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Global growth outlook down, US hit hard

IMF: Rising trade tensions, heightened policy uncertainty weighing on economic prospects

By ZHAO HUAXIN in Washington and WANG KEJU in Beijing

Growth projections for the global and United States economies this year have declined, respectively, by 0.5 and 0.9 percentage point from January projections, due to trade tensions and policy uncertainty, the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday. It added, however, that growth prospects could improve "immediately" if countries ease tariffs and pursue trade deals.

The latest "World Economic Outlook" report, released at the start of the IMF/World Bank Spring Meetings, said that rising trade tensions and heightened policy uncertainty are weighing heavily on global economic growth prospects, marking a potential turning point for the world economy.

It said that tariff increases announced between Feb 1 and April 4 by the US, and retaliatory measures from other countries, have triggered a downgrade in forecasts for global growth, which is projected to drop to 2.8 percent in 2025 and 3 percent in 2026, both below its previous projections of 3.3 percent, and also far below the average 3.7 percent growth rate for the world economy between 2000 and 2019.

The report makes clear that these downward revisions stem largely from the recent trade actions.

The negative effects are particularly visible in global trade flows, which are expected to dip more than output to 1.7 percent in 2025, a significant downward revision from the IMF's January projections.

"The US' effective tariff rate surged past levels reached during the Great Depression, while counter-responses from major trading partners significantly pushed up the global rate," Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, the IMF's chief economist, wrote in a blog published on Tuesday.

"If sustained, this abrupt increase in tariffs and attendant uncertainty will significantly slow global growth," he added.

The US economy, which is experiencing softening demand, is expected to grow just 1.8 percent this year, or 0.9 percentage point below earlier forecasts, and nearly half of that downgrade is directly attributable to new

tariffs, according to the IMF report. Inflation in the US is also expected to climb, reaching 3 percent, up from 2 percent previously, it said.

"The idea of using tariffs to 'make America great again' will likely lead to the opposite result," said Justin Yifu Lin, former chief economist of the World Bank and dean of the Institute of New Structural Economics at Peking University.

US tariff policies are intended to protect industries in which the US does not have comparative advantages. Even if the US could bolster these industries, they would "require protection and subsidies to survive," Lin said.

Meanwhile, other countries are likely to impose similar retaliatory tariff policies in response, which will result in a shrinking export market for US high-tech industries — the very sectors where the US holds comparative advantages — and thus weaken US technological leadership, Lin added.

China's growth forecast has been cut to 4 percent for this year, a 0.6 percentage point reduction, with inflation revised down by 0.8 percentage point, according to the IMF report.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that China's economy expanded 5.4 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2025, beating market expectations and marking a good start for the year amid headwinds.

Asked to comment on the projection disparity, Gourinchas said the IMF's number does not incorporate the latest release for the first quarter — figures that came after it made the projections. "So this is not reflected there, and we will have to see how it affects our projections when we have our next round of (World Economic Outlook) updates," Gourinchas told China Daily on Tuesday at a news briefing at the IMF Headquarters.

Lin, from Peking University, said, "The US tariff policies are constantly shifting, and it remains unclear whether 'reciprocal tariffs' will ultimately be implemented, or if there will be further delays." He added that, given the ever-changing nature of the US tariff policies, it is very difficult to predict how they will affect China's economic growth rate.

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Standing for peace



Demonstrators rally outside a military camp in Quezon City, Metro Manila, the Philippines, on Monday, during a protest against the annual Balikatan joint military exercises between the Southeast Asian country and the United States. The three-week drills kicked off the same day amid criticism for posing a threat to regional peace and stability. JAM STA ROSA / AFP Editorial, page 11

IP protection enhanced to promote tech innovation

By CAO YIN
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China's top intellectual property regulator is rapidly ramping up efforts to safeguard and support enterprises in the fast-evolving world of artificial intelligence, in order to give Chinese companies a competitive edge, according to a senior official.

"AI is a key driver of the new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation. Its development has been nothing short of explosive," said Shen Changyu, head of the China National Intellectual Property Administration, in an exclusive interview with China Daily ahead of World Intellectual Property Day, which falls on Saturday.

How to deal with AI in accordance with the law and in terms of IP rights, ownership and responsibility has become a pressing issue for the country.

"It is urgent and crucial that we adapt our IP protection mechanism to keep pace with the rapid progress," Shen said.

A few weeks earlier, Shen visited Zhejiang province to conduct research on the IP protection work



Shen Changyu

for startups in the AI industry. At a symposium held during his tour, he paid special attention to the IP protection needs of AI companies, and listened to their opinions and suggestions regarding the challenges that they face.

To address the challenges encountered by many AI startups in navigating patent and trademark applications, Shen asked IP administrators to maintain regular communication with the businesses to understand more about their IP protection needs, in order to help them solve problems and stimulate innovation.

"We're planning to establish a patent pool for AI large models to support the sustainable growth of enterprises," Shen said.

Stronger support

"AI innovators, as well as other businesses going global, will benefit from our more professional and efficient services in handling IP issues overseas, with stronger sup-

port provided for preventing IP risks in the course of their international expansions."

The administration will maintain an open and cooperative stance to advance the development of international IP rules that can adapt to the robust growth of AI technologies, with more international cooperation and exchanges in the field, he added.

China has seen remarkable development in AI innovation in recent years, with groundbreaking products such as those developed by DeepSeek capturing global attention and injecting new impetus into industrial transformation.

Shen lauded the breakthroughs, especially products developed by startups, emphasizing that the trend demonstrates the continuous advancement of high-level technological innovation in the country.

Data from the administration shows that last year, China granted more than 1.04 million invention patents, a year-on-year increase of 13.5 percent, while the registration of trademarks reached 4.78 million, up 9.1 percent compared with the previous year.

According to the Global Innovation Index Report 2024, released in

September by the World Intellectual Property Organization, China is home to 26 of the world's top 100 science and technology clusters, the highest for any country in the past two years.

"China has become the largest holder of AI-related patents globally. The numbers indicate that the dynamism of China's creation is accelerating, with the innovation momentum in key emerging fields being vigorously released," Shen said.

As AI technologies continuously develop and their applications become more diverse, the number of relevant patent applicants is also growing rapidly, presenting new challenges for IP protection.

"AI involves multiple IP aspects, including patents, trademarks, copyrights and trade secrets, so it is vital for innovators to think more about which technologies need protection, what measures need to be taken, and how to leverage IP to enhance their competitiveness," he said.

Given the current focus on patent-related IP protection in the AI field, Shen said the administration has taken some action.

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No time to lose: Shared duty to save heritage

WORLD WATCH
By Shahbaz Khan

Australia's ancient rock art, no region remains untouched.

Human activities are accelerating the peril. While urbanization and unchecked development have led to encroachment of historic neighborhoods, sprawling infrastructure has fractured cultural landscapes. Even tourism, a vital source of preservation funding, is straining fragile monuments in many World Heritage sites of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The loss of heritage is not merely structural; it is the erosion of humanity's legacy. As communities are being uplifted, valuable cultural practices and traditional knowledge are disappearing, fraying the fabric of human identity, collective memory, and the bonds that unite societies.

Friday marked the International Day for Monuments and Sites, reminding us that cultural heritage sites face unprecedented threats on a global scale.

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Pre-monsoon woes



Locals wade through a flooded street in a rickshaw after heavy rains in Guwahati, in northeastern India, on Tuesday. A sudden storm wreaked havoc in the city on Sunday evening, causing power outages, waterlogging and traffic disruptions. AFP

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BIGGEST SMALL-COMMODITIES MARKET UNFAZED BY TARIFFS

Operators at Yiwu expand horizons, diversify products to counter disruptions

By CHEN YE in Yiwu, Zhejiang
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While the United States' unwarranted imposition of tariffs has strained the nerves of traders around the globe, merchants in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, are confident their exploration of diversified export markets over the years will shield them from any heavy impact.

Known for its "small profits, quick turnover" model, Yiwu International Trade Market is renowned as the world capital of small commodities. The market consists of five districts housing 75,000 stores, with over 3,000 of those exporting merchandise to the US.

Yiwu Yexin Electronics began operating in the market in 2010

and currently has four stores across the districts. Company sales manager Mao Yeqiang said like many operators in the market, they follow a "store in the front, factory in the back" model and mainly export wearable products such as headphones and smartwatches to Europe, Southeast Asia, and South America.

This year, Southeast Asia will account for 60 percent of their exports, and Europe about 30 percent. "US orders were normal last year, but this year they've nearly vanished, dropping from 10 percent to far less," Mao said.

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Although they had plenty of orders early this year, April has been noticeably quieter compared with previous years. A direct impact of the tariff war has been the sharp decrease in order volumes, he said. Bulk orders of thousands, or tens of thousands, of units have dropped to just dozens.

Mao said the drop in volume is due to several factors.

"The overseas supply chain for these products is nearly saturated," he said. "After COVID restrictions were lifted demand exceeded supply, but now it's the opposite. Plus, due to economic uncertainties and exchange rate fluctuations brought by the tariff war, foreign buyers are more price-sensitive and prefer placing smaller orders."

To adapt to changes in the trade landscape and the US tariffs, Mao said Yexin Electronics is shifting from a business-to-business model to a business-to-customer one.

"We used to be an OEM (original equipment manufacturer), but now we're building our own brand with unique product features," he said. "We're also exploring other markets like Russia and South America, and considering domestic sales. Local sales require changes in packaging and compliance with domestic standards, making overseas markets comparatively easier to navigate," Mao said.

During the interview with China Daily, Ecuadorian importer Marlon Duche and his team were at Yexin Electronics asking about the prices of travel chargers. Yexin was the first store Duche visited on his Yiwu trip, but he said he would compare prices at other outlets. When asked about the impact of the tariff war initiated by the Trump administration, Duche said, "We're from Latin America, so the tariffs don't impact us at all."

Opportunity from crisis

The shelves at Yiwu Lincy Lock Industry Co are filled with traditional and modern smart locks. Founded in 2012 by general manager Lin Xiaoming, Lincy now exports over 50,000 locks daily, and is experiencing double-digit annual growth in production and market share.

In the past, two of its traditional locks were very popular in the US, with monthly exports of 300,000 units each. But following the US tariff announcement, the import cost for US buyers has jumped to 165 percent, prompting a halt in exports.

"We've essentially stopped trading with the US," Lin said. "The US used to account for 30 percent of our exports. Over the past few years, this has dropped to under 1 percent. Fingerprint-activated lock exports to the US have also dwindled due to their complex import requirements and order uncertainties."

Despite the drop in exports to the US, Lin is unfazed by the situation. "We are not fixated on the United States," he said.

"This is just a temporary minor difficulty, which we will rely on transformation (of markets) to overcome. If everyone ignores the United States, and all of Chinese manufacturing ignores the United States, what can the United States do?"

Africa and the Middle East now make up 60 to 70 percent of Lincy's exports, Lin said.

"In many African and Middle Eastern countries, our brand recognition is high — market share ranges from 50 percent to 90 percent," he said. "Word of mouth keeps us going. The US is just a small market for us, we can grow bigger in other regions such as Belt and Road countries and regions."

Lin recently returned from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where he joined a Jinhua city business delegation seeking to deepen economic cooperation.

Inspired by the trip, he plans to develop lock models tailored to local preferences. He has already designed three new models for the Central Asian market.

"I hope to deepen and slowly cultivate this market," he said.

"Crises can reveal opportunities. The tariff war has forced us to abandon the US market, but it gives us more energy to



Left: A merchant demonstrates a toy camera to a Spanish trader at Yiwu International Trade Market in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, on April 15. Right: A merchant negotiates prices for insulated bags with Ethiopian traders at the market on April 15. PHOTOS BY SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY



Tariffs: Operators seek to expand global reach



Overseas traders learn about air coolers during an electrical appliance fair in Yiwu on April 20. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY

56.62 billion dollars

Yiwu's total import and export trade with Belt and Road partners in 2024



Crises can reveal opportunities. The tariff war has forced us to abandon the US market, but it gives us more energy to expand elsewhere."

