create more jobs and sustain development.

Perhaps the most exciting outcome of Yunus' visit was his suggestion that some Chinese companies in sectors like garment, electric vehicle, light machinery, high-tech electronics and chip man-

ufacturing, as well as solar photovoltaic panel industries relocate to Bangladesh, because it could be a game-changer for Dhaka. These labor-intensive and technology-driven sectors offer dual benefits: employment generation and skill enhancement. The suggested move, if it becomes reality, will not only create more jobs for Bangladesh's burgeoning workforce but also facilitate the transfer of valuable technology and expertise, which will enable Bangladesh to climb up the value chain and diversify its economy.

Bangladesh has long relied on foreign loans to finance its critical infrastructure projects. Beyond trade, the proposed development and livelihood projects, and free up resources which then can be diverted to boost education, healthcare and poverty alleviation initiatives.

Bangladesh has a huge trade deficit with China. According to data from 2024, it imported more than \$22.9 billion worth of goods from China and exported goods valued at \$677 million. To address this imbalance, China has agreed to import Bangladeshi mangoes, jackfruits, guavas and aquatic products starting this summer. Since agriculture remains a cornerstone of Bangladesh's economy, providing livelihoods for nearly half of its population, this initiative could reduce the massive trade imbalance between the two countries while opening up new export avenues for Bangladeshi farmers and fishermen.

Education takes center stage in Sino-Bangladeshi relations. China's promise to provide scholarships to more Bangladeshi students will help the younger generation access world-class learning opportunities. Education is the founda-

tion of sustainable development, and increasing access to high-quality education abroad will equip young Bangladeshi minds with the tools needed to boost development back home.

As Bangladesh pushes toward digitalization and advanced manufacturing, the authorities need to build a rich pool of high-tech talents, which they can achieve by employing youths returning to Bangladesh after having completed their higher studies in science and engineering at top Chinese universities.

For millions of Bangladeshi farmers, manufacturers and entrepreneurs, China's cooperation is akin to receiving a priceless Eid gift, as it creates for them more export opportunities, helps consolidate economic stability, and promotes prosperity and people's well-being.

China's decision is more than just diplomatic courtesy; it reflects China's genuine understanding of Bangladesh's aspirations. As a reliable partner, China has invested in Bangladesh's development. In this respect, China's is a more extensive strategic collaboration than a ceremonial exchange, especially as this year marks 50 years of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two sides.

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Tenzin Lhundrup

## Xizang promotes development through ethnic unity

The newly revised regulations on the establishment of model areas to facilitate the overall development of the Xizang autonomous region, implemented on March 1, will strengthen the legal foundation for promoting ethnic unity and protecting the interests of all ethnic groups in the region.

When China was wracked by poverty and weakness, colonial powers fragmented and humiliated its ethnic groups. This painful history has made it clear that ethnic unity serves not only the well-being of all ethnic groups in Xizang but also the overall interests of the Chinese nation.

Since the establishment of the Xizang autonomous region in 1965, particularly in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, Xizang has accorded priority to addressing ethnic matters, while implementing policies aimed at ensuring ethnic equality and unity, regional autonomy, and shared prosperity. Guided by the vision of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, Xizang has tailored its policies to promote socioeconomic progress.

Today, Xizang enjoys political stability, social harmony and economic growth, and has achieved success in better preserving the ecology and securing the borders. The bond of ethnic unity today in Xizang is as inseparable as butter and tea (tea in Xizang is made with tea leaves and yak butter), reflecting the enduring spirit of unity in China. In fact, over the past six decades, Xizang has exemplified the country's successful approach to addressing ethnic issues with Chinese characteristics.

Originally issued on Jan 11, 2020, the regulations to build up a model for ethnic unity were the first of their kind at the provincial level in China. After five years, Xizang's local legislation began the process of revising the regulations to further strengthen the legal safeguards for ethnic unity.

**The promulgation of the regulations shows that safeguarding and strengthening ethnic unity have become the common consensus of all ethnic groups.**

The goal of the revised regulations is to reinforce the legal framework to build a Chinese national community as the country advances Chinese modernization through national unity. The regulations are based on the fundamental principle of governing Xizang in accordance with the law and designed to provide legal safeguards for the legitimate rights and interests of all ethnic groups in the region, and uphold national unity and ethnic solidarity.

What's more, Xizang has four creative measures, with the first aimed at building a model area for promoting ethnic unity and progress, which can foster solidarity among and development of all ethnic groups, and advance the construction of the Chinese national community. The second measure is to build a pioneering zone which positions Xizang at the forefront of high-altitude economic growth in the country. The third measure is to build a national ecological civilization on the "roof of the world" for better ecological preservation and sustainable development. And the fourth is to secure the borders, promote prosperity, and improve people's well-being to inspire other regions to follow Xizang's example.

