



Spring blossoms

Qingming Festival offers ideal time to enjoy nature in full bloom **IMAGE, PAGE 7**

Much-needed help

China's second batch of aid reaches quake-hit Myanmar **WORLD, PAGE 4**



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Xi stresses key role of afforestation

Greater public participation urged in nation's greening efforts

By MO JINGXI
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President Xi Jinping stressed on Thursday the crucial role of afforestation in enhancing ecological conservation, and called for greater public participation in the country's greening efforts in order to build a Beautiful China and make the nation even greener.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks while attending a voluntary tree planting activity in Beijing.

It is the 13th consecutive year that Xi has participated in the capital city's annual tree planting activity since becoming general secretary in late 2012.

Xi, who was joined by other senior leaders of the Party and State, planted trees with local people in southern Beijing's Fengtai district.

While planting saplings of various types of trees, Xi said that China's forest coverage has now exceeded 25 percent and contributed to 25 percent of the global increase in green coverage.

Through continuous efforts, the Taklimakan Desert, China's largest and the world's second-largest shifting sand desert, now wears a "green scarf" and the Horqin Sandy Land has restored its grassland scenery, he said, adding that these achievements have not come easily.

China is one of the countries with the severest desertification. In 1979, the country designated March 12 as National Tree Planting Day and launched a nationwide voluntary tree planting campaign in 1981.

After decades of relentless efforts, China has made significant progress in fighting desertification and restoring the ecological environment.

In 2024, China planted 4.446 mil-



President Xi Jinping talks with students during a voluntary tree-planting event in Beijing's Fengtai district on Thursday. YIN BOGU / XINHUA

lion hectares of forest, nearly the size of the Netherlands. The country also restored 3.224 million hectares of degraded grassland and upgraded 2.783 million hectares of sandy and stony land last year.

Xi said that the public have the most direct and genuine feelings about the improvement of the ecological environment.

He noted that it is also important to recognize that China's forests and grasslands are still insufficient,

and their quality and the economic profits they create are not yet enough, urging efforts to address prominent problems.

To make China greener, Xi said efforts should be made to advance large-scale greening, expand the channels for turning the country's waters and mountains into invaluable assets, and strengthen the protection of forest and grassland resources.

He called for greater emphasis on

making better use of forests and grasslands through reforms, and bringing more job opportunities and boosting people's incomes while making their surroundings greener and more beautiful.

Voluntary tree planting is a nationwide effort that involves everyone, Xi said, adding that it must be continued from generation to generation.

During the tree planting activity, Xi also asked the children at the

site about their studies, life and their participation in labor activities.

He said that a better life is created through hard work and encouraged the young people to actively engage themselves in public service activities such as tree planting.

Through such activities, they can exercise their bodies, strengthen their will and gain knowledge, thus promoting well-rounded development, Xi added.

US faces blowback from latest tariff hikes

By ZHONG NAN,
OUYANG SHIJIA in Beijing and
YIFAN XU in Washington

The United States' latest wave of tariff hikes may have the consequence of further strengthening trade cooperation between China and its other key trading partners, according to Chinese and foreign analysts.

Amid strong opposition, US President Donald Trump on Wednesday signed an executive order on the so-called "reciprocal tariffs", imposing a 10-percent "minimum baseline tariff" and higher rates on certain trading partners.

The policy includes tariffs as high as 46 percent on imports from Vietnam, 34 percent from China, 24 percent from Japan and 20 percent from the European Union, according to media reports.

China's Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday it would take firm countermeasures to safeguard its interests and enhance coordination with the EU, Japan and South Korea on key trade issues.

Speaking at a news conference in Beijing on Thursday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said there are no winners in a trade war.

China urged the US to reverse its wrongful imposition of "reciprocal tariffs", and address economic and trade differences with China and other countries through equal, respectful and mutually beneficial negotiations.

The US move marks a further departure from its long-standing commitment to multilateralism and the most-favored-nation principle under the World Trade Organization framework, said Mei Xinyu, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

Mei added that the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative could serve as a fallback mechanism to support the multilateral trading system.

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Chongqing's charms amaze US internet celebrity

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI
in Chongqing

Eating spicy ice cream, getting a haircut, dancing with local grandmas, trying intelligent NEV cars, and taking the Yangtze River Cableway and a night cruise, Darren Watkins Jr, the 20-year-old US internet celebrity better known to his 37 million YouTube followers and those on other platforms as iShowSpeed, had shown the world another interesting city through his lens.

"This is (a) cyber city that looks crazy on camera," the YouTube sensation said in great excitement as he enjoyed the breathtaking view during a night river cruise in Chongqing.

"Beautiful, beautiful. This is Chongqing. This city doesn't look real."

From 3 pm to 9:30 pm on Wednesday, he did a marathon livestream in Chongqing city center after visiting Beijing, Shanghai, Shaolin Temple in Henan province and Chengdu in Sichuan province.

The livestream in Chongqing has attracted over 7.3 million viewers on YouTube so far, as well as over 8,000 comments.

This metropolis of more than 30 million people in Southwest China, which boasts a multidimensional landscape, futuristic architecture, spicy hotpot and glittering night scenes, has attracted many foreign internet influencers amid the recent "China Travel" trend.

A gateway to a vast inland and a major manufacturing hub, it



American internet celebrity Darren Watkins Jr, better known as iShowSpeed, tries local delicacies in Chongqing on Wednesday, during a trip exploring the wonders of the municipality. HE PENGLEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

became China's fourth municipality in 1997 after Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin.

As large as Austria and five times bigger than Beijing, this city of mountains and rivers has witnessed rapid development into a modern metropolis with advanced transportation systems, outstanding architecture and eye-catching features.

The city looks futuristic with its skyscrapers, while at the same time, with some 3,000 years of history, it still preserves a distinct culture and lifestyle.

The live show started in the Jiefangbei area, which is the equivalent of Times Square in New York, surrounded by giant billboards and brand-name retailers.

The US celebrity had attracted millions of fans in China soon after he started his China livestreaming tour on March 24, with his short videos going viral online.

His appearance in Chongqing immediately drew large crowds, and he had to urge them to calm down.

Accompanied by local English-speaking internet celebrity Chen

Rui, the American tasted ice cream with spicy chili oil, visited Kuixinglou Square, which has become a global sensation due to its unique architectural features, and took metro Line 2 to the famous Liziba Station where the train passes through a 19-story residential building.

He then took a ride on the 112-meter-long Huangguan Escalator, the highest single-grading escalator in China and Asia when it was built. He also experienced Chongqing's dazzling transportation infrastructure, including the highest overpass in the country at 72 meters and Huangjuewan Overpass which connects more than 20 ramps and eight different roads.

"It (the tour) is very hectic and it has a lot of energy. Everyone is full of passion," Chen said. "It is a very meaningful trip and a good opportunity to introduce Chongqing to the world."

As one fan on YouTube put it after watching the Chongqing livestream, "Growing up in America I was told entirely wrong things about China. But after watching these Speed streams I'm definitely visiting soon!"

"These videos have completely flipped my perception of China on its head. Our French media had painted a wildly inaccurate picture of it. I'd absolutely love to travel to China with my friends sometime soon!" said another YouTube user.

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ECO-BURIALS TAKE ROOT IN FUNERAL INDUSTRY

Relatives opt for tree and sea final services as traditions change

By ZHAO YIMENG
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In a quiet corner of Phoenix Mountain Ecological Cemetery in Luoyang, Henan province, a memorial ceremony was held in late March next to rows of white pines and golden osmanthus trees. Beneath the trees lie the remains of 229 people, who were interred not in traditional tombs but in biodegradable urns designed to return to the earth.

Since its inception in 2016, the cemetery's eco-burial initiative "I Wish to Become a Tree" has offered a free, environmentally friendly alternative to conventional burials. The project was among the first in the city to promote the concept of tree burials, where ashes are interred under trees instead of in large stone graves, said Cui Zhenyu, deputy marketing director of the memorial park.

In 2016, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and eight other government departments issued guidelines promoting ecological burials that save land. "But even before the policy, we had already started exploring this idea," Cui said.

It began with a local writer searching for a dignified resting place for his late wife. Disheartened by the bustle of scenic spots, he approached the memorial park with the idea of a tree burial. "He believed memorials should be about remembrance, not monuments," Cui said.

The cemetery's authorities agreed with the eco-friendly and land-saving funeral rites, seeing it as a future trend in the industry and pioneering the idea in Luoyang, he added.

A collective tree burial ceremony has since been held each year ahead of Qingming Festival, or Tomb Sweeping Day, providing interment services for applicants.

Returning to nature

In recent years, China has been promoting eco-burials, with many regions introducing public benefit policies. With a change in attitudes toward life and death, an increasing number of people are choosing green methods such as sea and tree burials. Returning to nature has become a new trend in funeral practices.

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Newstand prices:
US \$1 Canada C\$1
UK 1.6 EU 1.6
Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling
Asia Pacific: Thailand 120
thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat;
Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

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CHINA

Philippine spy network broken up

Authorities say suspects admitted conducting surveillance near military facilities

By ZHAO JIA
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China's national security authorities have dismantled a Philippine espionage network operating within its borders and detained three Philippine nationals suspected of spying on Chinese soil.

Authorities had noticed a foreigner frequently appearing near military facilities, who was behaving in a highly suspicious manner.

The man was later identified as David Servanez, a Philippine national who is a long-term resident of China. He was apprehended during espionage activities.

Servanez confessed that during a

holiday in the Philippines, a man named Richie Herrera, who told him he worked for the Philippine intelligence agency, asked him to gather information on Chinese military deployments and promised to offer monthly payments as an incentive.

Directed remotely by Herrera, Servanez frequently conducted close-range surveillance and took photographs near Chinese military facilities, amassing sensitive information from various sources.

Chinese authorities said that since 2021, Herrera, a Philippine military intelligence operative, has recruited Servanez, Albert Endencia and Nathalie Plizardo — three Phil-

ippine nationals living in China — and trained them for covert intelligence missions.

Herrera also tasked them with collecting information on other Filipinos in China in an effort to help the Philippine espionage agency recruit additional operatives.

Chinese authorities also revealed that the Philippine espionage agency wired monthly payments to Servanez and others, with additional bonuses given based on the value of the intelligence they gathered.

Investigations uncovered that the Philippine espionage agency has long tracked China's activities, with a keen focus on collecting intelligence about its military deployments.

Servanez and the others photographed and collected extensive military and classified materials during their time in China, passing them to Herrera and gravely undermining China's national security, authorities said.

After conducting a meticulous investigation and securing solid evidence, China's national security authorities lawfully detained the three Filipinos.

All three suspects have confessed and expressed remorse. In particular, Servanez acknowledged the good living environment China provided him, and said he deeply regretted damaging its interests, authorities said.

Endencia urged others in similar situations to turn themselves in, while Plizardo, who was recruited by Philippine intelligence in January 2024, said she regretted her actions from the bottom of her heart.

The case remains under investigation, with the suspects' legal rights and interests being protected as proceedings continue.

Under China's Counterintelligence Law, foreign entities or individuals conducting, instigating or funding others to carry out espionage activities against China's national security will face legal consequences.

The national security agency warns foreigners in China not to participate in espionage or activities that harm China's national security.

Political Lens

Xi extends condolences over passing of Laos' former president

President Xi Jinping sent a message to Lao President Thongloun Siphouth on Wednesday, extending his deep condolences over the passing of Laos' former president Khamtay Siphandone and his sincere sympathy to his family.

In the message to Thongloun, who is also general secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, described Khamtay as a steadfast communist, a prominent leader of the older generation of the Lao party and state, and a close comrade and friend of the CPC and the Chinese people.

He made significant contributions to the development of relations between the two parties and two countries, Xi said, adding that the CPC, the Chinese government and the Chinese people will cherish the memory of Khamtay forever.

Noting that China and Laos are good neighbors, friends, comrades and partners, Xi expressed China's willingness to work with Laos to advance the building of a community with a shared future and achieve greater development in their respective socialist causes.

Khamtay passed away at the age of 102 at 10:30 pm local time on Wednesday, according to the LPRP Central Committee.

Messages mark 30 years of diplomatic ties with Bosnia and Herzegovina

President Xi Jinping and rotating Chairperson of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Zeljka Cvijanovic exchanged congratulations on the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries on Thursday.

In his congratulatory message, Xi hailed the development of bilateral ties in the past 30 years, saying that both countries have upheld the principles of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit, with their political mutual trust deepened and pragmatic cooperation yielding fruitful results.

The two countries have set an example of friendly coexistence and mutual development between big and small countries with different historical backgrounds and different social systems, he said.

Noting that he attaches great importance to the development of China's relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Xi expressed his willingness to work together with Cvijanovic to use the 30th anniversary as a new starting point to continue the traditional friendship and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation to bring the countries' ties to a new stage and deliver more benefits to the people of both countries.

Cvijanovic said that her country is willing to further deepen its relations with China to achieve common prosperity.

CHINA DAILY

Tariffs: Big impact likely on emerging markets

From page 1

He said that China is likely to strengthen ties with Southeast Asia, as well as with Japan and South Korea, to mitigate the fallout from Washington's protectionist turn.

Given the complex and ever-changing international landscape, He Yadong, a spokesman for the Ministry of Commerce, said that China and the EU should uphold the independence and stability of China-EU economic and trade relations.

Both sides have agreed to communicate regularly at the ministerial level on economic and trade affairs and to strengthen exchanges on major China-EU economic and trade issues, He said at a news briefing in Beijing.

Qian Wei, chief analyst of overseas economy and major asset classes at China Securities, noted that initial expectations centered on the EU and China, but the actual scope turned out to be much broader, with emerging markets facing even higher tariffs.

As the market had not fully anticipated the imposition of uniform and large-scale tariffs on emerging markets, the impact on those economies could be substantial, said Qian.

John Keane, a professor of politics at the University of Sydney, said that the real loser in this situation will be the US. By targeting major global economies and imposing steep tariffs on Chinese exports, the US risks facing significant blowback.

"While Washington promotes the idea of 'reindustrializing' as a strategic response, many economists are skeptical. The reality is that today's most advanced industrial investments are deeply embedded in complex global supply chains," said Keane.

"In sectors like electric vehicles, the idea that the US could quickly catch up with players such as BYD and other leading Chinese manufacturers is a joke," he added.