Lin Xiaoming, general manager of Yiwu Lincy Lock Industry Co

75,000 stores

The approximate number of stores at Yiwu International Trade Market, with over 3,000 exporting merchandise to the US

expand elsewhere — especially in Africa, the Middle East, and Belt and Road countries. The world is vast, and if you understand your customers, the market opens up. Even if we stop selling to the US, there are countless other markets to grow into."

BRI benefits

In 2024, Yiwu's total import and export trade with Belt and Road partners reached 413.34 billion yuan (\$56.62 billion), up 18.2 percent year-on-year, accounting for 61.8 percent of the city's total trade, and making it a key growth driver, official data shows.

Chen Fangfang, chairwoman of Hui-Gang Import & Export Co, also joined the business delegation to Central Asia. Her textile company specializes in bedding and carpets, with a daily output of 40,000 to 50,000 blankets.

Chen has been in the industry for 25 years and joined Yiwu International Trade Market in 2011.

"Our foreign trade started with South America. Now our main markets are South America, the Middle East, and some of Europe," she said.

"The US accounts for about 20 percent of our business. But this year, American clients halted orders due to high tariffs. Even European clients are holding back due to the poor economic climate."

Despite challenges from the US and Europe, Chen said South America, the Middle East, and Africa remain stable.

"The tariff war has affected us, but not

our survival. Seventy percent of our business comes from other countries. We've never focused on just one country — we develop multiple markets and go on international visits every year," Chen said.

She said the first step is research and development, starting with the raw yarn "so we control the supply chain". The second step is to gain market advantages through innovation. Finally, the company has the benefit of 25 years' experience in the field, Chen said.

"We tell our team to stay grounded and build strength internally, attracting quality clients through innovation, not desperation. Sustainable growth requires both quality and quantity," Chen said confidently.

Wu Xiaoming, chairman of Yiwu Aokay Sports Goods Co, which makes basketballs, footballs, and volleyballs, began diversifying the company's markets following the 2008 global financial crisis.

Average annual company sales total 30

to 40 million yuan, with 50 percent to South America, 20 percent to Western Europe, and the remainder to Africa, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. US exports dropped from 2 percent last year to zero this year, Wu said.

"The US market has high barriers, and mature supply chains, which make it hard to break into. We still have a leftover Walmart order of over 30,000 balls from last year, but due to shipment delays and increased tariffs, it's uncertain whether we'll complete it," Wu said.

Nonetheless, he said the US tariffs had disrupted global trade. "Some of our old South American clients are hesitant to place orders now due to exchange rate volatility," Wu said.

The company has also initiated brand differentiation.

Aokay is the high-end line, Meik is geared for schools and the general public, and Ruimeng (RM) is its budget label. "We used to focus on OEM, but now we're prioritizing brand development," Wu said.

Disruption minimal

Zhejiang Yinyuan Optical Instruments Co makes optical products like binoculars, scopes, and night-vision gear, with an annual output value of around 80 million yuan.

Exports to the US account for 40 million to 50 million yuan of its output. Their outlet in Yiwu market sees less than 5 percent of its exports go to the US, but their sales through Amazon are mostly US-bound.

"Through traditional channels, importers handle customs, so we're not directly impacted," general sales manager Chen Jiajia said. "But higher tariffs mean higher shipping costs, which push up prices. In e-commerce, the effect is delayed, but if tariffs stay high, orders will likely decline."

She said if the tariff war continues, the company will absorb some cost increases and raise prices when needed. "Ultimately, US consumers will pay more. It's not beneficial for them," Chen said.

She recently went to a Hong Kong trade fair and said almost no US clients attended. "Since COVID, the US economy has been declining year by year," she said. "When we participated in exhibitions this year, we didn't consider the US and went to Russia or other places. We're now targeting South America, which is showing great potential."

Wu Guangyao, general manager of Wokali (Zhejiang) Biotechnology Co, runs a cosmetics business that joined the market in 2005. The company exports shampoo and other personal care products to nearly 200 countries. US buyers account for less than 10 percent of their exports, but the tariffs have already had a noticeable impact.

"We import raw materials like witch hazel extract and carbomer (a synthetic polymer) from the US, and prices have doubled ... but they are even more after suppliers raised prices," Wu said.

Wokali began storing up on US raw materials a month before the tariffs hit — enough for a full quarter of production. But storage limitations, like temperature requirements, prevent them from stockpiling for a full year.

"Our bottleneck is raw materials — we can't change formulations overnight. Some R&D can take three to five years. We're now seeking alternative suppliers from other countries," Wu said.

However, an upside is the brand is well-known in many countries. "Though the US market is affected, global exports remain stable. If we lose the US, we can make up for it with growth elsewhere," Wu said.

Walking through Yiwu International Trade Market, foreign buyers are everywhere, merchants have their doors open, and business is bustling. Although some US clients are hesitant, most Yiwu merchants believe tariffs have not caused significant disruption.

Expanding markets, improving quality, building brands, and continuous innovation were common themes expressed by many traders. In the face of uncertainty in global trade, Yiwu's merchants are embracing long-term thinking and steady progress.



Left: Chen Jiajia (left), general sales manager of Zhejiang Yinyuan Optical Instruments Co, looks on as Russian visitors check scopes at an outdoor expo in Moscow on March 1. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Right: Azerbaijani traders inspect sports equipment at the market on April 15. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY



TOP NEWS

New undergrad majors added

Ministry emphasizes alignment between academic planning, employment trends

By ZOU SHUO

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China has added 29 new undergraduate majors in its latest annual reshuffle of university disciplines released on Tuesday, aiming to respond rapidly to the evolving needs of national strategies and the pursuit of high-quality development, according to the Ministry of Education.

Universities nationwide added 1,839 new undergraduate programs while suspending enrollment in 2,220 programs and phasing out 1,428 others. Additionally, 157 existing programs underwent modifications in degree categories or the duration of study.

The ministry releases the reshuffle every year, and it said the latest one marks a more drastic change in undergraduate majors.

Among the 29 newly added majors, it added ones that serve strategic areas of national interest, such as regional and country studies, carbon neutrality science and engineering, marine science and technology, and health and medical security.

It also included those focusing on technological frontiers, such as intelligent molecular engineering, medical device and equipment engineering, and spatiotemporal information engineering.

Majors catering to emerging market trends were added, such as international cruise management and aeronautical sports, as well as artificial intelligence-integrated disciplines such as AI education, smart audiovisual engineering and digital drama.

To facilitate a more agile response to national strategies, the ministry

has implemented a new mechanism allowing swift adjustments to the curriculum in response to newly prioritized strategic areas.

Addressing the rapid development needs of the low-altitude economy, six universities, including Beihang University, have been guided to add a major in low-altitude technology and engineering.

With China's higher education system now offering 62,800 undergraduate programs, the ministry emphasized strengthening the alignment between academic planning and employment trends.

A senior official with the ministry's department of higher education said that universities need to apply a year in advance to add new majors, so that they will not rush to set up trendy "hot majors" without proper consideration.

Meanwhile, the ministry has offered guidance to universities in establishing majors related to emerging industries and national

strategic needs, the official said.

Moreover, it has guided five provincial regions to better match university majors with local development needs, he said.

For example, almost 30 percent of university majors in Heilongjiang province were adjusted last year, with 74 percent of the existing majors supporting its key industries, the official said.

Lang Shiyuan, an English teacher at the First High School of Changsha in Hunan province, said he and his students pay close attention to the annual changes in majors.

He said that the new majors were more practical and conform to the needs of society.

His students, especially the top ones, have strong opinions on what majors they are going to study at university, he added.

"They will choose majors offering good career prospects," he said. "Interest and sense of achievement are also important."

Ruto says visit to further strengthen ties with China

By EDITH MUTETHYA

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As Kenyan President William Ruto is making a state visit to China from Tuesday to Saturday, leaders of the two countries are expected to have dialogues on deepening bilateral cooperation in various areas under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative to benefit Kenya as well as the entire East African region.

In an interview with Chinese media in Nairobi, Kenya's capital, on Thursday ahead of the visit, Ruto expressed his anticipation of his meeting with President Xi Jinping, saying that it will further strengthen ties between the two nations.

"I am looking forward to this trip because it will give me an opportunity to exchange views at the highest level with President Xi on matters of mutual interest between our two countries," he said.

Ruto said he looks forward to deepening the relationship between the two countries through this visit and engaging in more mutually beneficial cooperation for win-win outcomes.

Ruto said the expansion of the Chinese-built Standard Gauge Railway, a crucial artery that currently links Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya's second-largest city, will be part of the discussions during his visit, noting that there are ongoing conversations in the region to expand the railway line to Uganda and eventually to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

He said he will also seek Chinese support to revive other key infrastructure projects including roads. China has been Kenya's biggest trading partner and a major investor in its infrastructure projects.

Ruto said the development of the railway line and roads connecting the region will help in enhancing trade within the region and with the rest of the world.

Noting China's achievements in green energy technologies, he said Kenya is pursuing partnerships with the Asian powerhouse to realize the goal of making the country's power grid 100 percent green by 2030.

Kenya will also seek partnerships with Chinese enterprises on green energy, including electric



William Ruto

vehicles, to explore the public-private partnership model with the aim of building the country's manufacturing capacity to serve the country and the entire East African region.

"Kenya's leadership in the renewable energy space will be of benefit to the collaboration between China and Kenya," he said.

Ruto said that Kenya, which has abundant green energy potential, seeks increased Chinese private sector investment, taking advantage of China's strengths in technology, innovation and financial infrastructure.

Noting Kenya's strategic position on the east coast of Africa, Ruto said there is an opportunity for Kenya to work with China and position itself as the manufacturing hub in East Africa, based on its ports in Mombasa and Lamu.

"There is a possibility of connecting the East African coast to the West African coast through the BRI, and with it, Kenya can leverage the manufacturing possibilities that exist using its ports," he said.

He added that partnerships with the Chinese private sector under the BRI could help in promoting regional integration through the construction of roads connecting the East African region.

Ruto also said that China's modernization model is key for Africa in efforts to modernize its agriculture and realize industrialization, leveraging the Asian country's experience and technology. Kenya can learn from the experiences of China and other parts of the world, he said.

Cooperation between Kenya and China, along with Africa-China cooperation, is an important part of South-South cooperation, which currently enjoys growing potential and momentum.

Ruto said that Kenya is currently assessing the possibility of joining the BRICS cooperation mechanism. In a multipolar world, Kenya is dedicated to seeking a broad range of partners, exploring the potential for multilateral cooperation, he said.

For earth's sake

University students take part in a mangrove planting event on Tuesday to mark Earth Day in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Earth Day, which is celebrated all over the world on April 22, highlights the importance of protecting the environment.

RISKA MUNAWARAH / REUTERS



IMF: Global cooperation key to growth

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"China, as a major economy that prioritizes domestic circulation as the main engine of growth, is well-positioned to achieve its expected growth target of around 5 percent this year by effectively leveraging its advantages and policy tools," he added.

Looking ahead, the IMF expects intensifying downside risks to dominate the outlook.

"Ratcheting up a trade war, along with even more elevated trade policy uncertainty, could further reduce near- and long-term growth, while eroded policy buffers weaken resilience to future shocks," the global lending agency said in its report.

Noting that the global economy is at a critical juncture, the IMF proposed policy recommendations that call for prudence and improved collaboration.

"The first priority should be to restore trade policy stability and forge mutually beneficial arrangements," it said. "Reducing policy-induced uncertainty and resolving trade tensions can promote a more stable environment, bolster consumption, and facilitate investment."

The IMF urged countries to work "constructively" to promote a stable and predictable trade environment, facilitate debt restructuring and address shared challenges.

"At the same time, they should address domestic policy and structural imbalances, thereby ensuring their internal economic stability," it said.

The IMF also called for efforts to preserve international cooperation.

"International cooperation, including cooperation through regional and cross-regional groups, is essential to sustain global growth, tackle common problems and mitigate cross-country spillovers," it said.