The revised regulations exemplify China's approach to borderland governance, showcasing the region's promotion of innovation in local governance and law-based governance under the leadership of the central government.

They demonstrate the local legislature's exercise of legislative power to safeguard and improve people's well-being, and promote ethnic unity and harmony in Xizang, underscoring the significance of local people's participation in legislation. They are China's latest contribution to the Global South's efforts to address ethnic issues.

My first-hand involvement in Xizang's ethnic legislation process has allowed me to observe how whole-process people's democracy is being implemented through the regulatory revision. For example, our team conducted comprehensive research, held symposiums with representatives of various sectors and industries, and organized experts' seminars and thematic meetings on legislation, followed by three rounds of public consultations across Xizang.

We also consulted national-level agencies in Beijing, soliciting 414 suggestions and opinions from the public and experts, and adopted 222 suggestions, ensuring the revised regulations are scientifically sound, democratically formulated and legally valid while guaranteeing their effective implementation.

The promulgation of the regulations shows that safeguarding and strengthening ethnic unity have become the common consensus of all ethnic groups. Xizang's different ethnic groups have voluntarily integrated into the Chinese nation and made significant contributions to the formation and development of the Chinese national community.

Today, all ethnic groups in Xizang enjoy the substantial benefits and safeguards brought about by this community while continuing to strengthen their integration within it. As China pursues national rejuvenation by advancing Chinese modernization, all ethnic groups in Xizang have committed to becoming the guardians and practitioners of ethnic unity.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

CHAIWAT MEESANTHAN

## Continued progression

The trajectory of the past half century points the way forward for Thailand-China relations in a changing Asia

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference and the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Thailand and China. These anniversaries highlight the enduring spirit of solidarity, mutual respect and peaceful



coexistence that has driven Asian regionalism since the mid-20th century.

Thailand and China have become exemplary partners in promoting the Bandung Spirit of solidarity, friendship and cooperation.

The trajectory of Thailand-China relations over the past half century reflects an energetic interaction between historical affinities, economic pragmatism and geopolitical transformation. From the initial years of guarded interaction to the present-day extensive strategic cooperation, the relationship between the two countries has developed into one of the most stable and mutually rewarding in the region. With China's persistent emergence on the world scene and Southeast Asia's rapid economic and strategic development, the challenge in the future lies in how the two countries can take their collaboration further and forge a community with a shared future.

Thailand was the first member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to normalize diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, which it did on July 1, 1975. The move was amid an enormous geopolitical realignment in Asia. Bilateral relations started modestly with a focus on trade, cultural exchanges and diplomatic mutual recognition. However, the post-Cold War era saw an intensification of bilateral activities, most notably in economic cooperation.

China and Thailand have taken their ties to the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership



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level in 2012. That was after China increased its activities in the region under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, in which Thailand has willingly participated. Several memorandums of understanding and cooperation agreements covering aspects such as infrastructure, trade, education, public health and defense have been signed by both countries under the framework of the BRI.

One of the most tangible and quantifiable dimensions of Thailand-China relations is economic cooperation. China has been Thailand's largest trading partner since 2013. Bilateral trade between Thailand and China reached \$135 billion in 2022, representing almost 18 percent of Thailand's total foreign trade, according to Thailand's Ministry of Commerce. China is also one of the major investors in Thai-

land, especially in renewable energy, logistics, manufacturing and the digital economy.

Through the BRI, a number of infrastructure projects have been initiated, the most notable being the Thai-Chinese high-speed railway. The intention is for railway, upon completion, to link Bangkok to Laos and South China, further facilitating connectivity and economic integration under the vision of the Pan-Asian railway network. Although the project has been postponed by Thailand due to cost, it speaks volumes of both countries' mutual long-term vision of cooperation on the foundations of connectivity-led development.

Additionally, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the world's largest free trade agreement among ASEAN, China and other regional economies, provides

another avenue for Thailand and China to align their economic agendas and simplify trade regulations.

The deep cultural and people-to-people connections between Thailand and China are based on a centuries-long process of migration. About 10 to 14 percent of the Thai population is of Chinese origin, with many of them becoming prominent figures in business, politics and civil society. This shared heritage provides a basis for friendly public opinion and makes bilateral cooperation culturally significant.

Educational and academic exchanges have also increased. More than 30,000 Thai students have studied in China as of 2023, while Confucius Institutes in Thailand serve to promote Chinese language and culture. Thai universities have also expanded Southeast Asian studies programs to learn

more about China's involvement in the region.

Tourism is also an important bridge. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, over 10 million Chinese tourists traveled to Thailand each year, and China emerged as the Thailand's most important source of inbound tourism. Tourism is now recovering and continues to be an important economic and cultural bridge.