US Senator Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, also expressed concern: "If these tariffs go into effect, it will be so harmful. And as price hikes always do, they will hurt those the most who can afford them the least."

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said the US "reciprocal tariffs" will "fundamentally change the international trading system". Canada would fight US tariffs with countermeasures, although his country and Mexico were not on the list of new tariffs, he added.

"There's only one conclusion: Trump is convinced that he's smarter than the many economists and business leaders who have urged him not to raise tariffs and risk a trade war," Anthony Moretti, an associate professor in the Communication and Organizational Leadership Department at Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania, told China Daily.

In the first two months of 2025, the US remained China's third-largest trading partner, with total bilateral trade reaching 733.67 billion yuan (\$101 billion), up 3.5 percent year-on-year, according to the General Administration of Customs.

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Musical beauty

A woman plays a musical instrument on a boat at a park in Beijing's Chaoyang district on Wednesday. The capital city has launched a series of spring events highlighting flower blossoms and promoting eco-cultural fun.

JIANG QIMING/
CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Editorial

Tariff war against world will likely make US fall again

Although the United States administration has tried to make the additional tariffs it is imposing on countries look somewhat lenient by calculating them based on how each country taxes goods from the US, and making the rates lower than the "reciprocal" level the US president threatened, the impact of the tariff hikes announced on Thursday will nonetheless be comparable to the country dropping a nuclear bomb on the world trade system, as some observers have said.

The US leader eyes what he describes as "discounted" tariffs as a quick-fix for the US chronic economic woes. But that is actually a mission impossible. The ramifications of the move will be profound as the US' trade aggression will necessarily prompt retaliatory measures from those countries hit by the castigatory tariffs, seemingly imposed on them for having the affront to trade with the nation.

The US will soon find itself caught on a horn of dilemma of its own making, as it will not be

immune to the effects. The shock waves will be felt throughout the multilateral trading system, and the operational costs of the world economy will soar. The protectionist, unilateral and bullying tariff policy, which will have a boomerang effect on the US economy, will not address the US' trade deficit nor federal deficit, nor will it revitalize US manufacturing, which is simply a crumb of hope thrown to those supporters struggling to make ends meet.

Under the World Trade Organization system, the principle of "reciprocity" does exist, but it does not mean absolute equivalence in tariffs. The WTO's principle of reciprocity emphasizes a comprehensive balance to ensure that all members can benefit from the overall trade system, rather than simply matching tariff figures one-to-one in bilateral trade relations, nor does it signify equivalence in bilateral trade volume. While the WTO's principle of reciprocity seeks to foster fair and balanced trade relationships among member countries, the US adminis-

tration's unilateral tariff policies are subverting this ethos. By weaponizing tariffs in a bid to strong-arm concessions from the US' trading partners, the US administration is erecting an unfair and unbalanced trade regime, destabilizing the multilateral trading system and flouting the WTO's foundational rules.

The US administration pretends to be blind to the fact that the tariffs in place under the WTO framework are the result of negotiations based on the principle of reciprocity by members through a "market for market" approach. The WTO also requires continuous advancement of trade negotiations to achieve dynamic equivalence. In comparison, the concept of "equivalence" defined by the US administration is extremely prejudiced and its acting accordingly will necessarily backfire.

The armchair strategists in Washington's narrow understanding of reciprocity and obsession with "America First" have spurred the US to weaponize tariffs without thinking about the broader consequences. Nor do they seem to realize the US will not be immune

to the consequences.

As the European Central Bank predicts, if the Europe Union retaliates against the US' measures, the US GDP could fall by 0.5 percent. And the International Monetary Fund also warns the trade tensions triggered by the tariff war could set back US economic growth. The rich guys who have bankrolled the US president may not feel the heat, but ordinary Americans will, and they are unlikely to take kindly to the broken promise that things will get better.

The US' sizable trade deficit in goods is due to the imbalance of its domestic finances and the international currency status of the US dollar. The US president hopes to strengthen the international currency status of the US dollar to obtain "seigniorage" on the one hand and achieve a better trade balance on the other hand, which is fundamentally against the law of the market.

The sweeping tariff war the US administration has launched might prove a watershed for the US, making April 2 anything but "Liberation Day" as the US leader declared.

Cultural exchange



A fitness enthusiast from Argentina interacts with others while participating in a traditional dance in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province, on Thursday. ZHANG WENLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Cyberattacks on Games traced to US

By LI SHANGYI
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The event information systems for the 2025 Asian Winter Games in Harbin were subjected to 270,167 cyberattacks from abroad between Jan 26 and Feb 14, with most originating from the United States, according to a report released on Thursday.

China's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center said in the report that cybersecurity monitoring and analysis covered the Games' information systems and key infrastructure in Heilongjiang province during the event.

The 9th Asian Winter Games took place from Feb 7 to Feb 14 in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang. While the event drew widespread attention both domestically and internationally, it also became a target for cyberattacks, the report said.

The number of attacks fluctuated, with a notable increase from Feb 7 to

Feb 13, peaking on Feb 8, according to the report.

The US accounted for the largest share, with 170,864 attacks, or 63.24 percent of the total. Following the US, Singapore accounted for 40,449 attacks, or 14.97 percent, followed by the Netherlands (12,414 attacks, or 4.95 percent), Germany (6,682 attacks, or 2.47 percent) and South Korea (1,281 attacks, or 0.47 percent).

The attacks targeted multiple event information systems, with the most frequent attempts directed at the event information release system, the entry and exit management system, and the card payment system, the report said.

Authorities blocked 12,602 high-risk malicious IP addresses during the Games. The addresses were involved in scanning the systems for vulnerabilities and attempting to steal data or damage the systems. Most of these attacks originated from foreign DigitalOcean cloud service hosts, the report said.

The report also identified cyberat-

tacks targeting key information infrastructure in Heilongjiang. From Jan 31 to Feb 14, the Netherlands accounted for the largest number of attacks, with 37.98 million, followed by the US with 11.79 million and Thailand with 720,000. Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, Lithuania, Canada, Japan and Singapore ranked fourth through 10th.

The report condemned cyberattacks targeting major international events and said details had been submitted to public security authorities.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun responded on Thursday that the report once again indicates that China is one of the main victims of cyberattacks globally.

"We urge the US to adopt a responsible approach, engage in more self-reflection and refrain from making baseless accusations against others," Guo said. "China will continue to take necessary measures to safeguard its cybersecurity."

COVER



Top left: Funeral workers lead relatives of the deceased in a collective tree burial ceremony at Phoenix Mountain cemetery in Luoyang, Henan province, last month. **Top right:** Flower petals are laid with the remains of the deceased during a tree burial ceremony. **Above left:** Relatives bow to pay respect to the deceased at the ceremony. **Above right:** Urns are placed in pits during a tree burial ceremony at the cemetery in Luoyang last year. PHOTOS BY CHEN JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Burial: Showing love trumps mere square meters

From page 1

At the Phoenix Mountain memorial park, each urn is crafted from biodegradable materials designed to dissolve over three to five years, allowing the ashes to integrate naturally with the soil and the burial plot to be reused.

The park is home to over 20 white pines and 100 golden osmanthus trees. "Pines symbolize enduring life. Osmanthus trees bloom with a sweet fragrance every year, as if those who rest here are still contributing to the environment," Cui said.

Each tree accommodates up to eight urns, and families can locate their loved ones via a meticulously maintained memorial wall. "If family members want to visit, they can find the exact tree where their loved one rests," Cui said.

"In a culture where burial traditions run deep, the gentle accommodation matters," he said.

At first, only a handful of families participated, Cui recalled. "Now, we see more families actively inquiring about it, especially among well-educated older adults who see tree burial as a meaningful final contribution to society," he said.

In the past, some elderly people with no descendants had opted for free eco-burials because they didn't need a place for family visits and the service was not an economic burden. "But more families are choosing this because they genuinely believe in the values it represents," Cui said.

Traditionally, Chinese culture has emphasized large, grand tombs as signs of filial piety. But this idea has gradually changed as people realized that love

and respect are not measured in square meters. "Families are starting to see that commemoration is about memory, not monuments," Cui said.

He recounted the case of a woman who donated her body for medical research and had her ashes laid to rest beneath a tree. "She and her husband made an agreement before she passed," Cui said, adding that her children have since expressed a wish to follow in her footsteps.

Younger generations no longer see death and funeral rites as bad luck or filled with fear, nor do they avoid talking about the issue, especially in big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, Cui said.

Residents with household registration in Beijing who choose sea or natural burials for cremated remains can use six free funeral services provided by funeral homes in the city, according to a circular recently released by the Beijing Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau. The services are: body grooming, refrigeration, transportation, a farewell ceremony, cremation and temporary ashes storage.

For those who choose a natural burial, the government provides a subsidy of 4,000 yuan (\$550) per set of ashes to service providers to cover biodegradable urns, farewell ceremonies, and burial ceremonies for the deceased, it added.

Heaven can wait

Earlier this year, 32-year-old Song Yunfang and her family joined a waitlist at Taiziyu Cemetery to have their grandfather's remains buried under a

"We feel that showing love and care while our family members are alive matters more. Remembering them fondly in our hearts is the truest way of paying tribute."

Song Yunfang, 32, who joined a waitlist to have her grandfather's remains buried under a tree



A relative ties memorial paper bow ties to trees during a tree burial in Luoyang, Henan province, last year. CHEN JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

tree. The cemetery is one of a few designated hubs for free ecological interment under the municipal bureau.

"My grandfather had expressed that he didn't want to be confined to a specific place and preferred a more natural and free approach," Song said.

"We also felt that maintaining a traditional grave required regular visits and upkeep, which could be challenging with family members living abroad."

The family was told that it could take a year to find a place for their grandfather in a collective burial ceremony, due to high demand. About 60 families usually participate in the monthly ceremony from May to October, according to Song.

Once notified about the ceremony, the remains are temporarily stored at an office under the management of Beijing Funeral Service, then transferred to Taiziyu. There's no specific tree or marked location for an individual buried at the cemetery. However, there is a shared space where families can leave flowers or pay their respects in a communal area.

This approach meets with growing environmental consciousness and changing perceptions of death. "It's not about having a grand monument, but cherishing the memories and values our loved ones left behind," Song said.

Song's family had maintained a conventional grave for their grandmother, who passed away in 2006. However, with the plot's lease expiring next year, the family has decided to transition to a tree burial for both grandparents.

"We used to think that a large tombstone signified respect. But now, we

feel that showing love and care while our family members are alive matters more. Remembering them fondly in our hearts is the truest way of paying tribute," she said.

Some of Song's friends have been inspired by her experience and are now considering tree burials for their loved ones.

Li Yang, a funeral consultant based in Beijing, said families can also pay for tree burials at some local memorial parks to avoid long waiting times, with prices ranging from around 10,000 to 100,000 yuan. Relatives can spend more to have a loved one buried in a special location or interred under their own tree, he said.

Some parents of deceased children find flower bed burials appealing because their child loved flowers, while others shun traditional tombstones as they can appear frightening to youngsters, Li added.

Despite growing acceptance, ecological burials remain a small segment of China's funeral industry. Statistics from civil affairs authorities show that the proportion of eco-burials has risen to 3.2 percent, Xinhua News Agency reported last year.

Given that elaborate tombs and large burial plots are seen as a sign of filial piety in Chinese tradition, many people may consider eco-burials too simplistic and lacking in respect, said Cui from the cemetery in Luoyang.

"But over time, as more people see how much thought and care go into the ceremonies, they will begin to understand," he said.

Zhou Wenbo contributed to this story.

Green funerals rise in Mother Nature's final embrace

By ZHAO YIMENG
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Since the launch of sea burials in 1994, Beijing has laid nearly 40,000 residents to rest in the ocean, a Beijing Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau spokesperson said.

Yang Zhiwei said sea burials now account for 4 percent of the city's annual cremation services. "In the recent decade, we have seen a gradual rise in public acceptance and participation in sea burials," Yang said at a news conference a week before this year's Tomb

Sweeping Day, which falls on Friday.

In 2017, Beijing expanded its ecological burial options by introducing natural burials. Municipal and district cemeteries have since promoted a number of personalized, land-saving green burials.

During this year's Qingming Festival, Beijing will host multiple sea burial ceremonies and launch a collaborative sea burial event at Tianjin Port for residents of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. An eco-burial memorial event will be held at Changqingyuan Cemetery in

Beijing's Chaoyang district to raise public awareness and acceptance of sea and natural burials, Yang said.

Featuring minimal land use and the absence of tombstones, eco-burial options include tree, lawn, flower bed, wall, sea, and deep-ground without a gravestone burials, all of which allow ashes to integrate with nature and return to the earth or sea.

Meanwhile, innovative eco-burial methods are also emerging worldwide. Natural organic reduction, sometimes referred to as "human

composting", is defined as the contained, accelerated conversion of human remains to soil.

The process uses large tanks, containers, or similar vessels to hold human remains together with straw, wood chips, and alfalfa for four to six weeks, according to the National Funeral Directors Association in the United States. Over several weeks, microbial activity breaks down the body, transforming it into nutrient-rich soil.

The average cost of such a funeral is around \$7,000. In January 2023, New York became the sixth

US state to legalize human composting.

Other innovative burial practices include cryo-burials, where bodies are preserved at -196 C using liquid nitrogen. Developed by Swedish scientists, this method dehydrates and pulverizes the body into powder. South Korea was the first country in Asia to adopt this technology, according to Chongqing-based Shangyou News.

Space burials, once a concept of science fiction, have also become a reality. In 2018, US-based Elysium Space sent the remains of 100 indi-

viduals into outer space aboard SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket. For \$2,500, families can send 1 gram of ashes into orbit, with a tracking app to follow the satellite's path around Earth, BBC reported.

In addition, fireworks burials mix ashes into fireworks for a final send-off in the night sky. Families can organize personal displays or work with professional companies to create tailored pyrotechnic shows, with costs ranging from \$1,800 to \$3,600.

Zhou Wenbo contributed to this story.