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Heritage: Chinese technical, financial assistance help boost capacity building

From page 1

Amid climate disasters, geopolitical conflicts and rapid urbanization, safeguarding our shared legacy has never been more urgent.

However, recent achievements by UNESCO and its member states offer a beacon of hope, demonstrating that collective action can preserve and even revitalize the irreplaceable treasures of our past.

The UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund, a multi-donor initiative, enables rapid response to crises caused by armed conflicts and disasters. Through this fund, UNESCO and its partners have organized cultural workshops to support community recovery, developed a guide to prevent fires in cultural and natural heritage sites, and established inter-sectoral collaborative platforms to address Mongolia's extreme weather known as *dzud*. The recent completion of an eight-year initiative has revived Mosul, one of the world's oldest cities, after its destruction by the Daesh (formerly known as the Islamic State).

In the Asia-Pacific region, UNESCO has advanced the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration, helping countries integrate culture into sustainable development.

Vietnam has expanded its legal frameworks for heritage preservation and creative industries with UNESCO's support, while Indonesia's 2024 national cultural strategy has reinforced culture as a pillar of development, and Nepal and Bangladesh have updated policies to prioritize cultural rights and climate resilience, and Tuvalu and the Cook Islands have integrated traditional knowledge into climate adaptation strategies.

China has also become a key partner in global heritage conservation, sharing expertise through technical and financial assistance. Since 1989, China has been helping Cambodia to restore the Angkor Wat monuments, and since 2015, it

how preservation can drive sustainable development. China's holistic approach — combining cutting-edge technology, community empowerment and policy foresight — offers replicable models for balancing progress with preservation.

China's use of cutting-edge tools has set a conservation benchmark. The Great Wall's artificial intelligence-powered monitoring system, employing satellite imagery and 3D modeling, detects structural vulnerabilities with unprecedented precision. The "digital Dunhuang project" in Gansu province has created a virtual twin of the Mogao Grottoes, reducing physical visitation pressure on the UNESCO World Heritage site while making the treasure globally accessible — a solution echoing UNESCO's emphasis on ethical digital transformation.

After the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan province, the restoration of Duijiangyan's ancient irrigation system, a UNESCO World Heritage site, not only preserved a 2,300-year-old engineering marvel but also ensured it continued playing its due role in irrigating around 750,000 hectares of farmland. This aligns with UNESCO's call to integrate traditional knowledge into climate resilience.

China's visitor-management innovations, such as time-slot ticketing for the Palace Museum, have inspired global peers such as Venice in Italy and Machu Picchu in Peru, while embedding heritage into rural revitalization programs has created millions of jobs, lifting communities out of poverty while safeguarding cultural heritage.

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has been assisting Nepal to rebuild monuments damaged in the devastating Kathmandu earthquake.

Through initiatives such as the International Youth Forum on Creativity and Heritage along the Silk Roads, China has fostered intercultural dialogue among youths from more than 100 countries, promoting heritage stewardship. Since 2018, China has collaborated with Africa to strengthen capacity building and monitor systems for UNESCO World Heritage sites. China's multilateral cooperation aligns with UNESCO's vision of heritage as a catalyst for international understanding and peace building.

Today, we celebrate heritage as a bridge — not merely between the past and the future, but as a living connection between peoples and nations. In the face of division and destruction, preserving cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, movable and immovable, becomes an act of hope and a powerful affirmation of the MONDIACULT vision that positions culture at the heart of sustainable development.

China has shown that through innovation, inclusive vision and global partnership, heritage can thrive as a testament to resilience — from AI-powered conservation to community-led rural revitalization.

UNESCO remains committed to strengthening its partnership with China as well as other countries, ensuring our cultural legacies not only endure but illuminate the path forward. Let today inspire our collective action to place culture where it belongs — as a fundamental pillar of human progress. Together, we can prove that the heritage preserved today becomes sustainable development tomorrow.

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IP: AI-related patent boom shows dynamism of creation

From page 1

It has clarified that inventions involving AI can be patented through revisions to the patent examination guidelines of 2019. Last year, the administration issued another guideline targeted at tackling AI-related invention patent applications.

IP protection centers

While improving the legal framework, the administration has established 77 national IP protection centers to provide businesses with comprehensive IP services. Among these, 62 centers have offered pre-examination services for AI-related patents to more than 21,000 registered enterprises and institutions.

Last year, these centers received 46,000 pre-examination requests for AI patents, with 31,000 patents granted through quick review channels, "which significantly supported the high-quality development of the AI

industry," according to Shen.

Considering that AI technologies involve many other fields, such as new-generation information technology, new materials and high-end equipment manufacturing, Shen underlined that IP protection must also meet the diverse needs of different fields.

"We've stepped up efforts to boost collaborative IP protection systems with other authorities," he said, noting that courts, procuratorates, public security bureaus and customs have been invited to set up offices in 33 of the national IP protection centers.

"This move is conducive to improving the timeliness, coordination and effectiveness of administrative and judicial IP protection in emerging fields like AI," he added.

Shen called for local governments and industrial associations to join the IP protection team in order to better embrace fast-developing AI-related technologies and effectively address new challenges.

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Facing a crisis



Medical staff of the Action Against Hunger organization queue up for photos on Monday at Haji Baba Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan. The organization has suspended most of its operations in Afghanistan, following cuts in aid by the US. SAMULLAH POPAL / EPA-EFE

CHINA

Cases highlight need to protect personal data

By WANG QINGYUN
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Police have revealed three cases involving violations of personal information security, urging the public to raise awareness and take precautions to avoid data leaks and potential fraud. The cases, reported by People's Daily, highlight how online channels can be exploited to compromise personal data.

In the first case, a group of suspects allegedly implanted Trojan horse malware into computers at more than 50 companies offering online education and training services.

In September last year, a person surnamed Lu, who worked at an education and training institution, was caught secretly extracting data from colleagues' computers using a flash drive. Lu was said to have admitted to moving between multiple companies in the industry to plant malware and steal data.

Investigators later discovered that Lu was part of a larger criminal network that included individuals who developed, purchased, distributed and implanted the malware.

In the second case, a consumer began receiving frequent telemarketing and scam calls after buying tea from a store on an e-commerce platform.

A subsequent investigation uncovered a criminal chain violating personal data security. According to

police, some online store operators sent encrypted customer order information to suspects posing as "agents".

These agents collaborated with employees at delivery companies to decrypt the data. Store operators then paid the agents for the information. Police have detained 18 suspects in connection with the case.

In the third case, police were alerted by an online recruitment platform in June last year after a woman surnamed Tian reported being defrauded of 2,400 yuan (\$328) by a company registered on the site.

The platform found that the company's uploaded business license was fake. Police later discovered a criminal organization that had been forging business licenses and luring jobseekers into sharing personal data. Once they received resumes, the group added victims on WeChat, persuaded them to download malicious applications and scammed them out of money.

Authorities said the group obtained contact information for nearly 1,000 jobseekers. They also used other companies' identities to register on seven online recruitment platforms, preventing the actual companies from posting legitimate job ads.

After solving the case, police informed multiple online recruitment platforms to delete fake business licenses sold by the group and uploaded on the platforms' websites.

Former senior Xinjiang official receives sentence

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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Li Pengxin, a former senior official of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve for accepting bribes totaling more than 822 million yuan (\$112 million), according to a verdict on Tuesday.

The verdict was announced by the Intermediate People's Court in Baoji, Shaanxi province. It noted that after the two-year reprieve period, the death sentence for Li, former deputy secretary of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Regional Committee of the Communist Party of China, would be commuted to life imprisonment without the possibility of further commutation or parole.

Li, 65, is a native of Shanxi province. He started his career in 1977 and joined the Party in 1984.

From 1999 to 2023, Li held a series of leadership positions, including head of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Qinghai Provincial Committee, head of the Organization Department of the CPC committee in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and deputy secretary of the CPC Xinjiang committee.

The verdict said through an investigation, it was discovered that Li was using his various positions to assist organizations and individuals in matters such as mineral exploration, business operations and official appointments.

Li, directly or through others, illegally accepted property equivalent to more than 822 million yuan from these organizations and individuals.

He was expelled from the Party and dismissed from public office for seriously violating Party discipline and laws in June.

Show of strength



Workers participate in a tug-of-war competition organized by the local trade union at the Jiangsu pilot free trade zone in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, on Tuesday. ZHU HUINAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Debut stem cell therapy pricing released in Hainan

By WEI WANGYU
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The Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone in Hainan province has released pricing for China's first batch of stem cell therapies officially classified as "medical technologies", marking a regulatory shift from traditional drug approval frameworks.

The approved treatments — targeting knee osteoarthritis, which will cost about 36,000 yuan (\$4,926) per session, autologous lung cell transplantation (150,000 yuan), and ischemic heart disease (60,000 yuan) — represent a transformative step in expanding access to cutting-edge regenerative therapies while navigating an evolving regulatory landscape.

"The medical pilot zone in Hainan serves as a policy innovation testing ground, implementing breakthrough institutional arrangements," said Su Jing, secretary-general of the Center for Global Development and Health Communication Research at Tsinghua University. "The zone permits specific medical projects to conduct clinical applications without undergoing conventional approval processes from national drug regulatory authorities, effectively establishing a platform for medical innovations."

While the announcement broadens treatment options, experts emphasize the importance of strict safeguards. Eligibility is limited to patients who meet rigorous clinical criteria, such as individuals with severe knee osteoarthritis that is



Talent test

Foreign youths at Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, take a practical skills test that required them to use AI applications to create posters and videos for a specific item on Monday. Eighteen young individuals from countries including Jordan, Syria, Yemen, and Morocco passed and received related certificates in Yiwu on Tuesday. These are the first specialized certificates issued in China by Yiwu for foreign talent. NI YANQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Courts to take tough stance against solid waste pollution

People participating in cross-regional dumping will face stronger penalties

By CAO YIN
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With a "zero-tolerance" stance toward environmental harm, Chinese courts have pledged to intensify the crackdown on illegal and criminal acts related to solid waste pollution, especially those involving cross-regional dumping, the Supreme People's Court said on Tuesday.

Marking World Earth Day, the top court revealed three exemplary cases involving solid waste contamination, underscoring the country's judicial determination and continued efforts in environmental governance.

"The disclosure serves to galvanize public participation in solid waste pollution control while urging enterprises to conduct activities — from generation, collection and storage to transportation, utilization and disposal — in accord-

ance with laws," the court said. "It is also meant to foster a societal shift toward moderate and prudent lifestyles, as well as green, low-carbon production patterns," it added.

In one of the cases, a court in Jiangsu province sentenced several polluters, including two individuals surnamed Wu and Deng, to prison terms ranging from 18 months to three years, along with fines, for illegally dumping waste across provincial borders.

According to the ruling, Wu and Deng, along with others, used two abandoned fish ponds in Qidong, Jiangsu, as unauthorized waste landfill sites in 2022. They transported more than 4,800 metric tons of mixed construction waste from multiple sites in Shanghai to the ponds and buried it under layers of soil, without approval or environmental protection measures.

An appraisal found that the solid

waste, soil and groundwater contained heavy metals and other medical substances, classifying them as hazardous pollutants under Chinese criminal law. The cost of clearing, transporting and disposing of the waste was estimated at about 1.7 million yuan (\$232,600).

The Dongtai court in Jiangsu found the defendants guilty of environmental pollution, citing the cross-provincial nature and hazardous content of the waste as aggravating factors that warranted harsher punishment.

"In recent years, with the continuous development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, a large amount of construction and domestic waste has been generated in urban areas," the top court said.

"Due to limited disposal capacity and high disposal costs, some people have been found to be transferring construction waste across provinces and dumping it in surrounding counties or cities, causing serious pollution and environmental damage."

To combat the issue, the Supreme People's Court has issued a joint directive with the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment on handling criminal environmental cases.

The document stipulates that for cross-provincial dumping of radioactive waste, waste containing infectious disease pathogens, toxic substances or other hazardous materials in the Yangtze River Economic Belt, harsher penalties may be imposed.