Apart from bilateral collaboration, Thailand and China also cooperate in multilateral platforms such as the "ASEAN+3" cooperation mechanism, Asia Cooperation Dialogue, Greater Mekong Subregion cooperation and the United Nations. Thailand is also a strong supporter of China's regional development plans such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Global Development Initiative. In particular, the two nations have shown solidarity in times of necessity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand was one of the earliest nations to receive China's medical assistance and vaccines. Thailand reciprocated with logistic support and joined in regional health coordination efforts, reaffirming the spirit of solidarity and inclusiveness that characterizes contemporary Asian values.

Looking ahead, there are several strategic areas where Thailand-China relations can develop, such as the green and digital transitions, public health and aging societies, security and strategic dialogues, youth and education, sustainable tourism and cultural diplomacy.

Cooperation will be required in green energy, climate change mitigation and digital infrastructure. Thailand's Bio-Circular-Green Economy model aligns with China's dual carbon goals and creates a new area for bilateral innovation and investment.

Both countries are facing a demographic transition. Cooperation in healthcare innovation, eldercare technology and medical education

can create long-term win-win opportunities.

The strategic dialogue must be intensified when there are strong economic and cultural relations, to address new challenges in the form of cybersecurity, transnational crime and regional stability, particularly in the South China Sea and the Mekong subregion.

Enhancing people-to-people exchanges, joint research and academic collaboration among young leaders will secure the future generation of leaders who will comprehend and continue bilateral cooperation.

Amid growing concern about overtourism and environmental degradation, both sides ought to encourage sustainable tourism trends and cultural collaboration on the preservation of shared heritage and the creative economy.

Thailand-China relations are a living example that mutual respect, shared values, and pragmatic cooperation can produce lasting friendship and strategic vigor. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations and the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, we must also take on the role of shaping the future. A closer and more comprehensive Thailand-China relationship will not only serve the interests of the two peoples but also regional stability, inclusive development and the revival of the Asian century. By sustaining the conversation, co-innovation, and the trust between them, the two countries can together map out for the next 70 years, a future in line with the Bandung Spirit and focused on shared prosperity and peaceful coexistence.

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ZENO LEONI

## Tension wind-down

Might the new US administration as yet unstated 'Indo-Pacific' strategy open an opportunity for de-escalation in the South China Sea?

With a new trade war and pressure on Ukraine to accept an unfavorable — but perhaps, realistic — deal, the second Donald Trump administration has sent shock waves across Europe. Coupled with declarations of intent to annex the Panama



Canal, Greenland and Canada to the United States, these developments have shown the Jacksonian face of the US president, and the manifestation of an old-fashioned, Manifest Destiny-inspired form of imperialism.

This has generated not unfounded speculation that the US might withdraw from its commitments on the continent — even if it is unclear what a decreased support for European security will look like. Although there is a degree of bluffing in Trump's idiosyncratic style — that is, an "aggressive" way of negotiating and extracting favors from allies — and between administrations there usually is a degree of strategic continuity and tactical change, it is fair to ask the question of whether the second Trump administration will mark a shift in US policy toward Europe.

Is this the same for "Indo-Pacific"? It is too early to say after only two months. Nonetheless, the pendulum at this stage swings toward a general continuity, rather than change. Since the first Barack Obama administration's "pivot to Asia", the US has sought to invest greater diplomatic and military energies in the "Indo-Pacific" region, seeking to roll out a "rebalancing" of naval forces and with the president visiting the region several times. The first Trump administration and the Joe Biden administra-

tion continued this trend. Trump pushed for an increase in the absolute number of warships, while reviving the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). The Biden administration adopted a more sophisticated strategy, with declining US influence over the international order, minilateralism — involving the Quad, a minilateral grouping between the US, Japan, Australia and the Philippines (Squad), the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity and the Australia-United Kingdom-United States Partnership (AUKUS) — has represented a comprehensive strategy to advance US strategic objectives. Amid these developments, AUKUS is the flagship project, not because of the nuclear-powered submarines, but because it consolidates the long-time alliance between its three members.

Much of this strategy has been driven by the belief that China's military power — and not only this — should be contained. Since the conditions that underlined the previous administration's policy toward the "Indo-Pacific" have not changed, it is hard to predict any substantial change during the second Trump administration. That does not necessarily mean that we know everything about it, and uncertainty will continue to characterize the current administration.



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However, the most important choke point, especially under a Trump administration which is less driven by values and more by interests, remains the South China Sea.

In fact, compared to the previous mandate, the second Trump administration has been quiet about his strategy toward the "Indo-Pacific". To date, the most substantial evidence is the increase of tariffs on Chinese products.

If former president Biden seemed to be keen to support the island of Taiwan for both economic and ideological reasons, under the second Trump administration, the second factor — democratic values — may have become less important. Even the aspect of semi-conductors may matter less, in so far as Trump accused Taiwan island — for instance, in the summer of 2024 — of "stealing" the US industry of semi-conductors. Finally, Trump's apparent — but yet to be demonstrated — rapprochement with the Kremlin and decreased support for Ukraine, has led to speculation that the current administration may likely accept a world order where the leading powers — US, China and Russia — have their own sphere of influence. Regardless, uncertainty continues to prevail.