WORLD

US reacts to Trump's latest round of tariffs

Stock indices plunge as market absorbs impact of taxes on more than 180 countries

By MAYZHOU in Houston
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The most stark reaction to US President Donald Trump's broad tariffs was reflected in the US stock market on Thursday.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped more than 1,600 points; the Nasdaq was down by almost 6 percent; the S&P 500 was lower by nearly 5 percent, while the US 10-year Treasury note yield was down to 4 percent, which signaled a flight to safer investments.

More than \$2 trillion in value was wiped from the US stock market, or an average of more than \$5,000 in one day for each American.

On Wednesday, Trump announced 10 percent tariffs on all imports from over 180 countries and territories, and higher rates on some trading partners. China, one of the US' major trade partners, now faces a 54 percent tariff rate overall.

An opinion piece titled "Trump's New Protectionist Age" by The Wall Street Journal Editorial Board called the move "another large step toward a new old era of trade protectionism."

"Assuming the policy sticks — and we hope it doesn't — the effort amounts to an attempt to remake the US economy and the world trading system," the editorial said.

The WSJ said that if the tariff brings widespread retaliation from other countries, "the result could be shrinking world trade and slower growth, recession, or worse." It listed other potential consequences: harm to US exports, a deeper Washington "swamp" in which businesses lobby for tariff exemptions, and the end of US economic leadership in the world.

David Rosenberg, president and founder of Rosenberg Research, said no winner will come out of a global trade war. "And a lot of that will get transmitted into the consumer, so we're in for several months of a very significant price shock for the American household

sector," he told CNBC.

Of thousands of comments made on the WSJ website about the tariffs, the vast majority were critical of the policy.

"I thought I'd be able to retire in five years. Now, thanks to your lunatic tariffs, I'll be working ten more — if I'm lucky enough to find work. But surprise! I just got fired today... by DOGE," reader Timothy B wrote.

He said the tariff is "a financial death sentence wrapped in a red hat and stamped 'Made in Chaos'" and questioned: "Prices are up, jobs are down, and your answer is more tariffs?"

Reader David Andrews said he started shopping for a Chevy Equinox on March 4. "The average advertised dealer discount was \$2K in March. Now it is zero. One dealer even posted a 'Market Adjustment' on top of the MSRP. So much winning! MAGA!" he said sarcastically, vowing to never vote for the GOP again unless it pushes back against the tariffs.

Experts said that American consumers will see price increases for daily goods, such as pineapples, 88 percent of which are imported from Costa Rica, which faces a 10 percent tariff; cashews, 89 percent of which are imported from Vietnam, which faces a 46 percent tariff.

When Christmas comes along, American consumers can expect to pay more also: Roughly 70 percent of Christmas lights are imported from Cambodia, which faces a 49 percent tariff.

Shane Oliver, head of investment strategy and chief economist at AMP, said the new tariff rate is above levels seen in the 1930s and it will "in turn add to the risk of a US recession — via a further blow to confidence and supply chain disruptions — and a bigger hit to global growth."

With the new tariffs, Oliver predicted that "the risk of a US recession is probably now around 40 percent" and global growth could be

pushed down by 1 percent, "depending on how significant retaliation is and how countries like China respond with policy stimulus."

However, many people in Trump's base cheered for the decision, believing that it will bring jobs back to America.

"I can't believe I am alive to see this in America. I remember when they started stripping our country's manufacturing and the slow decimation of our communities large and small," one user commented on Fox News' YouTube channel. "So much hurt and pain and devastation to our people. Crime, drugs, education, mistrust will all be corrected when we start to prosper again. The pride in our country will have no bounds."

However, some experts don't believe the tariffs will bring manufacturing jobs back.

Steven Durlauf, a professor at the University of Chicago, said during a Q&A session on Wednesday that "tariffs are likely to cause negative employment effects because of the way that they ripple through the economy."

Taking the steel tariff as an example, Durlauf said that while it might bring back limited jobs to an industry with a total of 150,000 workers, it negatively impacted more than 2 million manufacturing jobs involved with making products using steel. So, the total job gains were actually negative as a result of the tariff.

Others pointed toward the emerging role of robotics and AI in future manufacturing, without need for a large number of workers.

"I've personally worked with AI robotics companies who are much further along than people realize. In five years, the already anachronistic idea of a US manufacturing revival will be even more broken by nearly fully automated factories," Michael Ball commented on the WSJ site.

On Thursday, Trump left the White House for a trip to Florida. "I think it's going very well," he told the media before boarding Air Force One. "The markets are going to boom, the stock is going to boom, and the country is going to boom."



Chen Jie (right), a member of the Chinese Red Cross International Emergency Response Team, delivers lunch to quake-affected residents in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Thursday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

China's 2nd aid supplies reach Myanmar

YANGON — The second batch of emergency humanitarian aid supplies dispatched by the Chinese government arrived at Yangon International Airport in Myanmar on Thursday.

The devastating 7.9-magnitude earthquake has claimed 3,085 lives, left 4,715 injured, and 341 people were reported missing, according to the Information Team of Myanmar's State Administration Council on Thursday.

The second batch of aid supplies includes 800 tents, 2,000 blankets, 3,000 boxes of biscuits, 2,000 boxes of mineral water and other urgently needed supplies. These were transported to Yangon from China by a chartered flight.

The first batch of emergency humanitarian aid supplies dispatched by the Chinese government for earthquake disaster relief arrived in Myanmar on March 31.

Li Ming, spokesman for China International Development Cooperation Agency, said China is willing to continue providing assistance to the people in the disaster-stricken areas based on Myanmar's needs — supporting their efforts to overcome the disaster as soon as possible.

He expressed confidence that

with the joint efforts of China and the international community, the people of Myanmar will surely be able to tide over the disaster and rebuild their homes at an early date.

Chinese rescuers were continuing search and rescue operations in Mandalay, and have so far rescued 9 survivors from the rubble.

Due to the persistently high temperatures in the disaster-hit area, with daytime temperatures exceeding 40 C, and the increasing presence of mosquitoes at the operation sites, the China international search and rescue team has taken the lead in carrying out epidemic prevention and disinfection work at team camps and rescue sites.

Temporary ceasefire

On Wednesday, the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services of Myanmar said a temporary ceasefire will be in effect from April 2 to April 22, the office said in a statement.

The country is making every effort to continue rescue and reconstruction work, it said.

The statement said that during the temporary ceasefire, ethnic armed organizations and other armed

groups must not obstruct or attack civilian transportation routes, harm lives or public property, assault security force camps engaged in safety and law enforcement duties, attack military bases, mobilize or reorganize forces that undermine peace, or carry out any territorial expansion. If such actions are taken, the defense forces will take necessary measures to protect the people.

As of Thursday morning, Myanmar has experienced 66 aftershocks ranging from magnitudes 2.8 to 7.5, according to the country's Department of Meteorology and Hydrology.

The United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric said continuing aftershocks are complicating humanitarian response efforts. In Mandalay City, the quake's epicenter, many people are completely cut off from electricity and running water.

"People affected continue to need urgent healthcare and medical supplies, safe drinking water, food and other critical items," Dujarric said. "Tents and temporary shelter are needed, as well as latrines and other hygiene items, to prevent disease outbreaks."

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Tariffs dampen investor sentiment

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo,
YANG HAN in Hong Kong
and XIN XIN in Sydney

Investor sentiment worsened after US President Donald Trump announced that the United States would implement "reciprocal tariffs" on imports from multiple countries, sparking concerns over a potential economic downturn for not only the US but other economies too.

Government leaders of Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia have called for responsive measures while analysts noticed negative signals in the markets.

Japanese stocks plunged on Thursday as Trump pressed ahead with higher-than-expected tariffs. The benchmark Nikkei 225 briefly tumbled over 1,600 points from the previous day, hitting 34,102 — the lowest level since early August — during trading hours on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. By the close, the Nikkei 225 marked a 2.8 percent decline.

On Wednesday, Trump announced that the US would implement a 10 percent baseline tariff across the board, with additional tariffs imposed on nearly 60 countries and regions at differing rates. Trading partners like Japan, South Korea and India will face tariffs of 24 percent, 26 percent, and 27 percent respectively.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba met with key officials on Thursday to assess the economic impact of the reciprocal tariffs and formulate Japan's response.

Hidetoshi Tashiro, chief economist with the Japanese consultancy Infinity LLC, said the additional tariffs on Japanese imports appear arbitrary, with no clear justification.

"The arbitrary imposition of tariffs raises concerns that similar arbitrary regulations could be applied to foreign companies operating within the US. As a result, many foreign firms are hesitant to make direct investments in the country," said Tashiro.

"In the coming years, Japan and



Traders operate at a bank trading hall in Seoul, South Korea, on Thursday. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

China must protect East Asia from the tsunami of Trump tariffs by strongly adhering to and rapidly developing a free trade area that includes South Korea and Southeast Asia," Tashiro said.

On Thursday, South Korea's acting President Han Duck-soo ordered an "all-out" response to the US reciprocal tariffs on imports from the country.

Moon Jong-chol, a research fellow at the Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade, warned that the latest US tariff measures could trigger a global recession, with South Korea, along with the US and other economies, feeling the impact for the foreseeable future.

Greater challenges

With the higher-than-expected reciprocal tariffs, South Korea faces greater trade challenges with the US than ever before, Moon said.

Australia has been hit with the Trump administration's flat 10 percent global tariff but has avoided the steeper "reciprocal tariffs" the US imposed on many of its major trading partners.

Prime Minister Anthony Alba-

nese said the tariffs have "no basis in logic" and condemned the step as "not the act of a friend." The country's central bank also cautioned that US trade policies pose serious economic risks, disrupting markets and driving up costs for businesses.

"In the face of US tariffs, Australia has an uncomfortable choice: act with the courage of its convictions around the rule-based order or act with cowardice, kowtowing to the US," said Daryl Guppy, an international financial technical analysis expert who previously served on the national board of the Australia China Business Council.

Australia should coordinate a regional response to uphold the rules-based order and swiftly align itself with international institutions that support free trade, Guppy said. "Australia needs to show full support for ASEAN, APEC, the RCEP trade and other regional agreements," he said.

Alexis Hoot in Sydney contributed to this story.

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Tariffs have car buyers moving fast

By RENALI in Los Angeles
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Allan Cheng, an auto dealer in Los Angeles, recently posted on social media to inform his customers that due to the recent large fluctuations in vehicle prices and inventory, they would no longer be able to provide a unified quotation reference as they had in the past.

"We expect the cost of vehicles from at least 20 brands to increase by anywhere from \$4,000 to \$12,500 due to the tariffs," Cheng told China Daily.

The new tariffs, announced by President Donald Trump on Wednesday, which Trump called "Liberation Day", imposed tariffs on foreign-made cars and light-duty trucks. The 25 percent tariff on all imported vehicles took effect on Thursday.

Cheng explained that many key components of vehicles like the 2025 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 4XE are manufactured in Mexico or Canada. As a result, the new tariffs are expected to drive up prices significantly in April.

Scott Jones, a resident of Rancho Santa Margarita, had been considering a new car for months, hoping to replace his aging Honda Accord in the summer. However, the US administration's decision to impose new auto tariffs has forced him to expedite his purchase.

Jones had been considering the 2025 Toyota RAV4 Limited Hybrid, a popular choice among environmentally

conscious consumers. He found his ideal model, in midnight black with a beige interior, at a local dealership. With tariffs set to significantly increase costs on foreign-made vehicles, including those from Japan, he feared waiting would mean paying thousands of dollars more. After negotiating a deal, he drove his new SUV home last weekend.

"I didn't want to risk the price jumping in a few months. It made sense to buy now," Jones said.

His decision reflects a broader trend among car buyers. Auto dealerships in California have reported a noticeable surge in demand as consumers rush to secure foreign-made vehicles before the 25 percent tariff takes effect at midnight Thursday.

"The talk of a potential price increase is spreading. While we can't say for certain what will happen, right now it might be wise to make a purchase to avoid any surprises later," said Elsie Mooney, a sales associate at a Toyota dealership.

Critics, including auto industry executives, warn that the new policy could have devastating effects on manufacturers and consumers alike. The economic costs and benefits of tariffs are different now than in the past due to the rise of global value chains, according to Robert Johnson, a professor of economics at the University of Notre Dame.

"The North American automobile industry is deeply integrated, with

vehicles assembled in the US containing a significant number of imported parts, while cars assembled in Mexico or Canada rely on US suppliers," Johnson said. "Tariffs, therefore, disrupt supply chains, raise production costs and ultimately impact consumer prices."

Research from the Yale Budget Lab projects that tariffs will drive up vehicle prices by an average of 13.5 percent, adding roughly \$6,400 to the cost of a typical new 2024 model.

The auto industry is already bracing for widespread consequences. The Center for Automotive Research estimates that if tariffs remain in place, US car sales could decline by up to 2 million units annually. General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis — major automakers with extensive supply chains spanning North America — are expected to face increased costs, which may be passed on to consumers.

Johnson noted the hidden consequences of tariffs in an interconnected market. While the goal might be for consumers to buy more US-assembled cars instead of those assembled in Mexico, US cars contain imported parts.

"This makes the shift in demand the tariff less attractive to the government," he explained. "Because it's losing some of the benefits of that tariff to foreign auto parts suppliers."

Agenies contributed to the story.

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PEOPLE

Generations guard heroes' resting place

A teacher answers calls of family duty in protecting legacy of a Red Army soldier

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu
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For over nine decades, Feng Lian's family has remained in the mountains of Changpingshan in Nanbu county, Sichuan province, guarding the tomb of a Red Army company commander — a solemn commitment spanning four generations.

Feng, a 33-year-old teacher in a primary school in Nanmu township of Nanbu, is the fourth-generation keeper of the tomb.

Located about 20 meters from her home, it holds the remains of commander Liu of the Red Army led by the Communist Party of China, who died at age 25. Eleven members of Feng's family are buried alongside his resting place.

"We only know his surname was Liu and that he came from Henan province," said Feng. Although her father, Ma Quanmin, the third-generation keeper, used to ask visitors from Henan to help trace his family, the efforts were all in vain.

Feng's childhood memories vividly recall her maternal grandfather, Chen Zhongmin, gathering the family to sweep the tomb during festivals. "Back then, meat was a rare treat we only got during the Spring Festival," she recalled. "Yet grandpa would always offer the first piece at commander Liu's tomb."

Grandfather would also tell Feng stories about commander Liu since she was little.