The top court praised the Jiangsu ruling, saying it will help drive the transformation of the traditional construction industry and support the development of new, green and efficient productive forces.

"The verdict has also shown our firm determination to provide strong judicial guarantees for jointly pursuing protection and refraining from large-scale development in the Yangtze River Economic Belt," it said.

Grassland conservation efforts yield positive results

By YAN DONGJIE
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China has made significant strides in grassland conservation through seed industry development and technological innovation, officials announced on Tuesday, which was World Earth Day.

With 40,000 hectares of new seed production bases established and 15 breakthrough grass varieties bred, the country is addressing ecological challenges while boosting rural livelihoods, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

"We've built a national preservation system with one central seed bank and 20 resource nurseries," said Zhao Bing, deputy inspector of

the NFGA's seed and nursery department.

He detailed efforts to strengthen domestic seed supply, including the department's launch of the Catalog of China's Major Grass Species and the recent approval of 59 new grass varieties, marking milestones in supporting ecological restoration and pastoral industries.

Notably, seed production reached 25,000 metric tons annually last year, with large-scale bases including a 13,333.3-hectare seed farm in Qinghai province and a 6,666.7-hectare *Leymus chinensis* grass hub in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

"Our goal is 75 percent domestic seed self-sufficiency by 2030," Zhao said, outlining plans to expand

breeding land and establish traceability systems.

Tong Jinquan, deputy inspector of the NFGA's technology department, highlighted scientific advancements. A "mission-oriented" breeding program has yielded 15 elite varieties, including "Zhongke No 10" *Leymus* and "Tengge" licorice, which have increased grassland productivity by 80 percent. These varieties are now rehabilitating degraded lands across six provinces.

The establishment of 26 research stations and a national grassland lab at Lanzhou University underpins these efforts.

"We've trained 57 top-tier researchers and deployed 320 technologies," Tong noted, citing alfalfa

strains for saline soils and sand-fixing grasses for the Three-North Shelterbelt Forest Program.

Li Yongjun, director of the NFGA's grassland management department, linked these measures to broader outcomes. Annual restoration of over 3 million hectares has raised fresh grass yields to 550 million tons, while eco-tourism in 39 pilot grassland parks boosts local incomes.

Challenges remain, with 70 percent of grasslands still degraded. Yet, as Zhao said, "From seed banks to smart monitoring, we're building an integrated system to turn green barriers into green wealth."

Zhou Wenbo contributed to this story.

long-term patient monitoring.

He said stem cell therapy is particularly effective for diseases that cannot be cured by traditional treatments.

"Immune cells are very beneficial for diseases of the blood system," he said. "In the United States, a lot of work is being done in Philadelphia, which is known as 'Cellicon Valley'. Compared to them, we are more cautious about openness when it comes to cell therapy policy."

In China, stem cell therapies managed as a medical technology are regulated by the National Health Commission. The national medical research registration and filing platform has approved filings from more than 140 stem cell institutions and nearly 130 research projects. These projects are conducted through clinical research and may not charge patients, Tan said.

Sun Lei, director of the bone and joint transplantation and regenera-

tory laboratory at Beijing Jishuitan Hospital, said the Boao model has sparked optimism within China's stem cell industry, but challenges remain.

The high cost of cell therapies — equivalent to many months of disposable income for the average urban household — raises affordability concerns, he said.

Still, he said, "the latest approval in Boao, if scaled nationally, will be of great significance for the stem cell sector and has broad market potential."

Ye Cuihua, a 77-year-old arthritis patient who has undergone multiple surgeries, said she would consider trying the therapy despite the cost. "I've been taking medication for over 20 years and have had two surgeries," she said. "If stem cell treatment can make me feel better in my later years, I'm willing to try it. The price is only reasonable if it's truly effective."

CHINA

Study aims to boost Hainan gibbon numbers

Habitat, nutrition, genetics and extreme events can threaten species' recovery

By CHEN LIANG
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In the heart of the lush Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park dwells the Hainan black-crested gibbon (*Nomascus hainanus*). Also known as the Hainan gibbon, it is the world's rarest primate species.

Only 42 individuals remain, a single struggling population clinging to existence within the park's Bawangling area. The International Union for Conservation of Nature classifies them as critically endangered.

For decades, conservationists have strived to bolster their numbers, battling habitat loss and low genetic diversity. A team led by professor Fan Pengfei from the School of Life Sciences at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in collaboration with researchers from home and abroad, recently published a paper in *Science Advances*, an open access multidisciplinary journal.

Titled "Science-based suggestions to save the world's rarest primate species *Nomascus hainanus*", it offers a fresh perspective on the Hainan gibbon's situation and a glimmer of hope for the species' future.

Fan and his team believe that despite the gibbons' dwindling numbers, the quality of their current habitat is surprisingly not poor.

Instead of focusing solely on improving the existing environment, they argue that the priority should be expanding the gibbons' accessible habitat.

They suggest building habitat corridors to rapidly increase the habitat available to the gibbons, a

vital step in mitigating the chances of inbreeding — a significant threat given their low genetic diversity.

The team emphasizes that capturing wild gibbons to establish a captive breeding program should be approached with extreme caution. Such an action could diminish the already limited genetic diversity of the population, exacerbating the risk of inbreeding depression — the reduced survival and fertility of offspring from related individuals.

Their recommendations are rooted in robust analysis of years of data.

"The protection of biodiversity is one of humanity's core tasks," Fan told *China Daily*. "Saving critically endangered species with tiny populations is a key, yet extremely challenging, aspect of biodiversity conservation, and there are few successful cases."

He explained that when a population falls below a certain threshold, it enters an extinction vortex, where random events such as fluctuations in population size, environmental instability and genetic drift — change in gene variant frequencies in a population from generation to generation that occurs due to chance events — continually threaten its survival.

Habitat degradation and accompanied nutritional deprivation, genetic issues such as inbreeding depression and genetic bottlenecks, and extreme events like severe weather can accelerate extinction or impede population recovery.

In such dire circumstances, human intervention, such as habitat restoration and captive breeding, becomes essential, Fan said.

"But these interventions must



A female Hainan black-crested gibbon and her baby rest in the canopy of a tropical forest in Hainan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

be based on solid scientific evidence," he added. "Otherwise, significant resources may be wasted on inefficient or ineffective conservation efforts, and may even have a negative impact on the species."

The Hainan gibbon, endemic to South China's Hainan Island, once thrived throughout the province. As recently as the 1950s, estimates placed their population at around 2,000. But habitat loss and rampant poaching caused a drastic decline, leaving only two family groups, a mere 13 individuals, by 2003.

While conservation efforts have

gained traction in the past two decades, leading to a slight population increase, Fan said, the species remains trapped in the peril of a small, vulnerable population.

After the establishment of the national park in October 2020, it designated the Hainan gibbon as its flagship species, channeling significant conservation funding toward its protection and habitat restoration.

However, the suitability of the population's existing habitat and its genetic status had not been adequately assessed.

"As a result, habitat restoration and captive breeding programs

targeting at the Hainan gibbon have lacked a solid scientific foundation," Fan said.

From March 2021 to December 2022, Fan's team, comprising three of his students and several local forest rangers, successfully habituated two Hainan gibbon family groups to human presence. This allowed the gibbons to exhibit their natural behaviors unperturbed by the observers.

They conducted year-round behavioral observations and collected the largest behavioral dataset on the species to date.

Coupled with analyses of the macronutrient composition of

their food plants, the team estimated the gibbons' annual energy intake. This marked the first quantitative assessment of energy intake in wild gibbons.

By comparing their data with captive southern yellow-cheeked crested gibbons that were provided with ample food and other free-feeding captive primates, the researchers found that wild Hainan gibbons had relatively higher energy intakes.

"This suggests that the wild Hainan gibbons are able to obtain sufficient energy from their habitat to meet their needs," Fan said.

The research team organized nearly two decades of population monitoring and estimated crucial breeding parameters, namely female reproductive intervals and male dispersal age.

Comparing these parameters with those of other gibbon species, they discovered that Hainan gibbons have relatively short reproductive intervals and earlier male dispersal ages, indicating a healthy breeding status.

Finally, the team constructed a genetic dataset of the existing Hainan gibbon population, including 18 of the 21 adults.

The results revealed that while the gibbon's genetic diversity remains significantly lower than historical levels, the coefficient of relatedness between adult males and females in newly formed family groups is increasing. This suggests that the population faces a high risk of inbreeding.

"Because of these data and analysis, we think our suggestions are solid and practical," Fan said.

"We will continue to monitor population dynamics and investigate energy intake of other groups of the Hainan gibbons, especially those living in secondary forests. Hopefully, our research and conservation efforts can save the species from extinction."

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BIODIVERSITY IS LIFE.
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IS THE FUTURE.**



WORLD

Russia says open to direct discussions with Ukraine

MOSCOW/KYIV — Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed on Monday bilateral talks with Ukraine for the first time since the early days of the conflict, and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv was eager to discuss a halt to attacks on civilian targets.

Speaking to a state TV reporter, Putin said fighting had resumed after the 30-hour Easter ceasefire, which he had announced unilaterally on Saturday. And Moscow, he said, was open to any peace initiatives and expected the same from Kyiv.

"We have always talked about this, that we have a positive attitude toward any peace initiatives. We hope that representatives of the Kyiv regime will feel the same way."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, quoted later by Interfax news agency, told reporters, "When the president said that it was possible to discuss the issue of not striking civilian targets, including bilaterally, the president had in mind negotiations and discussions with the Ukrainian side."

There have been no direct talks between the two sides since the early weeks after Russia's February 2022 special military operation.

While Zelensky did not respond directly to Putin's proposal, he emphasized in his nightly video address that Ukraine "was ready for any conversation" about a ceasefire that would stop strikes on civilians.

He said Ukraine stood by its proposal for an end to attacks on civilian targets and was ready for any form of discussion to achieve it. Previously, the United States and Ukraine had framed this as a 30-day ceasefire.

"Ukraine maintains its proposal not to strike at the very least civilian targets. And we are expecting a clear response from Moscow," Zelensky said. "We are ready for any conversation about how to achieve this."

The Kremlin said on Tuesday that Russia is ready to consider the Ukrainian proposal for a halt to attacks by both sides on each other's civilian infrastructure.

Peskov said it was a complex topic that Putin was ready to discuss. However, he also told reporters there were no concrete plans at the moment for talks between Russia and Ukraine.

The two countries have said they are open to further ceasefires after the Easter truce over the weekend. Each side accused the other of violating it.

Wednesday meeting

Meanwhile, Ukraine will take part in talks with the US and European countries in London on Wednesday, Zelensky said. The discussions are a follow-up to a Paris meeting last week where the US and European countries discussed ways to end the more than three-year-old conflict.

The primary task of the London talks is "to push for an unconditional ceasefire", which must be "the starting point", he said.

US President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio both said on Friday that if no progress, then Washington could abandon the peace talks within days. Trump struck a more optimistic note on Sunday, saying that "hopefully" the two sides would make a deal "this week".

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

UK hosts ministers for crucial energy summit

By JONATHAN POWELL in London
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Global leaders, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and ministers from France, Germany, India, Japan and the United States, will join energy company executives in the United Kingdom this week for a major summit on securing stable energy supplies amid global market uncertainty.

More than 60 countries will be represented at London's Lancaster House on Thursday and Friday for the energy security summit, co-hosted by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and the International Energy Agency amid warnings that the world has yet to fully grasp the lessons from the crisis triggered by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, reported the Financial Times.

Discussing the crisis stemming from Europe's loss of Russian pipeline gas and the scramble for alternative energy sources, International Energy Agency chief Fatih Birol warned the "lessons from Ukraine have not yet been fully understood".

Birol outlined "three golden rules" for energy security: diversifying energy supplies, ensuring political stability for long-term corporate investments, and fostering global cooperation.

Current trends contradict these principles as Europe continues to rely heavily on imported gas, noted the FT's analysis. Both Europe and the US have implemented significant changes to energy subsidies and regulations, and current trade tensions initiated by US President

Donald Trump are undermining international cooperation.