If the "Indo-Pacific" region is a geostrategic priority, it seems unlikely that US allies such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia may receive a similar treatment to that of European countries. Yet, additional pressure for increasing defense spending is to be expected — one can remem-

ber the tensions between the first Trump administration and Japan. Meanwhile, a country such as Vietnam, that in recent years has benefited from tariffs against China, may also face the Trump administration's anger.

However, the most important choke point, especially under a Trump administration which is less driven by values and more by interests, remains the South China Sea. Here, China and the US have ended up in a dangerous security dilemma, from which it seems difficult to exit. In that part of the world, even a limited military confrontation may have devastating economic implications. But this is just part of the problem. From Washington's perspective, China's military control of the islands of the South China Sea may be used not just for self-defense, but also for coercing and closing the spigot of global trade which, through the role of the dollar, has underpinned the US hegemony for a long time. Yet, it could be countered that China will not want to take such a drastic measure, as it relies on global trade itself and on strategic natural resources coming from Africa and the Middle East.

Ultimately, the overall relationship between China and the US has now been strained for more than a decade, but it is concerning that there is no specific formal agreement on how to manage even one of several choke points. Yet, a de-escalation is in the best interest of both countries, and the world.

The author is a lecturer at King's College London and a visiting fellow at Fudan University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

## Z WEEKLY

## Social Media Digest

## Bunny babble

Recently, a quirky and adorable language known as "Rabbit Language" has gained popularity on Chinese social media platforms like Xiaohongshu (RedNote).

This writing system, with its rabbit-eared or rabbit-shaped characters, exudes a uniquely cute aesthetic and has even been dubbed the "cutest language in the world".

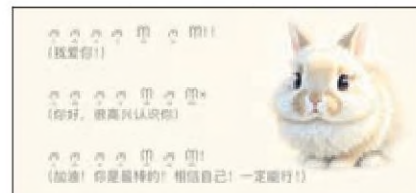
On Xiaohongshu, when you click the translation button next to comments written in Rabbit Language, the symbols transform into text. As more people started using it, they noticed that the translations aren't random — each Rabbit Language character consistently corresponds to the same word or phrase.

The characters and symbols we see on computers and smartphones are displayed according to a system called Unicode — a global character encoding standard that assigns a unique number to each symbol.

Upon analyzing Rabbit Language's Unicode, it was found to be a visual symbol system that incorporates elements from Canadian Aboriginal syllabics, the Tai Dam language, and Burmese.

Since its emergence, Rabbit Language has quickly spread through emojis, creative products, and various other mediums. Its success has even sparked the creation of alternative languages, like Fish Language and Bird Language, based on similarly rare characters.

According to netizens, these adorable symbol languages offer a sense of "healing" through their soft imagery and warm storytelling. This resonates with the modern desire among young people for a more relaxed and comforting emotional experience.



Symbols in "Rabbit Language" can be decoded into real text. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Pocket-size paradise

When most people think of a park, they picture vast green spaces, clear lakes, dense forests, and ample areas for community activities. However, a park in Nagaizumi, Shizuoka, Japan, challenges these expectations. This year, it was recognized by Guinness World Records as the "World's Smallest Park".

Located just over an hour from Tokyo, this mini park measures only 0.24 square meters — about the size of two A3 sheets of paper. Despite its tiny dimensions, it features a small bench and a patch of grass, offering a quaint spot for relaxation.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a park is defined as "a piece of ground in or near a city or town kept for ornament and recreation". By this standard, this petite installation certainly qualifies.

However, earning the title of the world's smallest park requires meeting several criteria, including being legally recognized as a park, existing for at least five years, and undergoing professional measurement.

The park's origins date back to 1988 when a local staff member, inspired by a visit to the United States, set out to create a park smaller than Mill Ends Park in Portland, Oregon — the previous record holder. Since then, Nagaizumi has informally referred to it as the world's smallest park, a claim now validated through official measurements and documentation.

Nestled in a residential area just a short walk from Nagaizumi Town Hall, the park has become a charming attraction for both locals and tourists. Visitors often stop by to take photos or simply enjoy a brief moment of tranquility.

GUI QIAN



A mini park in Nagaizumi, Japan, holds the Guinness World Record for being the "World's Smallest Park". PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Saving oceans with robot innovation

Teenagers from around the world design robots to restore marine ecosystems and promote global collaboration.



**Left:** Team 6941 (IronPulse) operates their robot at the 2025 FIRST Robotics Competition Shanghai Regional, held at East China Normal University from March 14 to 17. **Right:** The IronPulse robot attempts to pick up artificial corals during the competition. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By GUO JIATONG  
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High schoolers from around the world recently proved that robotics isn't just about building machines — it's about tackling real-world challenges, one robot at a time.