In 1933, commander Liu volunteered to stay behind at Changpingshan to cover the retreat of the leading forces. He often helped Feng's childless great-grandparents with housework. Her great-grandmother, surnamed Han, eventually treated him as a son.

"Local warlords made life unbearable — dozens of exorbitant taxes and levies left people without basic food and clothing," Feng said. "But the Red Army treated poor people like family."

Later, commander Liu was killed by warlord forces in battle, and his body was dumped at the foot of the mountain as a warning. The warlord troops threatened to execute entire families of anyone attempting to retrieve his remains.

On the third night, Han secretly carried commander Liu's body home with the help of her husband and relatives. She placed him in her own prepared coffin and buried him behind their house before daybreak.

The warlord forces arrested Han and tortured her for three days but failed to locate the body. She died three months after being released, leaving the last words: "The Red Army fought for the poor. Our family must guard commander Liu's tomb for generations."

Feng's great-grandfather later adopted a boy — her maternal grandfather — who never left Changpingshan his entire life. Her grandfather passed away in 2002, transferring the duty to his son-in-law.

"On his deathbed, grandpa told dad to watch over commander Liu's grave and to never forget this duty, in poverty or prosperity," Feng said.

Ma was a construction labor contractor in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. After his father-in-law's death, he returned to Changpingshan to guard the tomb. Life grew much more challenging as he could only sustain the family through farming and livestock raising in the mountainous area. Yet he never wavered in keeping the family promise.

Back then, meat was a rare treat we only got during the Spring Festival. Yet grandpa would always offer the first piece at commander Liu's tomb."

Feng Lian, a teacher and fourth-generation keeper of the martyr cemetery

A man with few words, Ma often told her daughter "All difficulties are temporary."

In 2011, local authorities in Nanbu county built a martyr cemetery centered around commander Liu's tomb. The cemetery now entombs 1,080 martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the revolutionary wars and in public service after the founding of New China in 1949.

Ma voluntarily took on the responsibility of guarding the entire cemetery.

Like many other youths born in rural areas and small towns, Feng once yearned for life in big cities. After graduating from college, she moved to Guangzhou in 2016 with her boyfriend, Zhou Heng, for e-commerce work.

Everything seemed perfect, except for that constant tug at her heart — Changpingshan, the mountains 1,500 kilometers away that never faded from her thoughts.

"Dad struggled with Mandarin and his failing eyesight. It pained him when he couldn't properly communicate with martyrs' families coming to seek their loved ones," Feng said. No one asked her to return, yet half a year later, she found her way back to Changpingshan.

In 2017, Feng passed a public recruitment examination to become a local primary school teacher. Every weekend and holiday, she returned home to help her father clean and maintain the cemetery.

She also volunteered to become the cemetery's guide. Along the field ridge in front of her home, she planted clusters of daisies of different colors — a living tribute for visitors to honor the martyrs.

Zhou, now her husband, respected Feng's choice and returned to Sichuan. On National Day in 2020, they married before the martyr cemetery.

"My husband never made grand speeches, but his actions speak volumes," Feng said.

On occasions such as Martyrs' Day and the Qingming Festival (Tomb Sweeping Day), local schools would organize students to visit the Changpingshan martyr cemetery. Feng would tell them stories about the Red Army and commander Liu.

"These stories are living lessons, teaching children to cherish today's hard-won happiness," she said.



Feng Lian sweeps the tomb of commander Liu of the Red Army. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Zhang Keyi and other overseas players pose for a group photo in July last year, at an international competition held in Pingdu, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Teen knife-throwing prodigy stuns global audiences

By CHEN YE in Hangzhou
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A "knife-throwing girl" has captivated global audiences with her remarkable videos on platforms like Douyin, showcasing unparalleled precision in throwing knives while spinning, garnering widespread attention on the internet.

The 13-year-old girl, Zhang Keyi, hails from Ningbo in East China's Zhejiang province.

Considering her introverted personality, Zhang's parents sent her to a martial arts training session to learn Sanda (a type of kickboxing in China) and nunchakus. But later, she was attracted by knife throwing. "Her body coordination is excellent. After learning some basic knife control techniques, she quickly became even more stable on target than many adults in just a few days of practice," said Zhang's father, Zhang Demin.

Knowing Zhang's talent in knife-throwing, her parents took her to Qingdao, Shandong province, in 2023 to seek guidance from Ju Zhenfei, a knife-throwing master in China.

Since then, Zhang has devoted countless hours to grueling training sessions, refining her technique and honing her skills to perfection. Training for 5 hours daily during summer and winter vacations and 8 hours on weekends has become the norm.

"After reaching the sixth grade of elementary school, due to the heavy workload of school assignments from Monday to Friday, there is basi-



Left: Zhang Keyi is awarded a qualification certificate in arbitration for her skill in knife handling in May 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Right: A poster of Zhang Keyi holding knives. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

cally no practice. However, every weekend, she perseveres in training for seven to eight hours. There is also a traditional martial arts class every weekend to improve her physical fitness and deepen her understanding of martial arts," her father shared.

She has made a world record of 53 knives hitting the target at a distance of 6 meters.

Zhang's father explained, "She excels in close-range events that test stability and quick reaction but lacks an advantage in long-distance throws. So, that is what she needs to break through. I estimate that with further intensive training during this summer vacation, she can achieve over 50 knives hitting the target from a distance of over 7 meters."

"This record has been achieved by only about 10 people worldwide, including adults," he added.

Zhang's distinctive blend of martial arts proficiency, dance skills, and unwavering commitment has set her apart as a rising star. Her mastery of complex techniques, especially her unique skill, "Spiral 12-Consecutive Throws," is a testament to her exceptional talent and agility.

Despite encountering setbacks and enduring injuries during practice, Zhang's resilience and passion for traditional martial arts have remained steadfast. "Martial arts have taught me not only skills but also unwavering determination," she said.

To raise awareness and appreciation for ancient art, Zhang and her

father have leveraged social media platforms to share her training videos with a global audience, and they have received more than 130,000 fans.

Seeing her videos gain international attention and receive praise from foreign viewers, Zhang experiences a profound sense of accomplishment and motivation.

During an international competition last year, the renowned Russian champion Sergey Fedosenko approached Zhang with excitement, saying that she is a star in Russia and everyone admires her skillful knife-throwing.

Embracing the accolades and spotlight, Zhang remains committed to her practice. "I aspire to compete abroad, showcasing the charm of Chinese martial arts to the world and fostering a deeper appreciation for our rich martial arts heritage," she said.

"Knife throwing is a lesser-known traditional martial art because of misconceptions about its safety and practicality," Zhang's father explained.

He highlighted the benefits of practicing knife throwing, like improving coordination, strength, focus, and patience. "It also helps preserve martial arts traditions and promote Chinese kungfu."

"Knife throwing is seen as a competitive sport abroad, but I envision it as an art. I hope my daughter not only shines in international competitions but also showcases Chinese knife throwing to global enthusiasts and impresses them with its beauty," he added.

Senior woman earns degrees via 16-year self-study

By CANG WEI in Nanjing
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In the dozens of examination rooms she attended, Feng Yan stood out among the young students taking the exam with her. At 88 years old, she wore a head full of silver hair. She embarked on her journey of self-study examinations at 72, spanning 16 years and participating in 97 exams.

Feng already holds self-taught undergraduate degrees in law from Nanjing University, engineering management from Nanjing Tech University, and agricultural economics management from Nanjing Agricultural University, all prestigious institutions in Jiangsu province.

"Self-study examinations are the lifelong dream I pursue," Feng repeated when asked why she persisted in taking self-study exams at such an advanced age.

Feng's connection with self-study exams dates back over 30 years. During the early days of China's reform and opening-up, as the society rapidly transformed and there was a high demand for talent in various fields, the self-study examination system advocating for self-learning and educational advancement thrived.

Feeling the call of the times, Feng, who only had a vocational school education then, applied for a self-study examination. However, she had to put her studies on hold due to a busy work schedule. As a mother of two daughters, her busy work and family life consumed all her time, and her dream of educational advancement could only remain a buried seed in her heart.



Feng Yan, who is 88 years old and participated in 97 exams over 16 years, attends a ceremony to receive her diploma. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Time passed swiftly, and upon retirement, enjoying a peaceful and leisurely life with filial children, Feng, who had toiled all her life, found the seed she had planted decades ago beginning to sprout.

She felt compelled to fulfill her lifelong dream. Learning that self-study exams had lenient policies not constrained by age, profession or educational background, Feng boldly registered for the exams. That autumn, at 72, she again picked up the textbooks she had set aside for many years.

It was not easy for her. Besides the challenges of aging, which brought diminished physical and mental capabilities, the rapid evolution of knowledge made it increasingly difficult for her.

Leveraging her professional expertise and work experience at the agricultural and industrial department of Nantong city, Feng

applied for the agricultural economics management program at Nanjing Agricultural University in 2009 at the age of 72.

She then consecutively took exams in law at Nanjing University and engineering management at Nanjing Tech University.

When asked about her study "secret", Feng stated that she set a principle to simplify her family life and prioritize her studies.

Feng is strict with herself, "rarely visiting others and seldom taking breaks even on holidays," she said.

Feng gave up senior citizen recreational activities to focus on her studies and never allowed her children to celebrate her birthday.

In 2015, during a trip to the United Kingdom to visit her granddaughter, Feng brought her self-study materials and continued learning in her spare time. Even in 2019, shortly after recovering from

a stroke with lingering effects, her top priority was to return to her desk and resume her studies.

With unwavering determination, she planned and finished her self-study exams. Over 16 years, Feng participated in 97 exams, achieving passing grades in 44 subjects.

In March, Feng was awarded her self-study graduation certificate by Guo Kai, vice-president of Nanjing Tech University, and Li Yongjun, deputy director of the Jiangsu Provincial Education Examination Authority.

Guo praised Feng's extraordinary perseverance, surpassing ordinary individuals, and emphasized her as an excellent real-life example and role model.

"Feng holds multiple records in the province's self-study system, including being the oldest examinee to obtain self-study certificates and the highest number of self-study graduation certificates among elderly candidates," said Li.

Feng said: "Participating in self-study exams, continuously improving myself, not only allowed me to fulfill my dreams but also helped me keep pace with the times."

Due to health reasons, Feng has decided to halt her self-study journey, but she intends to continue learning. Now, she spends her days learning to play the piano through her phone, making her later years more fulfilling.

She hopes that her experience of pursuing self-study exams at an advanced age will inspire more young people to seize the opportunity to study diligently and cultivate a lifelong habit of learning.

Guo Jun contributed to the story.

READ



Left: A male Elliot's pheasant flaps its wings while perching on a tree trunk at Fengtian village in Yongan county, Fujian province, in 2020. MEI YONGCUN / XINHUA



Right: A male silver pheasant stands on a tree trunk at Fengtian village in 2021. YANG ENJU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Silver economy at the flap of a wing

At 'silver pheasant village' in Fujian province, senior villagers run bird hides that cater to senior photographers

By CHEN LIANG in Sanming, Fujian
chenliang@chinadaily.com.cn

As China's population ages, pensioners are increasingly shaping the country's burgeoning "silver economy" and playing a significant role in driving consumption. This trend is exemplified in a flourishing hamlet nestled amid the rolling mountains of Yongan county in the southeastern province of Fujian.

Fengtian village in Qingshui She ethnic township, Yongan, may not be a household name for many, but for a niche community it stands out as a premier travel destination. With just 180 households and 800 residents, this hidden gem has captured the hearts of elderly bird photographers, a group largely composed of pensioners from major cities across the country.

Referred to affectionately as "silver pheasant village", Fengtian has gained renown among enthusiasts seeking to capture exquisite images of the majestic birds in their natural habitat.

"For those seeking to capture stunning photos of silver pheasants, Fengtian is a must-visit destination," Chen Guangyun, a pensioner from Beijing, told China Daily in the village.

"Here, you can catch a glimpse of these magnificent birds in a variety of picturesque settings, from bamboo forests and clear streams to blooming trees and at sunset."

Developing bird hides

The idea of catering to bird photographers in Fengtian first occurred to Zhu Fusheng, once head of the Tianbaoyan National Nature Reserve in Yongan, which shares a border with the village, as recounted by Xiong Shengchun, one of the village's pioneering bird hide operators.

Xiong, who worked as the village head from 2000 to 2003, knew Zhu, who used to work with the local for-

estry bureau, for many years. As head of the nature reserve, Zhu sometimes visited the village to watch birds in the forests, spread across 3,300 hectares.

During one such visit, Zhu clicked photographs of Elliot's pheasants, an endangered bird under the State's protection and native to the country's southeastern part. Excited by his discovery, Zhu showed the images to Xiong. "I wasn't particularly thrilled," Xiong said. "After all, I had seen many of these birds while tending to my family's bamboo groves."

So Zhu proposed that Xiong build a bird hide — camouflaged shelters used to observe birds from a close range without disturbing them. The plan was to entice Elliot's pheasants to open areas, offering bird-watchers an opportunity to capture these rare birds in their natural habitat for a fee.

Born in 1959, Xiong had engaged in bamboo trade during the 1990s and opened a pig farm in 2004, so he knew he must seize what looked like a great business opportunity.

In 2015, Xiong began constructing a bird hide, within a serene bamboo grove, on his family's property.

However, even after 4-5 months, no Elliot's pheasants showed up. "I was disappointed and was thinking of giving up. Around that time Zhu visited me and encouraged me to not give up yet," Xiong said.

In the sixth month, the elusive pheasants finally made their appearance, he said. By February or March of 2016, bird photographers began visiting his hide.

Meanwhile, he built a bird hide at another location to feed silver pheasants, which were easier to sight than Elliot's pheasants. By September 2015, silver pheasants, a large and spectacular bird known for its long-tailed males that have white or silver-gray upper parts, were showing up regularly, much to the delight of visiting photogra-

phers. In the ensuing years, Xiong expanded his avian sanctuary by setting up four additional bird hides, all dedicated to the enchanting silver pheasants.

Each hide offered a unique backdrop for photography enthusiasts, ranging from a tranquil stream setting to the lush bamboo forest, blooming rapeseed fields, ancient trees, and picturesque pine forests illuminated by the hues of sunset.