Birol said these trade disputes have created "uncertainty which will affect demand for oil and gas for some time to come".

Threats to energy supplies are multiplying, from conflicts in Europe and the Middle East to extreme weather events, attacks on undersea infrastructure, and cyber threats. "There are traditional risks and emerging risks and these have to be more in the international debate," he said.

Concern remains

Europe's energy vulnerability, despite diversifying away from Russian pipeline gas, remains a concern as the continent heavily relies on liquefied natural gas imports, said energy analyst Ron Bousso for Reuters.

While Europe's gas supplies now include liquefied natural gas and pipeline imports from Norway, Turkey and North Africa, multiple risks, including potential US export curbs and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz — a critical waterway between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula that handles 20 percent of global oil and gas shipments — could threaten this balance, Bousso said.

The guest list for the energy summit includes major oil and gas companies, technology firms and energy-producing states.

The summit has drawn criticism from environmental groups concerned about the strong presence of fossil fuel interests, The Guardian reported.



Battling polio

A health worker administers oral polio vaccine to schoolchildren during a door-to-door immunization campaign in Lahore, Pakistan, on Monday. The country has launched a weeklong second nationwide polio drive of this year, aiming to vaccinate more than 45 million children against the crippling disease. It follows six reported cases since January. Last year, Pakistan witnessed a surge in polio cases, which jumped to 74.

ARIF ALI / AFP

'Moment of truth': Debate over trade, peace sparks global buzz

Two eminent experts from China and US cross swords in clash of worldviews

By SHI GUANG in New York
shiguang@chinadailyusa.com

Two high-profile Chinese and US experts engaged in a heated, one-on-one debate on the effects and implications of China's growth, broadcast on the Al Arabiya English Channel show *Counterpoints*. The video of the debate has proved quite popular on YouTube, garnering more than half a million views and 9,300 comments as of Monday.

Exchanges between Elliott Abrams, a senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, and Chinese geopolitical expert Victor Gao on April 16 revolved around the Donald Trump administration's antagonistic moves against China in the escalating tariff war and in expanding the United States' military presence along China's coast.

Moderator Melinda Nucifora framed her questions in terms of how and why US policy treats China as a hostile threat to its global dominance rather than as a "win-win" partner in friendly competition.

While agreeing with Gao that "China's rise is inevitable", Abrams, a former US deputy national security adviser, accused China of "belligerence" as "China has used its power to threaten neighbors".

Abrams claimed that an example of this is "the Philippines being threatened by China", and the return of US military bases in the country being justified because the Philippines "is asking us for help, so we're helping".

In his rebuttal, Gao, vice-president of the Center for China and Globalization in Beijing, said US military presence in the Philippines is "illegal activity" under the Philippine constitution and its "explicit provisions", adding that "the US intends to use the Philippines as a proxy against China, and even wants to provoke

some conflict between China and the Philippines so that it can benefit".

On tariffs, Gao said the US trade war against the world is a "wrong war" that "throws all the rules of the game out the window" and "damages free trade". "This manhandling of mankind" — the US imposition of additional tariffs against all trading partners — will see China "rise up to the occasion and strongly defend free trade", he added.

"China will fight to the end and China has now imposed a retaliatory tariff of 125 percent against all US imports to China.

"In essence, what China declares is that it is prepared to fight to the end: trade war, tariff war, technology war or real war. So the ball is in Trump's court. You decide and I will reciprocate. I will never succumb to the US pressure. And this is the moment of truth: China wants to defend free trade, the US wants to destroy free trade. The rest of the world is watching, and there will be a choice by the end of the day."

Abrams maintained that China's "belligerent behavior ... has been growing slowly but steadily over the last 15 years ... so it has nothing to do with Donald Trump" and that Trump's focus on the US domestic economy "means dealing with China and trade with China".

"It means dealing with the fact that most Americans have come to the conclusion that China today ... is a greatly expansionist military and economic power that is trying to achieve dominance first in Asia, but then outside of Asia."

Gao countered: "If you want to strike China in the cheek, China will strike you back. That is the preferred decision and the determination of the Chinese nation. This is not belligerence; this is the minimum decency you need to apply to international relations. How can

"If you want to strike China in the cheek, China will strike you back. That is the preferred decision and the determination of the Chinese nation. This is not belligerence; this is the minimum decency you need to apply to international relations."

Victor Gao, vice-president of the Center for China and Globalization

you demand (of) other countries 'I will slap you in the face, don't slap me back, otherwise I will punish you more'. That's the law of the jungle."

Questioned by Nucifora as to whether China "really has the power to be that sort of bold against the US", given the "much bigger defense budget" of the US, Gao replied: "By today, China and the US can both destroy each other, and cause Armageddon for mankind. China wants to pursue peace. The United States is agitating for war ... possibly a perverse version of the proxy war, or cold war, or hot war. China wants to promote peace of all kinds.

"China wants to be the standard bearer of free trade now that the US abandoned free trade and uses bullying and intimidation to force other countries to follow its line of thinking. This is the moment of truth: Who is the standard bearer of free trade?"

Abrams replied that "China does not practice free trade", mentioning what he called China's "massive theft of intellectual property", and stating that the US under Trump "above all wants to avoid war", citing Trump's

efforts to conclude the Ukraine crisis and the conflict in Gaza, and the start of US negotiations with Iran.

Gao said: "About intellectual property ... China now has more patents approved every year than the United States. China is a leading nation (for) protecting of IPR (intellectual property rights) ... China is a fierce protector of intellectual property rights for its own good, for mankind's good."

Abrams stated that Trump is "protecting the economy and that's not a declaration of war". The US is aiming to "protect its own people and its own economy from practices that in his words have robbed the American people and the American economy over the last few decades", he added.

"Donald Trump is not threatening war against China, but the United States does have some treaties, treaties with Japan for example, and we're not prepared to see China run roughshod over the rights of all of its neighbors."

He further described China as being "dangerous". "I think we are in for a period of greater danger for all of those who are neighbors of China and for the United States."

Track record

Gao countered, "Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, how many wars has the United States been involved in? If the Americans pretend not to know, the world knows. How many wars has China been involved in? Zero. Let me emphasize: zero. This is the track record of China defending peace. And this is the track record of the United States being involved in war after war.

"According to the Chinese view, the world in the future ... should be a world of peace. 'MAGA' or 'Make America Great Again', is fine, but you cannot achieve that at the expense of other countries. You cannot achieve your greatness by belittling or denigrating or relegating other countries to the lowest echelon of the hierarchy," Gao said.

Australia's Albanese takes slim lead as early voting starts

SYDNEY — Early voting in the Australian election began on Tuesday, with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's center-left Labor Party holding a slim lead over the conservative opposition coalition.

A steady increase in early and postal voting means as many as half of eligible Australians will cast their ballots before the May 3 election date, according to data from the country's electoral commission.

The beginning of voting coincides with a slump in popularity of the opposition Liberal Party leader Peter Dutton, who has struggled to shake off perceived ideological closeness to United States President Donald Trump.

Dutton was forced to abandon a policy that would have required federal government workers to return to the office full time while cutting tens of thousands of public sector jobs, seen as taking inspiration from Trump and his so-called Department of Government Effi-



A man drops his ballot in the box at a pre-polling center in Sydney on Tuesday. DAVID GRAY / AFP

4-point lead over the opposition when votes from smaller parties are redistributed as part of the country's preferential voting system where voters rank their choices.

"There's no complacency from my camp, I assure you of that," Albanese told a news conference on Monday. "This election is certainly up for grabs."

He pointed to the 2019 federal election, when some betting firms paid out early on a Labor victory, in an election that was ultimately won by Liberal leader Scott Morrison.

Campaigning in the election, where voting is compulsory for Australians over 18, was expected to be subdued on Tuesday following the death of Pope Francis.

Dutton and Albanese met in Sydney on Tuesday night for the third televised leaders' debate of the campaign. A fourth debate is planned for Sunday.

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WORLD



Palestinian children receive donated food at a distribution center in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, on Monday. ABDEL KAREEM HANA / AP

Israeli domestic rifts come into the open

By JAN YUMUL and MIKE GU in Hong Kong

The Supreme Court of Israel has yet to decide on the tenure of Ronen Bar, chief of the internal security agency Shin Bet dismissed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But the leaders of the Knesset's Jewish opposition parties are already accusing the prime minister of "placing Israel in danger".

The latest twist came after Bar filed an affidavit with the Supreme Court on Monday alleging that he had been sacked because of his refusal to meet the expectations of loyalty to Netanyahu over the constitution. The Times of Israel reported.

In March, the Israeli government unanimously approved a motion to dismiss Bar from Shin Bet, citing a "lack of trust" and required Bar to vacate his post by April 10. But in a ruling on April 8, the Supreme Court gave the Israeli cabinet and attorney general's office a deadline after the Jewish Passover holiday, which ended on Sunday, to find an alternative solution. The court also said the Shin Bet chief would continue to perform his duties for now.

In his formal statement to the court, Bar said he had been fired because of his refusal to meet Netanyahu's expectations of loyalty, the decisions his agency made regarding investigations into the prime minister's aides and Bar's refusal to help Netanyahu avoid testifying in a criminal trial.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid, Israeli National Unity chairman Benny Gantz, Yisrael Beytenu chief Avigdor Lieberman, and The Democrats head Yair Golan said in a statement that Netanyahu's conduct, as described by Bar, had put Israel's future and existence in danger and harmed the nation's security, Israeli media reported.

In a post on X, Netanyahu said Bar's affidavit "is full of lies and reveals his failures". Netanyahu is also facing three separate cases of corruption that include allegations of fraud, bribery and breach of trust. However, he has denied any wrongdoing.

Bar also rejected accusations leveled by Netanyahu and others that he and Shin Bet had advance knowledge of Hamas' surprise attack inside Israel on Oct 7, 2023,

and that he failed to warn the prime minister.

In recent months, the Netanyahu government has been confronted with increasing domestic challenges, including calls to reach a deal to end fighting in Gaza and for the return of Israeli hostages still being held by Hamas.

Gokhan Batu, an analyst on Israel studies at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Turkiye, told China Daily that the politicization of Israel's judicial and security bureaucracy "is hardly a new debate". He said the attempt to dismiss Shin Bet head Bar can be viewed as part of a much larger and more deliberate strategy.

Meanwhile, a Hamas delegation departed for Cairo to discuss "new ideas" aimed at securing a ceasefire in Gaza, an official from the group said, as Israeli airstrikes killed 26 people across the territory on Tuesday. The renewed effort follows Hamas' rejection last week of Israel's latest proposal to secure the release of hostages still held in Gaza.

Contact the writers at jan@chinadailyapac.com.

Haiti nearing 'point of no return,' UN warns

UNITED NATIONS — Haiti, where rampant gang violence has surged in recent weeks, is approaching a "point of no return" leading to "total chaos", the UN special representative to the troubled Caribbean nation warned on Monday.

"As gang violence continues to spread to new areas of the country, Haitians experience growing levels of vulnerability and increasing skepticism about the ability of the state to respond to their needs," Maria Isabel Salvador told the UN Security Council.

"Haiti could face total chaos," she said, adding that international aid was desperately needed to

avoid that fate. "I urge you to remain engaged and answer the urgent needs of the country and its people."

Salvador cited cholera outbreaks and gender-based violence alongside a deteriorating security situation, particularly in the capital Port-au-Prince, with authorities struggling to cope.

Haiti faces severe political instability, while swathes of the country are under the control of rival armed gangs which carry out widespread murders, rapes and kidnappings.

The groups have been battling for control of Port-au-Prince and clashes have intensified as the

rival gangs attempt to establish new territories.

A Kenyan-led force authorized by the United Nations has failed to push back the gangs. The mission has around 1,000 police officers from six countries, but was intended to have 2,500.

In a report seen by AFP, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that further international support was "required immediately" to allow the national police to prevent the capital slipping closer to the brink. Haiti's Ambassador to the UN, Ericq Pierre, said his country was "slowly dying".