The 2025 FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) Shanghai Regional, held at East China Normal University from March 14 to 17, brought together nearly 1,000 high school students from 43 teams representing multiple countries and regions, including China, the United States, and Australia.

This year's theme, "Reefscape", challenged students to design and program robots to restore marine ecosystems. Tasks included transplanting artificial corals made from rigid hollow tubes and collecting simulated algae, testing both technical skills and environmental awareness.

Among the competitors, two stand-out teams from Shanghai emerged victorious. Team 6941, "IronPulse" from Shanghai Pinghe School, and team 6940, "Violet Z" from the Minhang Zizhu Branch of the No 2 High School affiliated with East China Normal University, claimed first and third place, respectively. Both teams will advance to the world championship in Houston, Texas, later this month.

As the world's highest-level youth robotics competition, FRC demands a high degree of technological proficiency, which, according to Mei Kai, the 17-year-old captain of IronPulse, is only possible through

strong teamwork.

teamwork.

"Everyone has a role to play — whether it's the driver, coach, technician, data analyst, or coder — and it's through collaboration that things get done right," he said.

Song Jinyang, coach of Violet Z, believes that this level of close cooperation among students helps to enhance their ability to solve complex problems.

"For example, if a component isn't working, it could be an issue with the structure, circuitry, or the code. It's a collective effort between the engineering and programming personnel to troubleshoot and resolve the issue step by step," she said.

This collaborative spirit has shaped the legacy of Violet Z. Lin Chenyu, a 19-year-old student at East China University of Science and Technology and technical instructor for Violet Z, explained how the team's success is built on past achievements.

He noted that the team's advanced vision-based full-field positioning system — which ensures the robot moves accurately and swiftly during the autonomous phase of the competition — took two and a half years to develop.

"What began as something inaccurate and slow is now highly efficient," he said. "The ability to write such excellent code is not only the result of time and effort we've invested, but also because we started with high standards, building on the work of previous team members."

Lin, who was once a member of Violet Z himself, continues to contribute his expertise despite now being in college.

"As veterans, we always encourage current members to experiment boldly because we're here to

offer support and help them learn from their mistakes," he said.

This spirit of collaboration goes far beyond teammates, transcending nationalities to foster a global community.

For example, Violet Z took the initiative to share their autonomous code with participants from around the world, offering advice on programming and structural design.

"Competing against strong teams isn't about rivalry; true progress comes from mutual learning," said Jin Shifei, mentor of IronPulse. "When faced with strong competitors, we all improve together."

Jin introduced the concept of "gracious professionalism", which emphasizes helping competitors in need.

"If your opponent is missing a part and you happen to have it, would you lend it to them? Of course, the answer is yes — that's the true success of education," he said.

## More than robots

The competition also serves as a platform for fostering genuine friendships that span national borders.

"When we participated in the regional event held in Turkey last year, we met contestants from Russia and Poland who were fascinated by Chinese culture. They even asked us to write their names in Chinese characters on their arms and clothes," recalled Guo Xue, a team member from Violet Z.

Now hosting the regional competition in Shanghai, Violet Z embraced the opportunity to showcase Chinese hospitality and cultural openness.

"We are eager

to demonstrate our enthusiasm, openness, and friendliness to participants from all over the world," Guo said.

"I truly hope to present the image of Chinese people and contemporary China, letting everyone see what Chinese high school students and robotics teams are really like."

The passion for robotics has also sparked excitement among audiences. Jin likened the event to a "sports spectacle", with spectators waving flags and cheering — even though the robots couldn't hear them.

"They aren't cheering for the robots, but for the students working behind the scenes, demonstrating their intelligence and resilience," Jin said. "The complex competition structures and a sports-like format not only draw people's attention to robotics but also, hopefully, inspire many to pursue careers and education in STEM fields."

For Lin, the FRC has a positive impact on both the students participating in the competition and the entire robotics community, as it advocates for a blend of humanities and technology.

"It challenges the old notion that robotics is only about technology. Instead, it aims to cultivate the next generation of leaders in engineering — leaders who not only have technical expertise but also a deep sense of compassion and environmental responsibility," he said.

# Z WEEKLY

## Seeds of friendship blossom

American students from Iowa and their Chinese counterparts strengthen a long-standing tradition of people-to-people exchanges.



**Clockwise from top right:** Chinese and American students pose for a photo at the China-US Friendship Youth Woods in Zhengding, Hebei, on March 20. ZHAO XINYU / FOR CHINA DAILY  
Students participate in a badminton match, try calligraphy, and practice tai chi fan dance at Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School on March 19. Students admire wooden models at Hebei Zhengding High School on March 20. LIU ZUNSHUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang and LIU BOQIAN in Beijing

Against the backdrop of blooming cherry blossoms in early spring, the seeds of friendship between a group of Chinese and American students are also flourishing beautifully.