The silver pheasants, set against these captivating backdrops, emerged as the primary draw for



A male silver pheasant takes wing. MEI YONGCUN / XINHUA

bird photography enthusiasts. "Instead of young bird-watchers, most of our visitors are senior bird photographers from big cities," Xiong said.

"They enjoy plenty of opportunities to produce excellent bird photos at our bird hides."

Running homestays

In 2016, Xiong transformed his house into a homestay, offering eight rooms to guests. It has undergone several upgrades over the years and today boasts 18 standard

rooms that can accommodate up to 30 guests. Xiong charges 100 yuan (\$13.76) per day for a room. His homestay receives about 800-1,000 guests a year.

"Because most of my customers are retirees, they usually have time to stay in my place for three days and take photos at five or six bird hides," he said.

Xiong has three brothers living in the village, who either run bird hides or homestays. Whenever his homestay is fully occupied, Xiong Shengchun directs additional visitors to his younger brother Xiong Shengshui's homestay.

Xiong Shengshui, 56, operates three bird hides and has four rooms for bird photographers. Leveraging his wife's culinary expertise, the couple even prepare meals for Xiong Shengchun's guests. "My guests love my sister-in-law's cooking," Xiong Shengchun said. "Many of them walk the 2-3 minute distance from my place to my brother's to eat."

According to Xiong Shengchun, many of his relatives at the village are engaged in the catering business.

Besides his three brothers, his nephew, Xing Zhongyuan, is a major player in the bird-watching industry. The 41-year-old has been a forest ranger at the Tianbaoyan nature reserve since 2010. However, he said, the income from the job was never enough for him to raise his family of six. "In 2010, it was 300 yuan a month and is now just a little more than 1,000 yuan," he said.

In 2017, he started setting up bird hides for visiting bird photographers. He constructed and opened a homestay in 2021, offering 11 standard rooms for his guests.

He now operates four bird hides, one featuring a backdrop of blooming Rhododendron flowers.

"In April, after several species of Rhododendron flowers start blooming, it will become the most sought-after hide in our village," Xing said.

Win-win cooperation

Balancing his duties as a ranger patrolling the reserve, Xing entrusts the management of one bird hide to his father. "The income from the hide can support my father as his pension," Xing said.

The responsibility of taking care of the other three hides goes to his partner, Xiong Qingwen. The income generated from these hides is allocated based on the terms outlined in their contract.

This division of labor allows Xing to focus on his duties as a ranger while sustaining a thriving homestay business.

Xiong Qingwen was working at an industrial park in Yongan, Fujian province, with his wife, earning 7,000 to 8,000 yuan a month. He was persuaded by his then village head to return and convert his house into a homestay for bird photographers, with a 50,000 yuan subsidy from the township government.

Xiong Shengchun emphasizes the demanding and monotonous nature of maintaining a bird hide throughout the year. He describes the task as challenging, requiring daily visits to the hides to ensure the well-being of the birds under their care.

"Even during the period between June and September (characterized by the molting phase of silver pheasants when their plumages are not as visually striking as usual), the responsibility of tending to the hides and caring for the birds remains constant," he said.

The villagers' dedication to the business has clearly paid off. Over the years, Fengtian has attracted bird photographers from over 20 countries and regions, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Singapore. The place sees at least dozens of visitors daily, generating an annual revenue of more than 5 million yuan, according to a report in a local newspaper.



Top: Xiong Shengchun (left) watches bird photographers taking photos of silver pheasants at one of his six bird hides in Fengtian village, Fujian province, on March 21. Above: Xiong calls out to the birds at one of his bird hides. PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

United by a common love for winged kind

By CHEN LIANG in Yongan, Fujian
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Lam Kam-hung developed a passion for bird photography after his superannuation in Hong Kong around a decade ago. During a photography trip to Southwest China's Yunnan province last year, he encountered fellow bird photographers from other parts of China and was enthralled by the captivating images they shared.

One particular set of photographs showcasing the majestic silver pheasants, renowned for their striking long-tailed males with white or silver-white upper parts, left a lingering impression on him. "They look truly stunning in their diverse natural settings," Lam told China Daily.

He enquired where he could see the birds and was directed to Fengtian village of Yongan county in Fujian province. He obtained the WeChat contact of Xiong Shengchun, a local operator of bird hides and homestays, from his new

friends. "They told me that the village is probably the best place to take photographs of silver pheasants," he said, adding that he wasted no time in planning a trip.

On the morning of March 21, he boarded a bullet train in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and arrived in Yongan after a six-hour journey. He was received at the station by a driver Xiong had sent, who drove him to the destination in less than two hours.

That very afternoon, he could immerse himself in the enchanting world of silver pheasants at one of Xiong's six bird hides in the village.

At the bird hide, Lam also had the pleasure of meeting bird photographers from different parts of China. Engaging in conversations with them during breaks between their photo shoots, he soon made new friends.

One of them is Chen Guangyun. The pensioner from Beijing has been driving around the country on sightseeing tours ever since he

retired. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he had to spend a lot of time in Beijing. It was during this period that Chen discovered his interest in bird photography. In due course, venturing out to bird hides across the country and capturing the beauty of birds through his lens became his hobby.

Like Lam, Chen reached Fengtian on March 21 and was planning to stay there for three days. "Staying three days and visiting eight to 10 bird hides is a standard package for us while visiting the village," he said.

Another photographer Lam met at Xiong's bird hide is "Parrot". The 67-year-old retiree from Northeast China prefers to be addressed by his online moniker. He arrived at the village on March 20 and was surprised to meet three friends, who had just finished their photographic tour and were preparing to leave.

"It's a small world and the village is a must-see destination for us," he said. "One of my friends clicked 1.5 terabytes of photographs here."

After their photo sessions, the bird photographers shared a meal at the homestay run by Xiong Shengchun's brother, Xiong Shengshui. Xiong Shengchun said many of his customers enjoy the meals served by his brother and sister-in-law.

"We charge each customer 10 yuan (\$1.37) for breakfast and 60 yuan for lunch and supper," Xiong Shengchun said. "For a photo session at a bird hide, the price is 100 yuan per person."

Seated at the dining table, Lam found himself immersed in conversations with the other bird photographers, a community he had never come across before.

He used the opportunity to find out more about his passion from his new friends from the mainland, jotting down the names of other bird hide locations. He also took from them the WeChat accounts of the operators of other bird hides he might visit in the future. "I will try to visit more sites before I am too old for this," he said.

IMAGE



1

BLOSSOMS OF SPRING



Nation welcomes the 'clear and bright' fine days of Qingming

With the approach of Qingming, one of 24 solar terms, which means "clear and bright", the icy grip of winter has loosened. Warmth is spreading with the blow of gentle breeze. The country is brimming with blossoms and green grass, vivid and lively. It is now an apt time to go for a spring outing.

It is a time-honored custom to take a spring outing during Qingming. In the past, the people of China believed that after sheltering indoors during winter, both body and heart need to be refreshed by the embrace of spring, and a walk close to nature would be beneficial for their health. Just as one ancient scholar said, "It is a fine day the Qingming day. You

may enjoy yourself outside but do not forget to go back."

Spring is in full bloom nationwide. From the blossoms and green willow in South China to the new flowers after the snow in Heilongjiang province and the spring train winding through a profusion of flowers at the foot of the Great Wall at Juyongguan, these scenes create a magnificent portrait of a beautiful China. They capture the diverse charms of the country and the vigorous energy of spring around Qingming.

LIU ZHE



2

Above: A bird in the Lesser Khingan Mountains seen among the snow and flower petals in Yichun, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, on March 18.

CHI SHIYONG/FOR CHINA DAILY

Right: The vibrant display of tulips at Yaojiadang Park in Jiaying city, East China's Zhejiang province, on March 17.

JIN PENG/FOR CHINA DAILY

1: Heralding the arrival of spring, the Beijing S2 railway line travels through this sea of blooming flowers at the foot of the Juyongguan section of the Great Wall in Beijing, on March 23.

ZHANG XIUKE/FOR CHINA DAILY

2: A lady poses with a kite amid vibrant flowers in Jiaying county, Leshan city, Southwest China's Sichuan province, on March 10.

KONG SHENG/XINHUA

3: Children participate in a spring outing and educational activity at a large cherry blossom park in Quanjiao county, Chuzhou city, East China's Anhui province, on March 21.

JI CHENGJUN/FOR CHINA DAILY

4: Cycling enthusiasts ride through fields of rapeseed flowers in Shuangfeng county, Loudi city, Central China's Hunan province, on March 17.

NAI JIHUI/FOR CHINA DAILY

5: Visitors flock to Wanshou Temple to capture the beauty of magnolia flowers in full bloom in Beijing, on March 23.

ZHOU CHENGFENG/FOR CHINA DAILY



5



3



4

TREND

Carmakers unleash advanced tech for future edge

Artificial intelligence, autonomous driving in focus

By MA SI
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Chinese automakers are racing to integrate into their vehicles cutting-edge technology. From autonomous driving to artificial intelligence-powered cabins, the modern vehicles are being transformed into "the ultimate smart terminals" that fuse advanced mobility, connectivity, and artificial intelligence.

The trend comes as 2025 is widely tipped to be the first year that smart driving becomes a key feature in cars in China, and as the automotive industry enters an era of unprecedented competition in intelligent technology.

Chen Qingtai, chairman of the China EV 100, an auto industry think tank, said: "The pace of intelligent vehicle development in China has exceeded industry expectations. In the first half of 2024, the penetration rate of L2 or Level 2, plus advanced driver-assistance systems in new passenger vehicles surpassed 55 percent."

Level 2 is part of broader standards developed in relation to the degree to which autonomous machines take over driving functions. Level 2 means partial driver assistance. Level 3 means that drivers can afford not to pay attention in certain situations. Level 4 means that vehicles can perform all driving tasks under specific circumstances, but human overrides are still an option.

"In the coming years, basic intelligent features will become universally adopted in newly sold passenger cars," Chen said at the China EV 100 Forum 2025 which was from March 28 to 30 in Beijing.

Zhang Xiang, secretary-general of the International Intelligent Mobility Association, emphasized that advanced driver-assistance systems, or ADAS have become a critical differentiator for carmakers.

"Chip computing power, AI-model-powered applications, and breakthroughs in urban/highway navigate on autopilot, or NOA are key metrics for competitiveness. Automakers mastering these technologies will dominate the market," Zhang said.

BYD Chairman Wang Chuanfu declared 2025 the "Year of Universal Smart Driving", predicting that non-autonomous vehicles will soon become niche products. His words resonate across the industry.

"The pace of automotive intelligence is accelerating, with transformative advancements expected to mature within 2-3 years. Concurrently, China's new energy vehicles currently lead the global market by approximately 3-5 years in both technological innovation and industrial chain capabilities," Wang said.

"It is critical to seize this strategic window, uphold open innovation, and leverage cutting-edge green technologies and products to propel higher-level international collaboration," Wang said.

By capitalizing on complementary strengths and fostering open cooperation, China's automotive sector can achieve global success



Top: Some children experience intelligent driving at a BYD new energy vehicle science museum in Zhengzhou, Henan province. ZHANG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Above: Visitors seen at Xiaomi's smart auto factory in Beijing. HE GUANXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

while driving sustainable growth, Wang added.

Well-aware of the opportunities ahead, Chinese companies, from Huawei to GAC Group, are pushing boundaries to seize first-mover advantages.

Yu Chengdong, head of smart driving solutions at Huawei Technologies Co, said Huawei is ready for level 3 autonomous driving. "From passive to autonomous intelligence, cars are finally awakening," he said.

The remark, seen as a veiled challenge to BYD, underscores the intensifying rivalry.

Huawei's smart driving solutions, already adopted by partners like Chinese car companies such as

BAIC and JAC, have positioned it as a leader. Yet competitors are closing in.

BYD recently launched its DiPilot ADAS system, deploying it across 21 models priced between 70,000 yuan (\$9,650) and 200,000 yuan — democratizing high-end autonomous features. This disrupts the market's premium-only narrative, experts said.

He Xiaopeng, chairman and CEO of Xpeng Motors, has applauded carmakers including BYD on Sina Weibo, saying that they are helping to popularize smart driving in China and across the world.

Collaboration is accelerating. In January, GAC announced that it would establish a joint project with

Huawei to develop luxury smart EVs. "We aim to redefine competitiveness in the NEV sector," said GAC's General Manager Feng Xingya. The partnership reflects a strategic pivot as traditional automakers embrace tech-driven transformation.

Meanwhile, Changan Auto, Geely, Great Wall, BYD and other companies formed an alliance in February to co-develop autonomous technologies. The plan targets full-scenario level 3 autonomy by 2026 and level 4 capabilities by 2028. "This is about creating a 'Chinese smart driving benchmark'," said a Changan executive, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Vice-Minister of the Ministry of

Industry and Information Technology Xin Guobin said more efforts will be made to pursue breakthroughs in core technologies like autonomous driving and cross-regional application pilots.

Ouyang Mingguo, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said that level 4 autonomous driving, powered by advanced AI large language models, will achieve commercial scale in mid-to-high-end vehicles by 2030.

He forecast annual NEV sales to exceed 16 million units in 2025 in China, entering a stable growth phase with annual growth rates moderating. But the total NEV population in China is expected to soar to 100-160 million by 2030.

Zhang Yaquin, foreign academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and Dean of Tsinghua University's Institute for AI Industry Research, said unmanned driving will be the largest application for embodied AI in the next five years.

Embodied AI, as highlighted in this year's Government Work Report, refers to AI that is integrated into physical hardware such as robots. It represents a significant leap in intelligent systems capable of interacting with and adapting to their environments, experts said.

Zhang highlighted how generative AI and large language models are accelerating level 4 autonomous driving by addressing challenges like data scarcity, long-tail scenarios, and commonsense reasoning.

While autonomous vehicles will primarily rely on onboard intelligence, Zhang said vehicle-road-cloud coordination will provide critical safety redundancy and enable smart transportation ecosystems.

Zhang also predicted the "ChatGPT moment" for autonomous driving will arrive in 2025, with 10 percent of new vehicles achieving level 4 capabilities by 2030 — ushering in what he termed the "DeepSeek moment" for

AI-driven mobility.