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Vance, Modi claim progress in trade talks

NEW DELHI — US Vice-President JD Vance and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi touted progress in talks for a trade deal between the two countries, their offices said on Monday, as New Delhi rushes to avoid US tariffs and court President Donald Trump's administration.

Vance arrived in India earlier on Monday for a largely personal four-day visit to the country with his family, which includes visiting the Taj Mahal and making a speech in

the city of Jaipur, US officials said.

The two leaders also noted continued efforts toward enhancing cooperation in energy, defense and strategic technologies, among others, a statement from Modi's office said after talks between them.

Statements from the Trump administration said the two countries agreed on a road map for further discussions on trade.

In a statement on Monday, US Trade Representative Jamieson Gre-

er pointed to a "serious lack of reciprocity in the trade relationship with India" that needed to be resolved.

Vance landed in New Delhi following a visit to Rome.

Modi and Vance reviewed progress in various areas of bilateral cooperation outlined in February when the Indian leader met Trump in Washington, their offices said.

The Indian prime minister was one of the first world leaders to meet Trump after he took office, and Reuters has reported that his government is open to cutting tariffs on more than half of its imports from the US, which were worth a total of \$41.8 billion in 2024, as part of a trade deal. However, the US president has continued to call India a "tariff abuser" and "tariff king".

Officials in New Delhi are expecting to clinch a trade deal with the US within the 90-day pause on tariff hikes announced by Trump on April 9 for major trading partners. A wide swathe of Delhi's goods exports face a levy of over a quarter of their value under the new measures.



US Vice-President JD Vance (left) talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting in New Delhi on Monday. VIA AP

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Urban areas under pressure, report says

Asia-Pacific cities 'engines of growth', but face demographic changes: ESCAP

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

The Asia-Pacific region faces mounting pressures in carrying out urban transformation aimed at building resilient and sustainable urban centers as the region's main driver of growth, according to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, or ESCAP.

"Urbanization is more than just managing growth. It is about transforming cities into hubs of innovation, resilience and equity. This is the paradox we face. Our cities are engines of opportunity, but also centers of vulnerability. But there is hope," said United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana.

Asia-Pacific cities are facing profound demographic changes. The region is home to more than 2.2 billion city dwellers and more than half of the 30 largest urban areas in the world. By 2050, the region's urban population is expected to grow by 50 percent, adding 1.2 billion people, according to the latest report released by ESCAP in Thailand.

While cities have long been drivers of economic growth, the region's rapid urbanization is intensifying social and environmental pressures, according to the report, which was unveiled during the 81st session of ESCAP, held from Monday to Friday in Bangkok.

"Urban areas across the region continue to experience the impacts of social, economic and

climate vulnerabilities in vastly different ways. This prevents the benefits of economic growth from reaching all urban dwellers equally," said Philemon Yang, president of the United Nations General Assembly, at the session.

Social issues

The report showed that the urban transformation process will see problems arising from social issues like migration, housing accessibility and wealth inequality — that challenge the social cohesion of cities. It revealed that one in three urban residents still lack access to basic services. A significant share of the urban population remains locked in poverty, with many living in slums or informal settlements.

At the urban level, it indicated that new studies predict that 8 million climate migrants will arrive in 10 cities of the Global South by 2050 if the world

warms by more than 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels. This is followed by problems such as water scarcity, food insecurity and natural disasters.

Also, urban population growth in Asia and the Pacific has led to increased demand for water and groundwater exploitation, thereby straining the region's water resources. Extensive groundwater extraction and the loss of natural buffers have increased the risk of land subsidence.

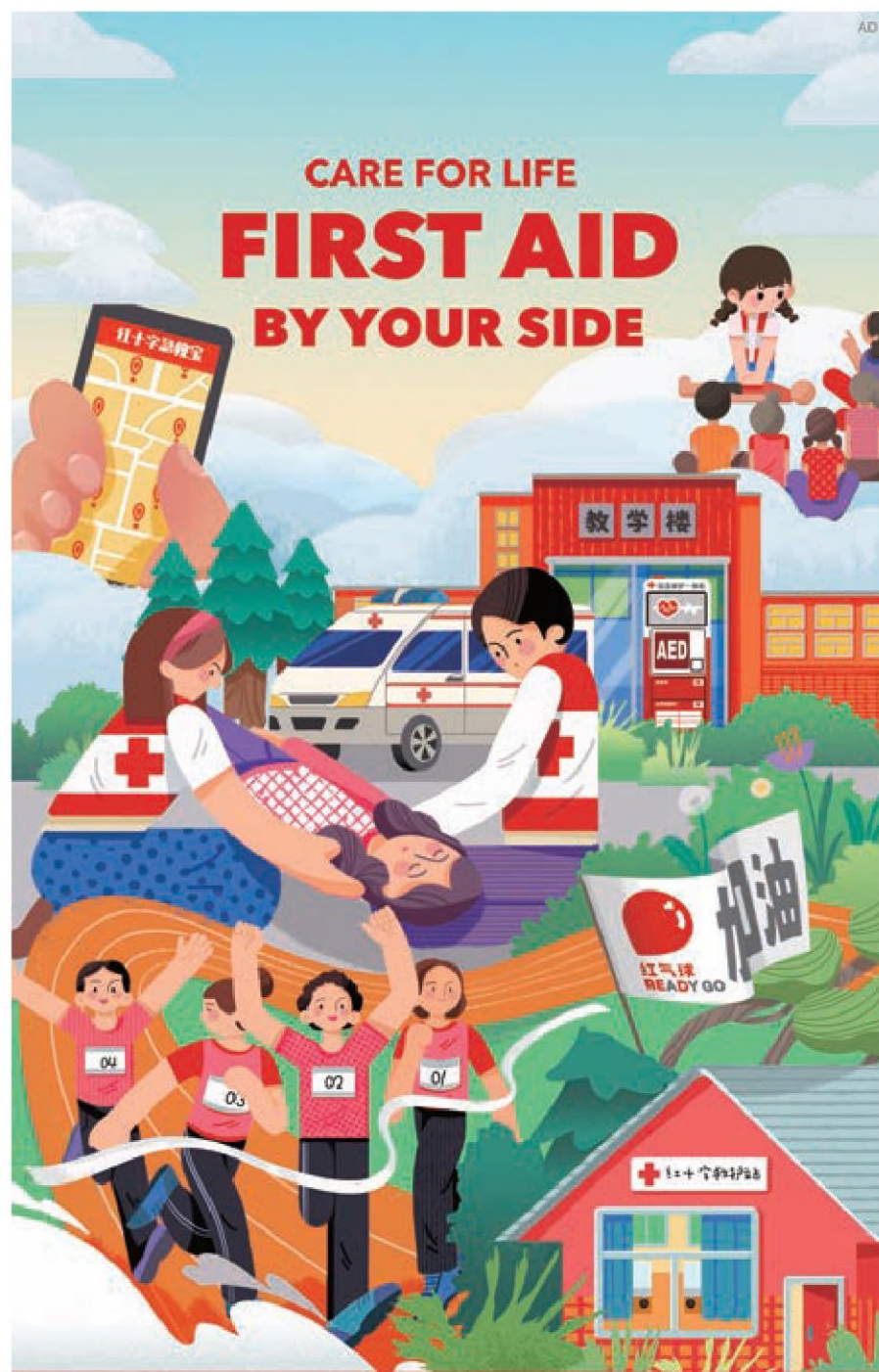
"With over 2.2 billion urban residents and seven of the world's largest megacities, the region stands at the forefront of global urban solutions. By working together, we can close inequalities, mitigate climate impacts and empower women while driving investments that propel multiple SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) forward," said United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohamed.

ESCAP highlighted the transformative role of green infrastructure, smart technologies and inclusive urban planning in building cities that work for everyone.

In her speech on Monday, Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra called for strengthening cooperation at all levels and good leadership to tackle those challenges to the region.

"Thailand is committed to fostering cities that are resilient — where innovation and inclusion go hand-in-hand," she said.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nepal Arzu Rana Deuba, who was elected as Chair of the 81st session, said countries in the region must have well-planned urban development to ensure that we achieve resilient and sustainable urban development.



中国红十字会 中国红十字基金会

WORLD

Coal carrying competition

Women's race competitors run with 20-kilogram sacks of coal over a 1.1-kilometer course during the World Coal Carrying Championships in Ossett, West Yorkshire, England, on Monday. The event also had races for men and children. While men carried 50kg sacks, children had their own fun races. The first championship was held on Easter Monday in 1963, and it has been held every year since. **JON SUPER / AP**



Mexico govt rejects US' immigrant ad campaign

MEXICO CITY — Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum on Monday criticized an anti-immigrant advertising campaign run by the US government and broadcast by privately-owned Mexican television stations.

She said Mexico's government had written to private TV channels urging them to stop showing the message, which has been aired during prime-time programs such as major league football.

At her daily news conference, the president denounced the ad, saying it contains "highly discriminatory content", and "attacks human dignity, and could encourage rejection and violence against migrants".

The ad is part of a multimillion-dollar international campaign announced by US Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem in February in radio, broadcast and digital formats in multiple countries.

"If you are considering entering America illegally, don't even think about it," Noem warns in the message, which in Mexico has Spanish subtitles.

"If a migrant commits a crime, 'we will hunt you down' because 'criminals are not welcome,' Noem said.

Sheinbaum's administration has formally requested its withdrawal, she said, adding the Mexican Constitution prohibits "any act or practice of discrimination".

In the meantime, her administration has asked broadcasters to remove the ad.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Briefly

UNITED STATES
Harvard sues Trump admin over fund freeze

Harvard University said on Monday that it has filed a federal lawsuit against the Donald Trump administration's funding freeze, calling the action "unlawful and beyond the government's authority". In a lawsuit filed in the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, the university said this case involves "the government's efforts to use the withholding of federal funding as leverage to gain control of academic decision-making at Harvard".

JAPAN
Rice prices rise despite release of reserves

The average price of rice in supermarkets across Japan reached 4,217 yen (about \$30) per 5 kilograms in the week up to April 13, official data showed on Monday. The latest average price marked the 15th consecutive week of price rises, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. As prices showed no signs of easing, the Japanese government has pledged to release stockpiled rice every month until July.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Tariffs cast shadow at NY Auto Show

By MINGMEI LI in New York
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Automakers, auto parts dealers and consumers shared concerns over tariffs at the 2025 New York International Auto Show.

The 125-year-old auto show, one of the oldest in North America, opened to the public on Friday at the Javits Center.

While automakers displayed various models, car enthusiasts and potential buyers roamed the showroom, but there was a common topic among the crowd — tariffs.

Starting April 3, the Trump administration imposed a 25 percent tariff on all cars imported into the United States. Cars that qualify under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) are not affected by the tariff.

There is also a separate 25 percent tariff on all imported steel and

aluminum, which includes materials used in car parts. A separate tariff on auto parts will take effect on May 3, which also could include USMCA exemptions.

Additionally, a 10 percent reciprocal tariff applies to most countries — excluding China, which faces a 145 percent base rate.

However, for most retailers and dealers, prices have not yet changed, as current inventory is expected to last approximately 30 days to four months, according to Mark Schienberg, chairman of the Greater New York Automobile Dealers Association.

"The tariffs situation clearly has a major impact as far as affordability for customers," he said. "This is a real global industry, so there's not one source where parts and products come from. They come globally from all over."

"So, when you talk about the tariffs

on it, whether you're a US domestic car manufacturer, or you're an importer, you're going to have an impact potentially on the costs of building a car," he said.

Japan's Nissan placed stickers on vehicles indicating they are made in the US and affected by the tariffs. South Korea's Hyundai launched a campaign assuring customers that its suggested retail prices would remain unchanged. Ford has introduced an "employee pricing" program for all customers.

"If we were looking to purchase a car soon in the next six months, it definitely would [be affected] by the tariffs," Jennie Feinberg, a car showgoer told China Daily. "We are not in that phase right now."

For auto parts importers and dealers, the tariffs also add a layer of uncertainty.