Atop the rolling peaks of the Badaling section of the Great Wall in Beijing, students from Iowa, the United States, and their peers from a school in Shijiazhuang, capital of North China's Hebei province, climbed a nearly 70-degree staircase, overcoming the challenging yet enticing stretch together.

"It's super hard, but we're almost halfway there. We've got this!" said Kenya Lopez, pausing to snap selfies with her friends as she climbed.

Lopez is part of a group of 102 high school students and teachers from five Iowa schools who embarked on a weeklong Inheritance of Friendship Study Program in China from March 16 to 22.

The delegation, led by Dan Stein and Tony Joseph, chairman and vice chairman of the Muscatine-China Initiatives Committee, and Krista Lee Regennitter, program director from the Stanley Center for Peace and Security, visited Beijing, Shijiazhuang, and Shanghai, immersing themselves in Chinese culture, history, and people-to-people exchanges.

"The trip highlighted how grassroots youth interactions continue to nurture the enduring people-to-people friendship between China and the US," said Pei Hongxia, principal of Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School (SFLS), which hosted the journey.

According to Pei, each American student was paired with a Chinese student from the school, all of whom are fluent in English, to help them better understand the places and culture during the tour.

### A journey of discovery

Their itinerary included iconic landmarks like the Great Wall and the Forbidden City in Beijing, along with hands-on cultural experiences in Shijiazhuang — learning calligraphy, paper-cutting, and Chinese painting, planting trees in Zhengding county, and bonding with Chinese peers over dumpling-making.

At the Badaling section of the Great Wall, American and Chinese students paired up to climb steep staircases, snapping selfies and cheering each other on.

Some held hands for support, while others raced ahead until they finally reached the southern fourth tower — a high vantage point offering a sweeping view of the Great Wall as it snaked through the mountains like a "coiled dragon", as described in Chinese lore.

For Tristan Jorn Reidel of Muscatine High School in Iowa, who was visiting China for the first time, the breathtaking scenery left a lasting impression.

"In Iowa, we have some hills, and I've seen mountains, but this is on a whole different scale," he said, gazing at the distant peaks with his Chinese partner. "It's tiring, but I think it's worth it."

After riding a cable car down the mountain, the students were captivated by the Great Wall souvenirs. From coins to buildable models, they took a piece of Beijing's mountain landscape back to the US.

For many American students like Reidel,

“The trip highlighted how grassroots youth interactions continue to nurture the enduring people-to-people friendship between China and the US.”

Pei Hongxia, principal of Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School, Hebei

this was their first encounter with China. "I've been to a few countries surrounding it but never actually inside China," said Kaj Espen Larsen, a student also from Muscatine High School, during a tree-planting event in Zhengding county.

"I had a few friends who came on a similar program last year. And the whole summer, they were talking about it and sending me pictures. So, when I heard there was an opportunity to sign up again this year, I was really excited," Larsen said.

The program he mentioned is the Inheritance of Friendship Study Program for Chinese and US teenagers in Hebei and Iowa, launched by bilateral schools in 2023 to mark the 40th anniversary of the sister state-province relationship between Iowa and Hebei.

SFLS has been conducting frequent reciprocal visits and exchanges with sister schools in Iowa since 1997.

Every year, teachers and students from

SFLS are dispatched to Iowa, while teachers and students from Iowa's sister schools are invited to visit China.

"At the end of the day, we just both wanted to be friends, sharing our cultures with each other," Larsen said, adding that people from the US and China are more alike than they are different.

His Chinese partner, Yan Yixin, a senior at SFLS, echoed the sentiment. "Cultural differences exist, but mutual respect and curiosity bridge the gaps. Our friendship proves that."

### Cultural immersion

In Shijiazhuang, the group explored some local traditions. At SFLS, for example, they tried paper-cutting, tai chi fan dances, and calligraphy.

"I messed up the strokes, but my partner patiently guided me," one of them laughed, holding up an ink-splattered Chinese character.

During a visit to the Hebei Museum in Shijiazhuang, Yan explained to her partner the symbolism behind Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) artifacts like the gold-threaded jade burial suit, while Larsen shared stories from his own background.

"For anyone who can come and have an experience like this, I will absolutely recommend it," Larsen said.

Even a visit to the zoo sparked interesting conversations. While observing pandas at the Shijiazhuang Zoo, Yan shared stories about this national treasure.

"Pandas symbolize peace and friendship in Chinese culture. China often sends them to other countries as a sign of goodwill. They're like friendly ambassadors," Yan explained.

She also spoke about Sun Wukong (Monkey King), a central character in *Journey to the West*, a classic Chinese novel. "He can do all kinds of amazing things and teaches us the power of perseverance and cleverness."