Lei Jun, chairman and CEO of Xiaomi, which made a splash in the Chinese crowded car market last year, said during the next five years, Xiaomi expects to invest a total of 105 billion yuan in R&D, and a quarter of its 30 billion yuan R&D investment plan this year will be devoted to AI and its related application in areas such as cars.

Beyond autonomous driving, automakers are waging war over "smart cabins." Chinese EV startup IM Motors, in partnership with Alibaba, debuted its "IM AIOS Ecosystem Cabin," integrating AI agents for in-car interaction.

"AI cabins aren't just about screens — they're about understanding users' unspoken needs," said Yang Dongsheng, who is in charge of BYD's smart driving business. BYD cars, powered by DeepSeek's model, exemplify this shift, enabling vehicles to predict preferences and execute tasks like food delivery via voice commands.

Over 20 brands, including Li Auto and Geely, have adopted DeepSeek's AI to enhance cabin interactions. Analysts predict such integrations will unlock new revenue streams through personalized services and in-car commerce.

As the auto industry's focus is shifting from hardware specs to ecosystem prowess, winning requires mastery of data, algorithms, and cross-industry synergy, experts said.

While BYD and Huawei vie for dominance, startups like Xpeng and Leapmotor see opportunity.

"Mass adoption of smart driving by giants like BYD educates the market — we all benefit," said Zhu Jiangming, chairman of Leapmotor, another Chinese EV startup.

In this hyper-competitive arena, cars are no longer mere vehicles but "third spaces" blending work, leisure, and AI-driven personalization. As 2025 unfolds, one truth is clear: The race to redefine mobility has only just begun, experts added.

China's automakers vie for wider global footprint

By MA SI

As electrification, smart connectivity, and globalization redefine the auto industry's dynamics, China's automotive sector is at a pivotal juncture of transitioning from scale to strength, amid unprecedented opportunities for international collaboration and strategic overseas expansion, experts and company executives said.

Su Bo, former vice-minister of industry and information technology, said while some nations and automakers have tempered their electrification timelines, the momentum toward intelligent, connected new energy vehicles remains unstoppable.

China's NEV exports surged to 1.284 million units in 2024, reaching over 160 markets, Su said at China EV 100 Forum 2025 which was held

from March 28 to 30 in Beijing.

And the export model is evolving from shipments of full vehicles to a comprehensive "ecosystem export" strategy encompassing technology licensing, brand partnerships, battery supply chains, and charging infrastructure, Su said.

Leading Chinese firms like SAIC, BYD, Geely, and Changan Auto are deploying localized production through greenfield investments, joint ventures, and acquisitions.

Yet challenges persist, such as limited global brand equity, talent gaps, and rising trade barriers, Su said, adding that more efforts are needed to promote global cooperation and enhance drafting of international industry standards so that Chinese auto companies are better able to go global.

Zhang Yongwei, secretary-general

of the China EV 100, an auto industry think tank, said the paths for Chinese automotive enterprises to participate in global development are becoming more diversified and innovative.

Following product exports and localized production overseas, Chinese automotive companies are adopting new models for global expansion. Chinese automakers have begun establishing joint ventures with overseas partners, co-creating brands, and empowering automotive industry development in host countries. This is a significant shift, Zhang said.

According to him, in the early stages, Chinese automakers primarily relied on export-oriented trade models. Entering a new phase, many automakers and component suppliers have shifted toward localized produc-

tion overseas, gradually transferring vehicle manufacturing and supply chain systems to foreign markets and transforming into locally rooted automotive enterprises.

"This model has been well-received and proven effective in many overseas markets," Zhang said.

"Building on this foundation, Chinese automakers are now forming joint ventures and co-developing brands with overseas partners. The development model has evolved from independent overseas operations to capital partnerships and collaborative brand-building with foreign companies," he said.

Zhang also highlighted another emerging approach: Chinese automakers are empowering overseas dealers or production partners by helping them enhance their capabilities. Leveraging China's manu-

facturing and technological strengths, they are supporting the automotive industries of other nations and assisting these countries in realizing their own automotive brand aspirations.

"This cooperative and symbiotic globalization model — transitioning from product-centric trade to localized production, joint ventures, and ultimately shared industrial ecosystems — represents a new paradigm and highlight for Chinese automakers in global engagement," Zhang said.

"This approach, which fosters mutual growth, is gaining broader acceptance and remains a key focus of ongoing exploration in the industry," he added.

He Xiaopeng, chairman of Chinese electric vehicle company Xpeng Motors, said the company has ambitious plans to bolster inter-

national sales, aiming for overseas markets to contribute half of the company's total sales by 2030.

The company, now China's top-selling new energy vehicle startup for two consecutive months, is accelerating its global footprint.

Xpeng said by the end of 2024, its vehicles had reached 30 countries and regions, supported by a network of 150 overseas stores. Looking ahead to 2025, Xpeng aims to accelerate its international growth, targeting entry into over 60 markets and expanding its overseas service network to more than 300 locations.

In late February, Xpeng Motors initiated its 255th overseas shipment from the Nansha Port in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. This batch featured the company's all-electric MPV, the X9, destined for Thailand.

BIZ LIFE

By WANG KEJU
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'Silver-haired express' steaming ahead in China

Demand for slow-paced, in-depth tourism experience from increasing over-60 crowd creating huge niche

The Y64 train departed Harbin in China's northernmost Heilongjiang province on March 15, carrying 546 spirited seniors united by a shared yearning for adventure as they embarked on a springtime journey to South China.

Dubbed the "silver-haired express", the train, hosting senior travelers with an average age of 65, was scheduled to stretch 14 days and nearly 9,000 kilometers round-trip all the way to the country's deep south — Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The March trip was fully booked weeks in advance, and there were only 30 spots left for April, according to Harbin Railway International Travel Agency.

The popularity of the "silver-haired express" comes as no surprise. By linking transportation with dining, lodging and sightseeing along key rail corridors, these sojourns simplify logistics while enriching the train travel experience, thus aligning with seniors' preferences for slow-paced, in-depth exploration, officials and analysts said.

"The Y64 train trip was launched just before Spring Festival in late January, and its 546 travel spots were snatched up quickly," said 81-year-old retired teacher Wang Shufen in Harbin, adding that she enlisted her daughter's help to refresh the booking page for three consecutive days to secure a spot.

China's over-60 population, nearing 297 million, has become a formidable force in the tourism sector. In 2024 alone, the country operated 1,860 tourist train trips, with seniors accounting for nearly 80 percent of rail passengers, said China State Railway Group, the national railway operator.

"While still in its developmental phase — with tourist train trips accounting for a small share of total railway operations — the sector holds immense untapped potential, particularly in catering to the booming elderly demographic," said Kong Dejun, director of the Department of Trade in Services and Commercial Services at the Ministry of Commerce.

According to a report jointly issued by China Insights Consultancy and QuantaSing Group in October, some 17.6 percent of China's elderly population venture out on at least three trips per year, while 40.8 percent partake in one to two journeys annually.

To meet the pent-up demand of the country's elderly population for leisure and cultural experiences, policymakers rolled out a dedicated plan for expanding train trips designed for seniors in mid-February, aiming to design over 100 elderly-focused railway routes, and operate more than 2,500 "silver-haired express" trips by 2027.

China's tourist trains have been synonymous with affordability over comfort — retrofitted from aging green-painted carriages with cramped berths, limited privacy and basic amenities, said Song Ziqian, a



Passengers applaud face-changing stunts by a Sichuan Opera performer during a tourism train trip from Chengdu, Sichuan province to Jianshui county, Yunnan province, on March 29. WANG XI / XINHUA

senior policy researcher at the China Tourism Academy.

Yet, as the nation's over-60 population is set to surpass 400 million by around 2035, this once-niche market is undergoing a transformative upgrade, driven by retirees' rising demand for quality travel experiences that balance cost-effectiveness with enhanced services, Song said.

The specialized trains will feature enhanced accessibility, including wheelchair-friendly corridors, priority seating with extra legroom and cabins equipped with health monitoring systems, according to the plan.

"The exponential growth of China's high-speed rail network has created an incredibly favorable environment for the commercialization and scaling of the tourism train

While still in its developmental phase — with tourist train trips accounting for a small share of total railway operations — the sector holds immense untapped potential, particularly in catering to the booming elderly demographic."

Kong Dejun, director of the Department of Trade in Services and Commercial Services at the Ministry of Commerce

market," said Zhu Wenzhong, an official with China State Railway Group.

Spanning 160,000 kilometers, the network now connects 99 percent of cities with populations over 200,000, according to the group.

"With greater network capacity

“

and improved connectivity, these specialized trains can now reach a wider array of destinations and cater to the diverse interests of the senior travel segment," Zhu said.

Moreover, by deploying tourist trains during off-peak periods such

as weekdays and non-holidays, rail operators can utilize idle capacity while aligning with seniors' preference for flexible travel schedules, Zhu added.

Beyond the practical benefits, these travel experiences also foster a sense of community and connection among senior passengers. The extended journeys provide ample opportunities for socializing, exchanging travel tips and forming new friendships — all vital aspects of maintaining a vibrant and fulfilling retirement.

"On the train, I've met so many interesting people from all walks of life," said 68-year-old Zhang Lina, who lives in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. "We swap travel tips, discuss local culture and even plan future trips together. It's a wonderful way to expand my social circle

and make the most of my retirement years."

With growing demand from the country's senior population and a robust rail network in place, the primary challenge hindering the widespread adoption of these specialized travel products has been the availability of financing and investment channels.

In a significant development, the plan highlighted explicit support for the participation of businesses under all kinds of ownership models, including private enterprises, in the development and operation of these specialized tourism trains and rail lines, as well as market-driven pricing.

The plan has also taken the crucial step of including the retrofitting and enhancement of silver-haired tourism trains — making them more age-friendly, green and comfortable — within the scope of the country's large-scale equipment upgrade programs, under which the government provides financial support.

"While the railway authorities are well-equipped to provide the foundational services and infrastructure necessary for these specialized travel products, the integration of private capital and expertise is crucial in delivering a more robust and diversified range of tourism services," said Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy.

One of the key advantages these industry giants bring to the table is their deep understanding of the tourism market and their established relationships with local attractions and destinations. By leveraging these connections, they can curate tailored travel packages that integrate the diverse offerings of the regions served by the tourism trains, Zhu said.

Moreover, the influx of investment and expertise from these industry giants is expected to have a catalytic effect on the growth of the tourism train market, attracting a broader customer base and driving the expansion of these specialized travel products across the country, Zhu added.

Since July, the "Silk Road Express", a collaborative venture between Fosun Infrastructure Development Group and China Railway Qinghai-Tibet Group, has been offering a five-day round trip between Xining, Qinghai province to Dunhuang, Gansu province.

According to Fosun, the company established a specialized project company to oversee the renovation and enhancement of the trains, as well as day-to-day operations. The railway authorities, on the other hand, do not directly participate in the train's investment, but rather provide critical services such as rolling stock, rail transport and safety assurances.

By separating the investment and operational responsibilities, this new model allows both parties to focus on their core competencies, ultimately delivering a more seamless and enriching travel experience for senior passengers, Zhu said.

Aging demographic unleashing consumption potential

By WANG KEJU

With the world's largest aging demographic — projected to see over 400 million people aged 60 and above by 2035 — China is leveraging its vast domestic market and robust industrial infrastructure to grow the silver economy, analysts said.

By doing so, China is not only improving the well-being of senior citizens, but also unlocking new avenues for economic growth and innovation, they said, adding that China's experience can offer insights for other developing countries that are still relatively young in their demographic transition.

With currently around 300 million people aged 60 and above, China is home to the world's largest elderly population, and roughly one in every four seniors globally, said Zhang Ming, deputy director of the Institute of Finance and Banking, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

While some view this demographic shift as a burden, Zhang focuses on the consumption power of this group and the strong impetus it would provide to the development of the silver economy.

Moreover, China has a relatively complete industrial chain, supply chain and innovation capacity,



Left: Passengers pose for photographs before boarding a train specially for senior travelers at a railway station in Shanghai. LIU WEIKING / XINHUA

Right: Senior travelers engage in conversation during a train trip from Tianjin to tourist attractions in South China. SUN FANYUE / XINHUA

which provide the necessary technological and production conditions to drive the silver economy forward, Zhang said.

By 2035, the silver economy might grow from 7 trillion yuan (\$970 billion) in 2024 to 30 trillion yuan, said the China Research Center on Aging. While economist Ren Zeping said that elderly consumption is predicted to reach 40-69 trillion yuan by 2050, or up to 20.7 percent of the nation's GDP.

Over the years, China's silver economy has taken root and flourished across the country, with a continuous stream of new and vibrant consumer trends emerging as the population's desire and ability to enhance their quality of life steadily grows.

The consumption structure, especially among those born in the 1960s and after, is gradually evolving towards a more self-gifting orientation, with a larger emphasis

on product quality, consumption experiences and the expression of personal values, said Liu Ming, director of the Department of Social Development under the National Development and Reform Commission.

"We are witnessing a convergence in the consumption mindsets and structures of the elderly and the young, where the traditional lines separating their preferences and behaviors are

gradually fading," Liu said.

Older consumers are now more inclined toward activities and platforms that were once primarily associated with the younger generation, such as online shopping, livestreaming and smart gadgets, Liu said.

According to a survey conducted by the People's Bank of China last year — the country's central bank — residents aged 56 to 64 hold more assets compared to other age

brackets, positioning them as a key demographic in the silver economy market.

The survey also revealed that there was a notable shift in consumer behavior and preferences for the aging population between 2014 and 2020, with older adults increasing their investments in social engagement, healthcare and retirement financial services.

On the other hand, the younger generation is also actively engaging with the silver economy, with online shopping becoming a means for many young people to fulfill their filial piety duties. Moreover, the presence of young individuals in elderly canteens and travel groups is becoming more prevalent, Liu added.

Going forward, China needs to weave an even stronger social safety net for senior citizens to steer clear of their concerns about eldercare and medical services, thus making them feel more secure about their financial situation and more willing to spend, said Cai Fang, chief expert of the National High-end Think Tank of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"We must ensure that the elderly are treated as a normal consumer group, rather than a marginalized segment, in order to sustain China's consumption expansion and unlock its inherent growth capacity," Cai said.