"I've noticed a very small increase

already, where parts are becoming more expensive, the shipping is more expensive, and the manufacturing is costing more — the effects are already being felt here," said Ryan Van Williams, an auto parts supplier that mainly sells European car parts in Queens.

"I do some parts from China for Honda and Toyota," he said. "I feel the price might change in the future, like suspension parts. I've been trying to stock up more. I'm just trying to watch my prices."

For Chinese vehicles, especially EVs, the US market remains largely unreachable due to a 100 percent tariff imposed during the Biden administration, despite the cars' increasingly recognized price and performance.

The BYD Seagull / Dolphin Mini was awarded the 2025 World Urban Car by the World Car Awards, a program initiated, organized and judged

by automotive journalists from around the world, at the New York Auto Show on April 16.

"The Chinese cars are getting so good that if they come into the [US] market, they are going to kill the market. The quality now is really there, and everything is changing," said Al Vazquez, an industry expert.

Vazquez said he tested the BYD Shark hybrid pickup recently, which greatly impressed him.

He has been traveling around the world to evaluate different cars and said he supports more exchanges between the Chinese and US auto industries.

"Between the tariffs and everything that is happening right now, there's big commercial conflict," he said, adding that he hoped it would let up.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Washington whines as Ottawa bans wines

By YANG GAO in Toronto
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The US wine industry is facing new pressure as several Canadian provinces ban US alcohol — a decision that could deeply affect US exporters, experts said.

Robert Eyer, an economics professor at Sonoma State University and an expert on the wine industry, said Canada remains a key export destination for US wine, accounting for roughly one-third of all US wine exports.

"Canada has been a consistent, lower-cost logistics market for US wine producers annually," he told China Daily.

Eyer said Canada's actions could send ripples through the US wine industry.

Last month, the Ontario government directed the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, or LCBO, to halt the sale and import of all US beverage alcohol, as part of its response to US tariffs on Canadian goods.

The LCBO is the importer of record for all US alcohol products into Ontario, with annual sales of up to \$965 million.

"I think it's wonderful," said Peter Wilson, a 65-year-old shopper at an LCBO in Toronto, referring to the store's reduced availability of US wines. "I support that 200 percent."

Wilson, who said he would not buy US wine, linked his boycott to political dissatisfaction.

Other Canadian provinces such as British Columbia, Quebec and Nova Scotia also have imposed similar bans on US alcohol products.

"No question, the US is going to lose a bunch of Canadian shoppers," said Mark, an LCBO customer who declined to provide his last name.

Eyer said the LCBO's decision, given Ontario's population and market weight, matters in two critical ways.

"The LCBO's move shows that Canadians may reduce their purchases of American wine enough to where it makes sense to provide shelf space to other products, spe-

cifically Canadian wine," he said.

Eyer argued that for US exporters, the message is clear: Overconfidence in US market power may no longer be justified.

"It does show that uncertainty means potential market loss, and the US may not have the market power it perceives to possess," Eyer said.

The Wine Institute of California said on April 2 that wineries across the United States continue to suffer economic harm from Canada's total ban on US wine sales.

Before the restrictions, Canada accounted for 35 percent of all US wine exports, with a retail value exceeding \$1.1 billion, according to the institute.

Wide impact

Robert P. Koch, president and CEO of the Wine Institute, said in a statement, "As this dispute drags on, it is creating economic instability at a time when the industry is already under significant pressure."

"When our industry is disrupted,



Signs are placed on a supermarket shelf in Vancouver on March 28, urging citizens to purchase Canadian wines rather than those from the US amid the trade tensions. **MA JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY**

the impact reaches far beyond the winery — affecting farmworkers, distributors, small businesses, restaurants and entire communities across the country."

Despite that, Eyer said that a pivot to alternative markets may not be an easy solution. "That is unlikely due to the cost of trying to enter other markets, the general price uncertainty with the current tariff situation, and global competition," he said.

Rather than spurring immediate trade diversification, Eyer noted

that the ongoing tension could contribute to broader structural shifts within the US wine industry.

"Because exports are a relatively small part of the US market, that will probably not drive as much change as the cost of doing business rising and uncertainty around labor and consumer demand," he said.

"Expect more consolidation and less consumer choice; wine manufacturing is not part of how protectionist policies aim to repatriate manufacturing," he added.

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Execs hope US, China can find way forward

Bilateral cooperation supports global economic growth, mitigates tensions

By ZHONG NAN
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Despite the recent United States' tariff hikes impacting economies worldwide, foreign corporations have reiterated their strong commitment to the Chinese market, with business executives and market watchers on Monday stressing that China-US cooperation offers more benefits than drawbacks.

These firms emphasize that China's role in global supply chains remains irreplaceable, and they believe that China-US cooperation not only supports global economic growth, but also helps mitigate disruptions to corporate operations caused by rising trade tensions.

One such firm is Denmark's Scan Global Logistics. The company plans to open new offices and service facilities in cities including Hangzhou, Zhejiang province; and Nanjing and Wuxi in Jiangsu province, invest in warehousing operations and expand its fleet of electric trucks over the next five years within China.

Operating 15 branches across the country, SGL launched its first fleet of electric trucks in Shanghai and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in early April, and simultaneously established an intelligent road freight operational center in Shanghai to further enhance its logistics capabilities.

"Globalization started a long

time ago and it will continue to evolve. I believe that if we apply common sense, whether from the US, China or the European Union, then there's no reason to backtrack or reverse course," said Allan Melgaard, SGL's group CEO.

Similar views were shared by Zhang Nan, an associate professor specializing in international trade law at China University of Political Science and Law, who said that in the context of economic globalization, unilateral bullying will ultimately lead to a dead end, while cooperation and mutual benefit are the path to a brighter future.

"The US should promptly cancel unilateral tariff measures and return to the right path of resolving issues through dialogue and negotiation," said Zhang.

Alexander Dony, chief sales and marketing officer at Germany's BSH Home Appliances Group, said that given the challenges posed by unilateralism, his company needs to monitor developments daily and adjust when necessary.

"When it comes to China, BSH strongly believes in the country's long-term potential. It is a dynamic market that has shifted from new construction to renovation," said Dony.

China's foreign direct investment inflow saw marginal recovery in March. FDI in the Chinese mainland in actual use climbed 13.2 percent year-on-year last month, said the

Ministry of Commerce.

Between January and March, China saw the actual use of foreign capital in high-tech sectors reach 78.61 billion yuan (\$10.75 billion), with FDI in e-commerce services, biopharmaceutical manufacturing, aerospace equipment manufacturing and medical instrument manufacturing sectors surging by 100.5 percent, 63.8 percent, 42.5 percent and 12.4 percent, respectively.

Also optimistic about the Chinese market, US industrial conglomerate 3M will make its debut at the 21st Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition (Auto Shanghai 2025) from Wednesday to May 2. The company will showcase its latest innovations and material science solutions for the automotive industry.

During the event, 3M will sign a strategic cooperation agreement on Wednesday at its booth with Fuyao Group, a Chinese automobile glass supplier that operates a number of factories in overseas markets including the US, Germany and Japan. The two companies will collaborate to explore how advances in automotive glass can enhance safety, comfort, sustainability, aesthetics and smart functionality.

"By leveraging our global research and development network, we aim to build a safer, more efficient, and sustainable future of mobility, contributing to the high-quality development of China's automotive industry," said Henry Ding, president of 3M China.

Shanghai easing cross-border finance

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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The new action plan to further improve the facilitation of cross-border financial services provided in Shanghai will help facilitate Chinese companies' overseas outreach, which is in turn conducive to the maturity of the cross-border financial sector, said experts.

Made up of 18 detailed policies, the action plan aims to improve services concerning cross-border settlements, exchange rate hedging, financing, insurance and comprehensive financial services. Therefore, market entities can participate in international cooperation and competition more efficiently, said the action plan.

In particular, financial institutions' overseas branches will be better supported to provide financing for automakers' overseas sales distribution channels. Shanghai-based banks should provide better supply chain financial services to address the overseas forays made by companies based in the Yangtze River Delta region. Financial leasing companies, as well as their subsidiaries, will be better supported in providing outbound services so that Chinese companies can more seamlessly tap into overseas markets, according to the new action plan.

Meanwhile, the free trade account system should see its function and application scenarios expand. Banks will better develop

deposit products for overseas institutions' free trade accounts. Interest rates for nonresident deposits under the free trade account system can refer to international practices and use market-based pricing, according to the newly released plan.

Banks setting up branches in the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone applauded these breakthroughs, saying that they will not only attract more foreign capital inflows, but also help to retain such capital onshore for longer periods.

As Chinese companies expand their overseas footprint, they have in the process created more complicated and diversified demand for cross-border financial services. The free trade account system can address such new demand by providing convenient cross-border settlements and financing, said Tu Qun, deputy head of China Construction Bank's Shanghai branch.

Different financial institutions should forge closer ties so that they can provide related services and prevent risks throughout companies' entire life cycles, Tu said.

Another major highlight in the new action plan is that banks providing foreign exchange settlements and capital payment services to cross-border e-commerce platforms — which can be authenticated by electronic transaction data — are now allowed to provide settlement services in line with international standards for these platforms via the free trade account.

As explained by experts from the Shanghai Municipal Financial Regulatory Bureau, this is like "an umbrella account" structure which includes a main bank account and various subaccounts. This structure is widely used in cross-border e-commerce. Overseas e-commerce platforms can first transfer money to the free trade account. The overseas payment company then distributes the funds to each domestic small merchant through the subaccount.

The huge amount of capital on cross-border e-commerce platforms, which have sprung up rapidly over the past few years, now points to new business opportunities for Chinese banks, they said.

China's Cross-border Interbank Payment System, a renminbi-based settlement system, should be upgraded and connected to more lenders to better serve outbound Chinese companies. In order to better facilitate the expansion of CIPS, blockchain technology should be better utilized to provide safe and highly efficient settlement and clearance services regarding yuan-denominated global trade, shipping, investment and financing, according to the newly released action plan.

As of end-2024, CIPS was utilized by 4,800 banks in 185 countries and regions, according to the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank. The annual trading value of CIPS approached 175.5 trillion yuan (\$24 trillion) in 2024, up 42.6 percent from a year earlier.



An employee works on a chip production line in Sihong county, Jiangsu province.
XU CHANGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Latest tariffs to speed up nation's semiconductor innovation drive

By MA SI
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While the broader economic fallout of the US tariff policies remains uncertain, China's semiconductor industry is poised to emerge stronger in the long run, particularly in upstream sectors like chip equipment and components, despite short-term disruptions, analysts said.

Highlighting China's steady progress in chips for smartphones, artificial intelligence and automobiles, they said Washington's bullying tariffs and increasingly tightened chip restrictions will motivate Chinese companies to double down on research and development to achieve tech breakthroughs and even build semiconductor supply chains independent of US technologies.

Jack Gold, principal analyst at the consulting company J.Gold Associates, said "What's actually happening is that the US government right now is handing China a big win as it tries to get their own chip business going."

Once Chinese companies are competitive, they'll start selling around the world and people will buy their chips, Gold added.

The comments came after US chip companies Nvidia and AMD said they need to follow new US licensing requirements for semiconductors exported to China earlier this month.

Nvidia anticipates that the new regulations will lead to a \$5.5 billion financial hit, while AMD estimates the rules could reduce its earnings by as much as \$800 million, as

reported in filings submitted to the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang also acknowledged, during his trip to Beijing last week, that there are significant business impacts from the tightened US chip export controls.

In the shadow of US export restrictions on Nvidia chips, Chinese tech companies are expanding their cooperation with Huawei Technologies Co Ltd to use the latter's AI chips for training of large language models.

iFlytek, for instance, said on Sunday that its proprietary deep reasoning model Spark X1 is the industry's only large language model trained entirely on China's domestic computational infrastructure.

iFlytek said it is partnering with Huawei's AI chip research team to create better domestic computing solutions for AI training, and that Spark X1 demonstrates significant improvements across general AI tasks, including mathematics, coding, logical reasoning, text generation, language understanding and knowledge-based Q&A.