"This visit to the zoo is really eye-opening. I can learn so much about Chinese culture through these animals," Larsen said.

"The youth are the future inheritors of Sino-US friendships. By learning together, laughing together, and overcoming challenges side by side, they plant seeds of trust that will grow into towering trees of friendship," said Principal Pei.

Her words resonated during the tour's symbolic tree-planting ceremony in Zhengding, where students shoveled soil and planted saplings in an area labeled "China-US Friendship Youth Woods".

As the delegation departed for Shanghai on March 21, souvenirs tucked into luggage included Great Wall coins and museum badges. Yet the most enduring takeaways were intangible. "I've been taking a lot of pictures," Larsen said. "After we travel, I always like to sit with my family and friends back home and flip through them."

For Yan, the experience has enhanced her understanding of the US. "I've learned a lot about American history and culture, practiced my English skills, and formed deep friendships," she said.

"These kids are writing the next chapter of our friendship," Pei said.

Zhao Xinyu, Gao Xinran, Cao Xinyi, and Zhang Xin contributed to this story.

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## Z WEEKLY

# Preserving ancient books for present and future

The burgeoning art form of ancient book restoration finds new enthusiasts eager to save the treasures of the printed word.

By GUI QIAN  
and LIU KUN in Wuhan

At 30, Li Yangyang never imagined that her degree in international business would lead her to a career in ancient book restoration. From starting as a novice in the workplace to founding her own restoration studio, she spent six years carving out a niche in this specialized field.

Today, she not only restores valuable ancient texts but also inspires lots of young people to engage with this traditional craft through social media. Li's journey reflects the transformation of ancient book restoration from a perceived "old craft" into a vibrant, emerging field amid a broader revival of traditional culture.

In 2017, Li, a native of Wuhan in Hubei province, had just graduated from college and was exploring various job opportunities. Despite trying several roles, she felt unfulfilled.

One day, she came across a cultural technology company looking for ancient book restorers and offering training to apprentices with no prior experience. Intrigued, she submitted her resume and got the job.

For Li, ancient book restoration was an entirely new field. The company paired her with experienced colleagues for hands-on training and frequently invited renowned industry experts to give lectures.

After an intensive six-month apprenticeship, she began taking on simple restoration tasks independently.

Restoring ancient books is more challenging than it appears. A typical restoration project involves over 20 steps, including photographing for archival purposes, preparing paper materials, disassembling books, cleaning, binding, and more.

Depending on the extent of the damage, Li can restore anywhere from 30 pages to just one or two pages a day, with fees ranging from 20 to 200 yuan per page.

"Book bricks" is the colloquial term restorers use for ancient books that have hardened into solid blocks. Some books are so damp that the pages stick together completely, and even the initial step of "flattening the pages" can take an entire day, with the slightest mistake risking a tear.

Aesthetics pose another significant challenge. Ancient book restoration isn't just about "patching up" — the proportions of the margins and the color of the backing paper must align with the original book's character.

Li believes that working in ancient book restoration, especially for beginners, requires a sense of reverence and a calm mindset.

"Before starting a restoration, you must ask yourself: Can my skills handle this? If not, it's better to seek help from a master rather than risk making things worse," she explained. "Over-restoration can be more damaging than leaving the book untouched."

Li also advised that if you're feeling emotionally overwhelmed, it's best to avoid working on ancient books. She recalled a time when she nearly crumpled a book in frustration.

"Being overly joyful, laughing, or joking around isn't ideal either. Even cutting a millimeter too much can make restoration impossible later on."



Li Yangyang has built a career for herself in ancient book restoration. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Technical upgrading

To improve her skills, Li attended several training sessions at institutions including the National Library of China in Beijing and the Yunnan Provincial Library in Kunming, where she mastered techniques such as digitization, cataloging, and facsimile reproduction of ancient books.

"These may not involve directly 'repairing' books, but they are just

as crucial for preserving and passing on ancient culture," she said.

According to Li, digitization involves scanning ancient books to create a searchable database. Cataloging establishes a complete identity archive for each book, classifying them into categories like classics, history, philosophy, and literature, and determining their editions, sizes, cultural relic grades, and damage levels.

The demand for facsimile production of ancient books has surged in recent years. "On one hand, it's to protect the original copies during exhibitions. On the other hand, the facsimile books themselves are exquisitely made and will be valuable in a few hundred years as well. This process essentially continues and passes on the importance of cultural preservation," Li elaborated.

She also focuses on the application of new technologies in ancient book restoration. For example, an AI restoration system can scan damaged areas, identifying issues like insect holes and mold spots, then automatically generate restoration plans and predict how the paper will age over time.

Fiber analysis is another technique Li is currently studying. By staining the paper with iodine reagents and examining it under a microscope, she can determine its composition. For instance, if the paper is made from bamboo, it can't be repaired with mulberry bark paper — much like how blood transfusions require matching blood types.