TRAVEL

By EDITH MUTETHYA

in Baringo, Kenya
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Thousands of flamingos gathered on the shorelines, squawking and croaking, while others flying or wading in the shallow waters of Kenya's alkaline lakes along the Great Rift Valley created a vibrant pink spectacle — a scene that every bird-watcher shouldn't miss.

It's not only a wonderful unwinding experience for holidaymakers but also breathtaking to watch the birds' vibrant pink plumage, long legs and graceful movements as well as their gregarious habits.

As you get too close to the flamingos at the viewpoints, they protectively fly away, but if you stay a bit, you will watch them come back after a few minutes, and you are able to capture a memorable photo or a short video of the mesmerizing birds.

This experience is a reality at Lakes Nakuru, Bogoria and Elementaita, which are located along the Great Rift Valley. The three lakes, collectively termed the Kenya Lake System, have been recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Being alkaline lakes, they host thousands of flamingos and other birds that attract both international and local tourists.

For international visitors, it's worthy planning for at least a two-day trip to either visit the three or at least two of the lakes for adventurous safari. In addition to the flamingos, visitors can also view numerous other bird species and wild animals.

Lake Bogoria, the favorite spot

Lake Bogoria, located about 250 kilometers northwest of Nairobi, hosts a large population of the pink birds, probably because of abundant blue-green algae — the primary food source for flamingos — minimal competition and less predators.

The lake is home to both greater and lesser flamingos, the latter being particularly abundant. Greater flamingos are bigger and taller and have light pink beaks with a black tip. The lesser flamingos, on the other hand, have a deeper pink color on their feathers and their beaks are deep red with a black tip.

However, there are times that the number of flamingos fluctuates in all the three lakes, depending on the food availability and mating season.

James Kimaru, a senior warden at Lake Bogoria National Reserve, said that during the mating season, most flamingos migrate to Lake Natron, an alkaline lake in northern Tanzania near the Kenyan border, to breed.

Lake Natron provides an ideal breeding place for flamingos because its harsh, alkaline environment acts as a natural barrier against predators. Its high salinity also supports the cyanobacteria that flamingos feed on.

As the lake's water evaporates, salt crystal islands emerge, providing nesting sites for flamingos. Chicks hatch between September and April.

Chris Relimo, who has been working as a tour guide at Lake Bogoria National Reserve for 10 years, said that when flamingos come back, the chicks are usually white downy in color with black legs. Their distinctive pink color develops gradually as they grow and their diet changes. The shrimp, algae and plankton, which flamingos feed on, contain carotenoid that turns them into pink.

A flamingo lays one large egg in a year that hatches after 27 to 30 days. Both the male and female flamingos take turns in incubating the egg and also both feed the chick after hatching.

Notably, flamingos are adapted to drink water that approaches the boiling point. This is because some of them live in areas with high salt con-



Lakes that host flamingos

International tourists flock to watch mesmerizing presence of the birds in their natural habitat in Kenyan waters



Wild animals gather on the shores of Lake Nakuru in Kenya. PHOTOS BY WANG YUXI / CHINA DAILY

centration, with the only source of fresh water being the boiling geysers. Flamingos can also tolerate extremely salty and alkaline water.

Kimaru said flamingos start returning to Lake Bogoria from mid-June, adding that, up to October the lake usually hosts thousands of flamingos, turning it into a pink lake. It is also the peak season for international tourists.

"Most of our tourists to Lake Bogoria are from China, representing 30 percent of our visitors. They are mainly interested in flamingos," he said, adding that the flamingos are also a key attraction to many other international tourists.

Besides the dazzling display of flamingos, the lake features bubbling geysers and hot water volcanic springs erupting along the banks and within the lake itself. They are the main attractions during the seasons when flamingos migrate for breeding.

Many students also visit the lake's hot springs and geysers for hands-on learning in earth sciences, geology and natural phenomena, while also experiencing a unique and memorable field trip.

At the main entrance gate, local residents sell raw eggs that visitors can buy and boil in the hot springs.

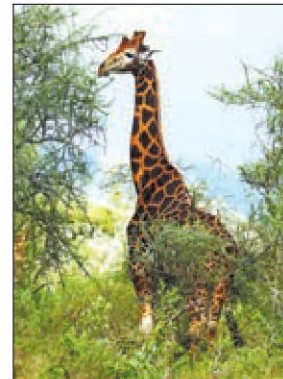
Relimo, the guide, said many hot springs and geysers have been submerged in the water and can only be seen if the water recedes.

Apart from the flamingos, Lake Bogoria National Reserve also hosts ostriches, kudus, impalas, buffaloes, zebras, leopards and hyenas.

Francis Ang'awa, a professor of geography at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology in Kenya, who had brought students for field study at the lake, said the government should improve infrastructure to make the lake more accessible.

Currently, there is only one road leading from the entrance of the reserve to the shores of the lake, with most parts of the road bumpy.

"Better infrastructure will increase activities to the lake," he



Clockwise from top left: Ostriches roam in the wetlands beside Lake Bogoria in Kenya. A giraffe stand tall among the bushes. An Agama lionotus, commonly known as Kenyan rock agama, bask in the sun on a rock. A vervet monkey perches on a tree.

said, noting that there had been a better road, which was destroyed by floods during the last rainy season.

There are several accommodation facilities near Lake Bogoria, one being Lake Bogoria Spa Resort, which is famous for its natural heated spa pool, known as "the healing place" for its therapeutic values.

To reach Lake Bogoria National Reserve from Nairobi, visitors can join a guided tour or rent a car and drive themselves. It's a five-hour journey.

Several tour operators in Nairobi

offer safari packages to Lake Bogoria, and most of the time they combine it with visits to other attractions such as Lake Nakuru, Lake Elementaita and Maasai Mara. There are no domestic flights to Lake Bogoria.

Foreign adults have to pay an entrance fee of \$50, while it is \$3.9 for Kenyan adults, and \$1.7 for children and students.

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proximity to Nakuru city ensures a range of accommodation options, making for a comfortable and convenient trip.

To access Lake Nakuru National Park from Nairobi, visitors can drive via the Nairobi-Nakuru highway, a three-and-half-hour journey, or fly from Wilson Airport to Naishi airstrip within the park.

The park has three gates: Main Gate, Lanet Gate and Nderit Gate. Adult Kenyans and East African Community residents pay an entrance fee of \$6.6, while children and students have to pay \$1.7. For nonresidents or international tourists, it is \$60 and \$35 respectively for adults and children.

Lake Elementaita, haven for birdlife

Located 30 minutes' drive from Lake Nakuru, and about 120 kilometers northwest of Nairobi, Lake Elementaita is one of the less known alkaline lakes in the Great Rift Valley and also a feeding lake for flamingos. It's also a haven for birdlife, especially flamingos and pelicans.

The lake is also home to rare species of animals that are mostly concentrated during the dry season. While at the lake, one can spot gazelles, zebras, elands and Rothschild's giraffes in the surrounding savanna and acacia woodlands.

About 90 percent of Kenya's black-necked grebes and cape teals are found at the lake, as well as maccoa ducks, the critically threatened great crested grebes, and great egrets, according to the travel company AfricanMecca Safaris.

The largest portion of Lake Elementaita is part of the nonprofit Soysambu Conservancy, focusing on flora and fauna conservation in the lake and the surrounding area.

As the conservancy is privately owned, visitors can access activities that are prohibited in game parks and reserves, including game drives, hikes and nature walks, to explore volcanic hills and grassy plains along the lake's shores, among others.

Visitors can also enjoy a unique geothermal experience at the Kikopey Hot Springs, which support aquatic lives such as tilapia and attract birds such as pelicans and cormorants.

Lake Elementaita can be accessed via highway or by air. The nearest airstrips are Soysambu Airstrip and Nakuru Airport, also known as Lanet Military Airstrip. It takes 25 to 30 minutes from Nairobi's Wilson Airport.

For nonresidents visiting Lake Elementaita Wildlife Sanctuary, the entrance fee is \$25 per adult and \$15 per child. Adult Kenyan citizens pay \$1.7 while children and students pay \$0.96.

Kariandusi prehistoric site

Visitors can also visit the Kariandusi prehistoric site, located about 2 kilometers east of Lake Elementaita. It is among the first discoveries of Lower Paleolithic sites in East Africa.

According to the National Museums of Kenya, the site has enough geological evidence indicating that large lakes — sometimes reaching levels hundreds of meters higher than the present Lakes Nakuru and Elementaita — occupied this basin.

Dating between 700,000 to 1 million years, Kariandusi is possibly the first Acheulean site found in situ in East Africa.

Kenyan-British paleontologist Louis Leakey believed that the site was a factory of the Acheulean period. He made this conclusion after numerous collections of specimens were found lying in the Kariandusi riverbed.



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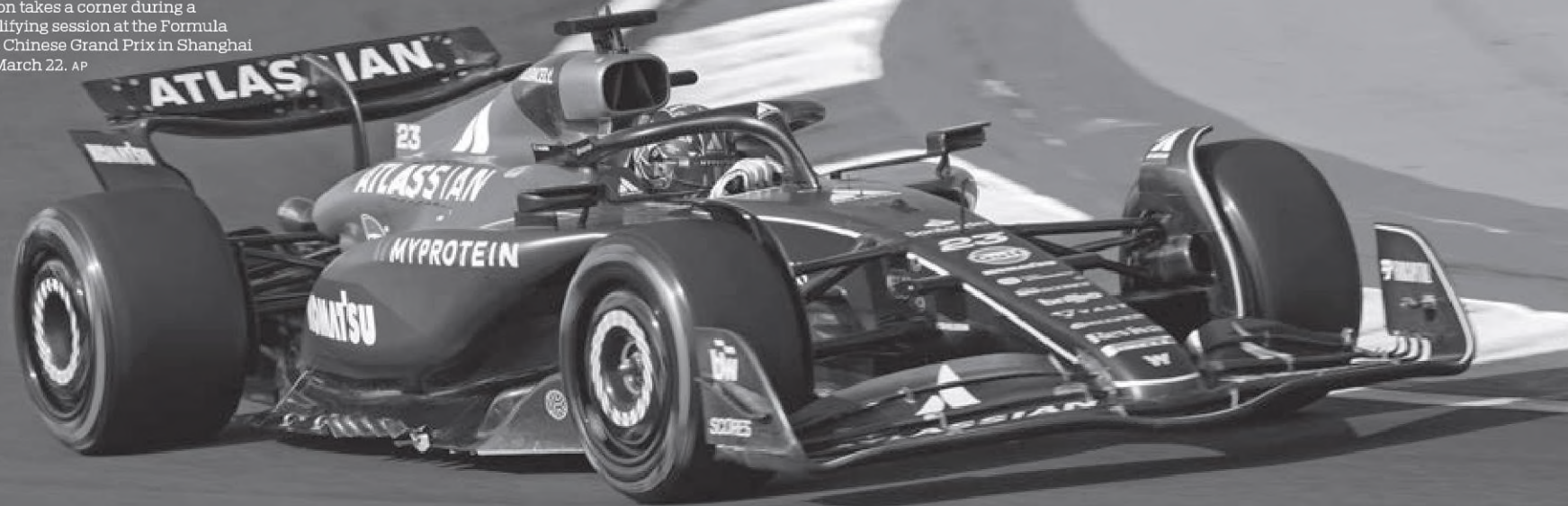


A flock of flamingos float on a tranquil lake.

SPORTS

MOTOR SPORTS

Thai-British Williams driver Alex Albon takes a corner during a qualifying session at the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai on March 22. AP



WILLIAMS ON THE RIGHT TRACK

After years of uncertainty, former F1 powerhouse is finally moving forward in a positive way

For Thai-British racer Alex Albon, the 2025 Formula One season isn't just about strong race results — it's about transformation.

The Williams driver has seen the team evolve significantly since his arrival in 2022. Now, with a more stable car, an experienced new teammate in Carlos Sainz, and long-term plans in place, Albon believes Williams is on the right track to reclaiming its place among F1's front-runners.

More predictable

Founded in 1977, Williams rose to become one of F1's dominant forces, winning several championship titles in the 1980s and 1990s.

However, in more recent times, Williams has largely toiled in F1's highly competitive midfield, often fighting reliability issues and an unpredictable car. But, the FW47, the team's 2025 challenger, has given Albon fresh optimism.

After two races this year, Albon has already scored more points than he did in the whole of 2024, notching up Williams' best result since 2021 with fifth place in the

season opener in Melbourne.

"There are a lot of little things on the car that make it more drivable, especially more predictable," Albon said of his new mount. "That allows the driver to extract a little bit more lap time."

A car's behavior can make or break a driver's confidence. In 2024, Albon and his teammates Logan Sargeant and Franco Colapinto had several high-profile accidents, severely depleting Williams' inventory of spare parts.

Albon says last year's car suffered with unexpected handling issues, some of which stemmed from electronic problems the team didn't always make public. Now, with those concerns largely resolved, he feels more in control.

"The car was trickier to drive last year, which possibly led to more mistakes," he admitted. "But, we've taken a huge step forward, and I feel like we're on top of a lot of those issues now."

That newfound stability has allowed Williams to focus on refining performance, rather than simply managing problems — an essential step in any team's journey



Williams' Spanish driver Carlos Sainz (left) and Thai-British driver Alex Albon believe the team is on the right track to reclaim its place among F1's front-runners. AP

back to competitiveness.

A new teammate

Albon isn't just benefiting from a better car; he's also learning from Sainz, a veteran of over 200 Grands Prix and a proven race winner who joined the team from Ferrari over the winter.

"They listen to what he has to say. I listen to what he has to say," Albon said. "He has a different approach



to, and theories about, many things, and it's been really insightful."

Sainz's arrival has shifted the team dynamic, creating what Albon describes as a more even playing field between the two drivers. More importantly, it has fostered an open exchange of ideas.

"I really appreciate how Williams has welcomed Carlos. It's been so open-book, which wasn't always the case in the past," he said.

"There's a real eagerness and a lack of ego within the team when it comes to learning from Carlos."

That collaborative spirit was on display in Melbourne, after Sainz spun off early in the wet. The Spaniard then took up position on the Williams pit wall, and helped devise the strategy that allowed Albon to master the tricky conditions and finish fifth.

Having a driver's perspective during those discussions proved invaluable, reinforcing the sense that Williams is operating as a more cohesive unit than in years past.

Long-term vision

While short-term success is always the goal, Albon is more focused on Williams' long-term trajectory. This is particularly pertinent, as a major regulation change is to come in next year, with profound design changes to both the car and engine.

This forces teams to balance their resources between developing their 2025 mounts, while also ensuring that they remain competitive over the coming years.

"We can't get lost in the fact that

next year is going to be one of the biggest changes to Formula One in the last 20 or 30 years," Albon said. "A power unit change and a car change is massive for everyone."

"We're already shifting toward next year's car. The next three to four months will be a crucial period for the team."

Williams has made strides, but the road to the front of the grid is still a long one. Albon acknowledged the need for further improvement, especially if the team wants to challenge for top honors in the near future.

"For me, talking about finishing fifth in the Constructors' Championship is fine, but I don't want to be fifth. I want to be in the top two or three, fighting for podiums," he said. "We can't do that unless we change everything and take a big step forward."

Williams still has work to do, but for Albon, the direction is clear. After years of uncertainty, the team is finally moving forward — not just this season, but for the years to come.

XINHUA



Williams driver Carlos Sainz of Spain in action during the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix at the Shanghai International Circuit on March 23. AP

MOTOR SPORTS

Racing Bulls chief Mekies relishes 'underdog' tag

Laurent Mekies has no illusions about Racing Bulls' place in Formula One. The team — formerly known as Toro Rosso, AlphaTauri and RB — has always existed in Red Bull's orbit; a proving ground for the energy drink-backed concern to prepare and evaluate its stable of young driving talent.

But Mekies, as team principal, sees the newly-named Racing Bulls as more than just a finishing school. He envisions a youthful, ambitious team capable of fighting on its own terms, while still fulfilling its role within the Red Bull ecosystem.

"There are many things that Red Bull, as the owner, wants to do with this team," Mekies told Xinhua.

"They have pressed the reset button — new name, new colors, new partnerships. And with one specific focus: We are the team that tries to

speak to younger boys and girls out there."

That connection to a new generation of fans is central to Racing Bulls' identity, with Mekies noting the team's unique place within F1's fandom.

"We have the most balanced fan base in F1 — basically it's fifty-fifty between men and women. Everything we are doing with this team is trying to provide a window into the sport for the younger generation."

Yet, Racing Bulls is still in the business of performance, and the team remains a launchpad for Red Bull's young talent. The pipeline is clear — excel at Racing Bulls, and a shot at the senior team may follow.

"It's part of our DNA to mold young drivers for the Red Bull family," Mekies said. "Apart from the team principal, we are the young



Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda in action for the Racing Bulls during the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai. Tsunoda will make his debut for the senior Red Bull team at his home Grand Prix in Suzuka after the team axed the underperforming Kiwi driver Liam Lawson. AFP

guys and girls. It's a young team, and we try to fight against giants."

That underdog mentality is something Mekies relishes. While Racing Bulls enjoys support from Red Bull, it remains independent from a major car manufacturer.

"It's probably only Williams and us now that are not linked to an OEM," he noted. "We like this setup — we are the underdog, the small team, and we are trying to take the fight on track to all these giants."

Fighting in F1's midfield is no small task. Mekies knows that breaking into the top four is unrealistic, but that doesn't mean Racing Bulls lacks ambition. "The top four is unreachable, but from P5 to P10, it's pretty open," he said. "We want to be credible fighters at the top of that group. We want to be credible in our fight for P6, maybe P5."

Mekies' words have already proven eerily prophetic. His insistence that F1 teams "change their opinions on drivers very fast" was underscored in the days after he spoke to Xinhua, when Racing Bulls' Yuki Tsunoda was called up by Red Bull to swap places with the underperforming Liam Lawson after just two races this season.

It was a reminder that, for all the talk of long-term vision, driver movements within the Red Bull system can be swift and brutal, with Racing Bulls' reality still dictated by the shifting sands of the senior outfit. But, under Mekies' leadership, the team is embracing its role, shaping its own identity, and proving that even a so-called junior team can dream big.

XINHUA

SPORTS

SOCCER

Slot sidesteps Tarkowski tackle talk

Controversial studs-up clash dominates derby commentary

LIVERPOOL — Liverpool boss Arne Slot had little to say about James Tarkowski's controversial bone-rattling tackle on Alexis Mac Allister during Wednesday's heated 1-0 Premier League victory over Everton, saying numerous people had done the talking for him.

Liverpool restored its 12-point lead over Arsenal atop the Premier League table with the victory over its crosstown rival.

But, it was the tackle that had everyone talking. Tarkowski won the ball, but his studs-up follow-through caught Mac Allister square on the calf in the 11th minute. Everton's captain was shown only a yellow, with a quick VAR review deciding the decision was correct.

"Alexis is okay, because he kept on playing, he's used to something (like that) because he's from South America," Slot said of the tackle. "I think everybody has said something about it, so why should I add to it? It's so obvious, that it's not necessary for me to comment."

"I'd prefer to talk about the (Diogo Jota) goal or Curtis Jones' performance, or something else," added the Dutchman, who pumped his fists at the final whistle while fans chanted: "We're going to win the league."

Plenty of people were vocal in their disagreement with the yellow card decision.

Former Manchester United defender Gary Neville called it a "horrible" tackle on the Sky Sports broadcast, adding: "He did not need to follow through like that."

Former Premier League official Mike Dean questioned the VAR's decision not to overturn the call, saying on Sky: "He should have gone to the screen and (Tarkowski) should be off."

"It is a horrible challenge. It is a red card all day."

Even former Everton forward Duncan Ferguson agreed, saying "No argument. Straight red. How they've not given the decision... it's a straight red."



Everton's James Tarkowski fouls Liverpool's Alexis Mac Allister during an English Premier League soccer match at Anfield in Liverpool on Wednesday. Liverpool won the derby clash 1-0. AP

"Back in the day, you might have got away with that, because he's tackled, he's got the ball, but he knows what he's doing, that could have been a leg-breaker."

Premier League's Match Centre posted a statement on social media to explain that Tarkowski had played the ball.

"The referee's call of yellow card for a reckless foul by Tarkowski was checked by the VAR, with contact on the follow through after Tarkowski had played the ball deemed to be reckless," the statement read.

Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford admitted Tarkowski came in with his foot high.

"You've seen at the end he apologized, it's probably a bit of a high foot, but he's done what he's done

and he's apologized after the game," Pickford said. "The VAR says it's not a red card, so that's the decision. It's a game of football as well."

Offside rule

Slot also said he does not agree with the offside rule that meant Jota's decisive goal stood in the 1-0 victory, but that the right decision was made.

Jota fired home the only goal just before the hour mark at Anfield.

Luis Diaz had been in an offside position when Tarkowski cut out a pass towards the Colombian.

Diaz then pounced on the loose ball to tee up Jota to drill in his first goal since January.

Everton boss David Moyes said he was disappointed to lose a derby to a

"clearly offside goal?"

However, Slot said the officials did get the decision right, as the rules stand given that Tarkowski deliberately played the ball.

"It was not offside, according to the rules," said Slot.

"Do I like the rule? No, I don't like the rule. I hate that rule, but the execution of the rule was, fortunately for us today, well done in that situation."

Liverpool's win could turn out to be a decisive moment in its charge toward the title, after an outstanding campaign began to wobble in recent weeks.

Champions League elimination at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain was quickly followed by defeat to Newcastle in the English League Cup final.

Meanwhile, Arsenal's win over Fulham on Tuesday sparked the possibility that the Londoners could yet mount something of a title challenge, after temporarily closing the gap at the top.

Dropped points against a fast-improving Everton would only have fueled belief that the tension is beginning to hit Liverpool's players at just the wrong time.

The home team had to survive two scares in the first half, when Beto had a goal ruled out for offside and later struck the post after racing clear.

But, Liverpool's players held their nerve and took advantage through Jota's first goal in 11 games.

Tonali strike 'a big moment' for Newcastle

Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said Sandro Tonali's eye-catching winner in Wednesday's 2-1 victory over Brentford was



Eddie Howe

a "big moment" in their push to qualify for the Champions League.

Tonali fired Newcastle into fifth place in the Premier League, as the Italian midfielder's 74th-minute rocket beat Brentford goalkeeper Mark Flekken from an improbable angle.

Brentford boss Thomas Frank claimed it was a lucky goal, describing Tonali's winner as a "one in a million cross."

Even Tonali admitted there was an element of fortune to his strike.

"It was definitely a good shot, but it was 70 percent a cross. I am going to be honest with you. It was perfect, the speed. I was a little bit lucky, because the keeper was not in the goal," he said.

But, Howe was convinced Tonali deserved credit for his headline-grabbing blast, especially since it gave fresh impetus to Newcastle's bid to return to Europe's elite club competition.

"Let me say one thing about Sandro: He can hit a ball like no-one else. When he strikes it (in training), I fear for our goalkeepers' wrists sometimes, because he can hit it that hard, so I wouldn't put it past him meaning that," Howe said.

"It was a big moment in the game, because we needed it. At that moment, the game was very much in the balance, so it's a big moment in our season."

The League Cup winner, playing for the first time since beating Liverpool to clinch its first major trophy for 56 years, is one point ahead of sixth-placed Chelsea.

The Magpies are one point behind fourth-placed Manchester City with a game in hand.

The top four qualify automatically for the Champions League, with fifth place also likely to secure entry, depending on the results of the remaining English clubs in European action this season.

AFP

AGENCIES

Flick: Too early to think about treble

MADRID — Barcelona manager Hansi Flick was keen to keep talk of trophies in check after his side booked its spot in the Copa del Rey final against rival Real Madrid with a hard-fought 1-0 win at Atletico Madrid on Wednesday.

Barcelona is on a 21-game unbeaten run across all competitions, and is the only team in Europe's top-five leagues yet to lose in 2025, as it bids for three titles playing some of the best soccer its fans have seen.

But, Flick remained cautious about its chances of winning the treble and urged his players to maintain a next-game mentality, warning that the club has little margin for error.

"I know everyone wants us to talk about the final, it's a 'Clasico,' I get that, but I don't live in the past or in the future, and our focus should be Betis, who are our next opponents in La Liga," Flick told a news conference.

"Yes, we are in a great moment, but I've been in this business enough time to know how everything can change in a heartbeat, so we need to keep focused."

"Dreaming is allowed, but first we need to work really hard and stay focused, so we can keep that dream alive."

Barcelona is on top of the La Liga standings with 66 points, three ahead of Real, with third-placed Atletico six further points back in the title race with nine games left.

Real will travel to London to face Arsenal in the Champions League quarterfinals next week, while Barca will host Borussia Dortmund.

The Spanish giants will meet in the Copa del Rey final on April 26 before they clash again in Barcelona on May 11 in a game that could decide the La Liga title.

"Tonight, I'll stick with this formi-



Barcelona's Ferran Torres (left) celebrates scoring the winning goal with Lamine Yamal and Fermin Lopez during a Copa del Rey semifinal second leg match against Atletico Madrid on Wednesday. REUTERS

dable win, which made me really happy," Flick said.

"Everyone can be proud of this team, we coaches are proud of this team. I am always positive, so I won't deny that I had great expectations for this team when I arrived last summer."

"I told them that I was very happy, that if we played like we did that day we would win. We were brave and we knew how to suffer. It's not easy to keep a clean sheet in this stadium, Atletico is one of the best teams in Europe. So, we should be really proud."

Ferran Torres scored a first-half winner for the Catalan club.

Madrid eliminated Real Sociedad in extra time on Tuesday, also advancing 5-4 on aggregate. The rivals will meet in the Copa decider for the first time since the 2013-14 season, when Madrid won the title.

"It feels great to win here, and it's even more special that it means we have qualified for the final," Torres said.

"It's always good motivation to be in a final, even more so when it's against a direct rival."

"The match was a war, a final was at stake. We did everything we could, and it was in our hands to get the victory and get that place in the

final."

"We just have to face reality as it is," Atletico defender Jose Maria Gimenez said.

"We're far away from the top in La Liga, but we're going to try until the end, and we'll see where we stand in the end to see if the season is good or not."

"We thank our fans from the bottom of our hearts and apologize for those moments when we were not up to the task. Together we are one, and we are stronger. That is how it should always be, and, hopefully, always will be."

AGENCIES

Simeone proud of team's performance, despite loss

MADRID — Atletico Madrid was knocked out of the Copa del Rey on Wednesday, after a 1-0 semifinal defeat to Barcelona for a 5-4 aggregate loss, but coach Diego Simeone was proud of his side's overall performance throughout the season.

Eliminated from the Champions League, Atletico suffered another massive blow with its Cup exit, as it extended its winless run to six matches. All signs now point to a fourth consecutive season without any silverware, as it trails leader Barcelona by six points in the La Liga standings.

Simeone, however, said he was still content.

"The team has competed very well so far, in the Champions League we have competed very well, in the Cup too, we are having a good league season, and we will continue approaching it match by match," Simeone said.

"We are trying to keep improving to get closer and closer to the teams above us, and to accept the place we are. I have no other thought than to continue with the same work, focusing on continuing in the best way possible on what is ahead of us in La Liga, with our focus on Sevilla who are our next opponent."

It seems like a tough pill to swallow for Atletico fans, as the team looked like a real contender for three major titles when it was in a two-month unbeaten run just four weeks ago.



Diego Simeone

It was head-to-head with Barca and Real on top of the La Liga standings, and secured direct qualification to the Champions League round of 16.

But, it crashed back to earth after a heartbreaking home loss on penalties to crosstown rival Real Madrid in the Champions League last month, followed by a 4-2 home defeat against Barca a few days later in La Liga, when it allowed the Catalan club to fight back from two goals down.

With elimination from the Spanish Cup on Wednesday, its last hope is La Liga, where it is miles away from Hansi Flick's Barcelona which is top with 66 points, three ahead of Real, with third-placed Atletico a further six points back in the title race with nine games left.

"In football, there are good moments and others that are not so good. There are moments when you control the game, and others when you control the opponent. And, during the season, you have to know how to manage the good, regular and bad times, and hope, game by game, to finish in the best possible way," Simeone said.

"We didn't play a good game today, but that is nothing to be sorry about. There are no complaints, as their competitive spirit and desire were always there. All the players are giving everything they can give."

REUTERS