## Market potential

With the nation's growing emphasis on cultural heritage preservation, the ancient book restoration industry is experiencing unprecedented opportunities for development.

"The demand comes not only from official organizations like museums and libraries but also from private book collectors," Li explained. "Ancient books are becoming more accessible to the public. Some even search their homes for family heirloom books."

Last October, Li established her own studio, taking on orders from both institutions and individuals, with the workload currently split evenly.

Since February, Li has been posting videos on platforms like Xiaohongshu (RedNote) and Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), hoping to use social media to bring ancient books into the mainstream.

She discovered that videos featuring technical tips and severely damaged books are particularly popular — the former gives viewers the sense that "they can try it themselves", while the latter offers a "healing" experience.

Li noted that most of her followers are young people, reflecting a trend in talent development within the field in recent years.

Since 2017, many universities have begun offering courses in ancient book restoration, marking a shift from the traditional "master-apprentice" model to a more academic approach.

To Li, ancient book restoration is not just about extending the life of paper but also about preserving cultural heritage. Nowadays, clients are restoring not only common books but also genealogy books, land deeds, maps, local chronicles, and other types of documents — ancient books have truly moved from museum displays into everyday homes.

"A book from hundreds of years ago may seem distant, but it can subtly influence our lives. I hope ancient books will become a more common aspect of life, allowing more people to experience them," Li said.

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Zhang Tanhao practices *qiaogong* on the armrest of a chair. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Traditional opera meets digital age

By MENG WENJIE and LIU KUN in Wuhan

Recently, 21-year-old Zhang Tanhao has been working with a group of young Peking Opera enthusiasts to adapt the 1990s animated series *Hulu Xiao Jin Gang* (Diamond Brother) into a Peking Opera performance. Created by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio, this cartoon holds nostalgic value for many born in the 1990s and 2000s.

Zhang's journey with Peking Opera began in high school when he developed an interest in *gufeng* music, a genre that blends traditional Chinese elements with pop music.

"I was drawn to the operatic vocals in these songs, which led me to explore traditional opera," he recalled. "Eventually, just listening wasn't enough — I wanted to sing it myself."

Zhang began learning through online videos and sought professional lessons from a local teacher in his hometown in Jilin province, who guided him in vocal techniques and body movements.

Learning traditional Chinese opera wasn't easy, especially for someone like Zhang, who hadn't trained in it since childhood. He struggled with body coordination and flexibility, and with limited free time during high school, he practiced whenever possible.

"The daily practice was tedious, but it built a strong foundation for my further study," Zhang said.

In 2021, Zhang enrolled at South-Central Minzu University in Wuhan, Hubei province. He soon noticed that the hot, dry climate of the southern city was affecting his voice, prompting him to shift his focus.

"I chose to specialize in *qiaogong*," he said, referring to a challenging Peking Opera technique typically performed by *huadan* (young, lively female characters). "It emphasizes physical agility more than vocal skills."

*Qiaogong* requires performers to wear special shoes over 10 centimeters high, balancing on their tiptoes or even just their big toes. This technique is often referred to as "Eastern ballet." But unlike ballet, some opera pieces require performers to jump onto the armrests of chairs and perform complex physical movements.

"At first, just standing still on the ground in those shoes was difficult," Zhang recalled. "I fell many times, but with more practice, it became easier."

According to Zhang, *qiaogong* embodies an ethereal grace and is used to portray ghostly characters in certain performances. "In these roles, the actor glides across the stage with a steady upper body, while only the feet move, creating the illusion of floating," he explained.

It was the unique qualities of *qiaogong* that inspired Zhang to adapt *Hulu Xiao Jin Gang* into a Peking Opera version. "One of the main characters in the animation is the snake demon, and *qiaogong* is a perfect way to showcase the snake's graceful, floating nature," Zhang explained.

## Youthful appeal

Since the start of the year, Zhang and his team have been working on the piece, developing the script, choreography, and vocal styles. They plan to film the production by midyear for competitions and hope to stage public performances in the future.

At just about one hour long, this opera is shorter than typical Peking Opera performances, making it more accessible to younger audiences, especially those experiencing opera for the first time.

"I hope this work will help them see, understand, and fall in love with Peking Opera," Zhang said.

Most of Zhang's performance partners are university students, all dedicated to bridging the gap between traditional opera and younger audiences. For example, when performing at Wuhan Textile University last year, Zhang and his partners decided to add a drum kit to the traditional percussion ensemble for a martial arts piece.

"This addition enhanced the rhythm of the martial scenes and made them more engaging for younger audiences," he explained.

Zhang has also begun incorporating internet slang into the dialogue of traditional opera, a change he applied in one of his performances in Henan in March.

"The script was witty and humorous. We want to break the stereotype that Peking Opera is just about long, slow singing without variety," Zhang said. "Traditional art can be vibrant and resonate with the younger generation."

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