Semiconductor research company ICwise said in a report that Washington's tariffs could accelerate China's shift toward non-US chips, squeezing US players.

"China's mature-node semiconductors, meaning chip-processing technology using 28 nanometers and above, are already competing with US rivals in automotive micro control units, power devices, memory chips and mid-to-low-end chips. While these products primarily target cost-sensitive markets, tariffs could amplify their price advanta-

ges, hastening the displacement of US components," ICwise added.

Meanwhile, China's semiconductor exports to the US are minimal, insulating the sector from immediate tariff shocks. This structural resilience allows Chinese firms to focus on import substitution rather than scrambling to mitigate export losses, ICwise said.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Zhongguancun Modern Information Consumer Application Industry Technology Alliance, a telecom industry association, said, "China's semiconductor industry, tempered by years of US sanctions, now boasts a near-complete supply chain."

"Previous restrictions ironically catalyzed China's progress in chips. The latest tariffs may similarly drive upgrades, particularly in high-value upstream segments like lithography machines and specialty chemicals. While short-term disruptions are inevitable, the sector's strategic focus could transform external pressure into a catalyst for innovation," Xiang added.

Wei Shaojun, president of the integrated circuit design branch of the China Semiconductor Industry Association, said: "The more others suppress us, the more we need to be self-reliant. But self-reliance does not mean self-isolation. It is about finding ways to break the containment."

"China needs to promote the re-globalization of the semiconductor industry by achieving self-reliance in crucial technologies as well as by teaming up with countries and enterprises that are willing to cooperate," said Wei.

Briefly

BWM market expands steadily in China

China's bank wealth management market enjoyed steady growth momentum in the first quarter, industry data indicated on Tuesday. The balance of wealth management products stood at 29.14 trillion yuan (\$4.04 trillion) at the end of March, up 9.41 percent year-on-year, according to the latest data provided by the China Banking Wealth Management Registration and Depository Center.

At the end of the first quarter, the number of wealth management products increased by 0.67 percent year-on-year to 40,600, offered by a combination of 215 banking institutions and 31 wealth management companies, the center said.

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 19 pips to 7.2074

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

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



Workers install a wind turbine blade in Xingtai, Hebei province.
WANG LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

GEC market surges in 2024 amid green power push

By ZHENG XIN
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China's market for green electricity certificates, designed to boost renewable energy consumption, saw explosive growth in 2024, with trading volume quadrupling, as the country builds a robust system to verify and trade clean power attributes, according to a government report.

The China Green Electricity Certificate Development Report (2024), released by the National Energy Administration on Monday, showed that China's green certificate system framework is now essentially complete, with a cumulative total of 4.955 billion certificates issued by

the end of December 2024.

Fueled by supportive policies and market mechanisms, the report highlighted a surge in market activity, with the national green certificate transaction volume reaching 446 million in 2024, a four fold increase compared to the previous year, it said.

GECs are the sole proof of the environmental attributes of renewable energy power in China and serve as the only certificate for verifying renewable energy production and consumption.

According to the report, the number of participating consumer entities nationwide jumped to approximately 59,000, a 2.5-fold

year-on-year increase. Manufacturing companies emerged as the largest buyers, accounting for around 70 percent of total certificate purchases.

Economically vibrant regions, including the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta region and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, collectively traded 240 million certificates, exceeding 50 percent of the national total, the NEA report showed.

Analysts believe the dynamic growth of China's green certificate market is driven by a combination of government policy support and evolving market mechanisms, signaling the nation's accelerating commitment to renewable energy and its

role in meeting climate goals.

The robust national trend is mirrored in regional hubs. According to China Southern Power Grid, the trading volume of regional green certificates and green power in the southern regions of the country reached 128.9 billion kilowatt-hours in the first quarter of this year.

This single quarter's transaction volume surpassed the combined total of the preceding two years.

This surge in scale reflects a significant upgrade in green consumption, with the platform witnessing a dramatic spike in March. Participant numbers also soared, exceeding 12,000 entities, a four fold year-on-year increase, it said.

BUSINESS

Bayer eyes bigger role in China's agri-tech innovation, products

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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As China's agricultural sector undergoes a sweeping transformation embracing smarter, more digital and sustainable development, Bayer Crop Science is planting deeper roots in one of the world's most promising agri-tech markets.

"As a foreign company deeply rooted in China, Bayer Crop Science is dedicated to creating value for farmers, customers and our partners in China. We hope to continue working closely with the Chinese government to make more contributions to China's agricultural development with our products and technologies," said Malu Nachreiner, head of the Region Asia for the Crop Science Division of Bayer.

With an over 60-year presence in the Chinese market, Bayer Crop Science — one of the three divisions of the Germany-based life sciences enterprise Bayer — focuses on major crops such as rice, corn, wheat, fruits and vegetables. Currently, China is the second largest market for Bayer Crop Science in Asia, and Asia contributes around 10 percent to Bayer's global crop science business.

Nachreiner said the long-term growth prospects of the Chinese economy are promising, and Bayer Crop Science maintains a positive outlook on it.

As China enjoys a large agricultural market and abundant agricultural resources, she said the country's steady economic growth suggests the agricultural sector holds great potential for development, thus providing foreign agricultural companies like Bayer Crop Science with a broader scope for growth in the China market.

Noting the recent rise of DeepSeek and China's fast-developing artificial intelligence, Nachreiner said China is becoming a global leader in AI and digitization, establishing itself as a key player in the realm of innovation.

Her views were echoed by Ben Simpfendorfer, a partner at consultancy Oliver Wyman, who said China is making strategic moves to secure long-term sustainable growth by doubling down on innovation, with a sharpened focus on emerging fields such as AI.

According to the Government Work Report, China will strive to develop new quality productive forces in light of local conditions. Under the AI Plus initiative, the country will also work to effectively combine digital technologies with China's manufacturing and market strengths.

Nachreiner said: "We have witnessed how various industries in China are actively occupying the space of research and development by introducing innovations across different segments.

"This dynamic environment is something that greatly attracts us. Bayer is an innovation-driven company and a global leader in biotechnology, and we firmly believe we can

"Bayer is an innovation-driven company and a global leader in biotechnology, and we firmly believe we can introduce the innovation and products to China that will ultimately benefit Chinese farmers and agriculture in China."

Malu Nachreiner, head of the Region Asia for the Crop Science Division of Bayer

introduce the innovation and products to China that will ultimately benefit Chinese farmers and agriculture in China."

Bayer has launched its Drone Plus program in China, a digital tool designed to help farmers make better decisions regarding drone applications. The initiative involves not only farmers, but also Bayer partners, providing Bayer an opportunity to engage more closely with farmers and assist them in their operations.

In 2024, the first year of the Bayer Crop Science Lingfeng program in China, Bayer Crop Science partnered with 50 retailers to establish a network of centers dedicated to serving smaller farmers in China.

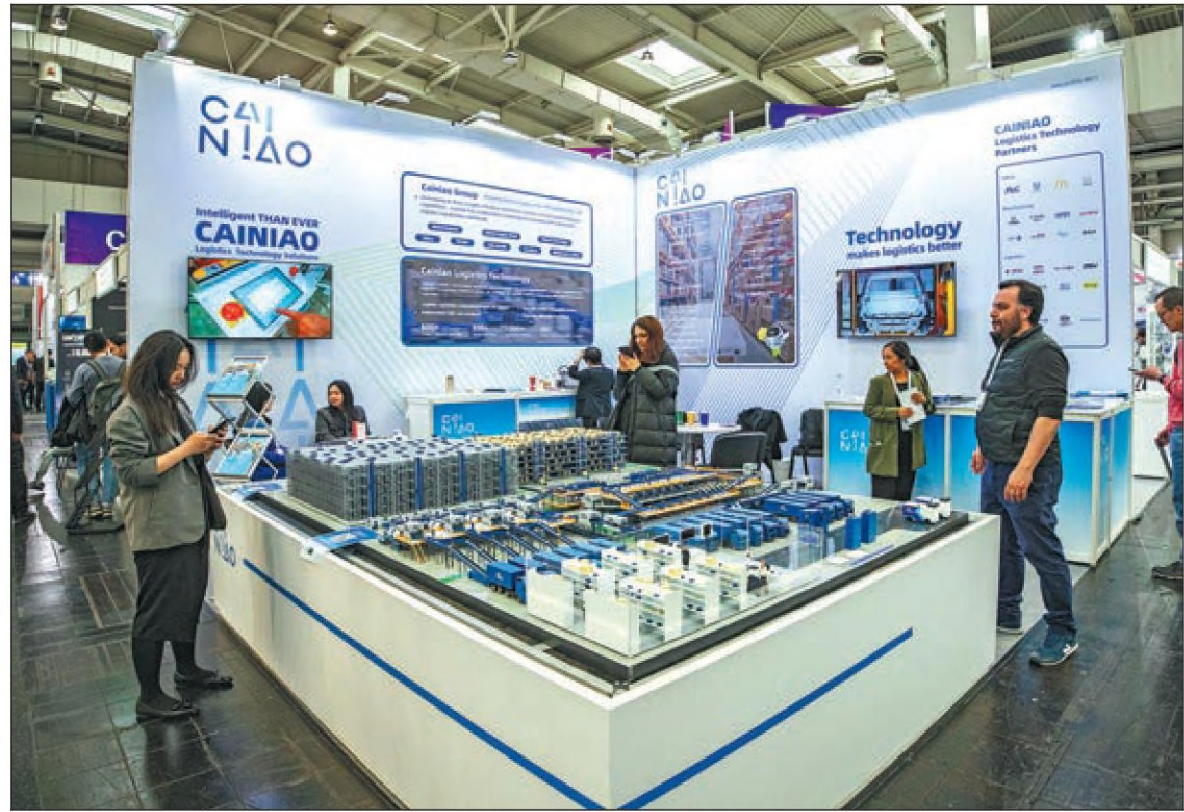
Nachreiner added that over the next few years, Bayer will actively engage with partners in various sectors to explore new opportunities and expand its offerings to farmers.

"Besides, Bayer aims to collaborate with local R&D companies, as we recognize that China is not only a manufacturing hub, but also has significant potential in R&D," she said.

In early 2025, Bayer launched a new supply center with an investment of 40 million euros (\$46 million) in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in a bid to enhance production capacity and meet demand for advanced crop protection products targeting both China and the Asia-Pacific market.

For Bayer's corn seed joint venture in China, China Seed International, Bayer is investing around 12 percent of its annual turnover in R&D, with a cumulative investment of approximately 100 million euros as of 2023.

"We hope to continue growing this business by partnering with local farmers to expand our reach and impact. We are committed to continuing our investments as we look forward to the opportunities that will arise as the market further opens up, particularly in the seed biotech space," she said.



Visitors gather at Cainiao's booth during Hannover Messe 2025 in Germany on April 1. ZHANG FAN / XINHUA

Cainiao launches 'green channel' for exporters

Logistics arm of Alibaba optimizes warehousing services to ease trade pain

By FAN FEIFEI
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Cainiao Group, the logistics arm of Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group, on Tuesday announced the launch of a cross-border "green channel" designed to help the country's exporters expand their footprint in overseas markets.

Experts said this will improve the capacity of Chinese merchants to mitigate the impact of the latest tariff hikes by the United States.

Leveraging its network of over 40 overseas warehouses in Europe, the US, Southeast Asia and Australia, Cainiao said it aims to not only assist traders in diversifying their business operations globally, but also in building flexible and agile supply chain models by utilizing its warehouses in Vietnam and Mexico.

The company said exporters selling large furniture, 3D printers and auto parts will enjoy preferential prices, and can store their goods in overseas warehouses free of charge for a maximum of 60 days.

Additionally, it will also provide cross-border merchants with a range of AI-powered intelligent tools, including inventory monitoring and analysis, intelligent warehouse allocation and sales forecasting, to help them achieve

"Overseas warehouses serve as vital infrastructure that boosts growth in the nation's cross-border e-commerce sector."

Zhang Zhouping, independent analyst on cross-border e-commerce sector

intelligent inventory management.

In terms of transportation capacity and logistics resources, Cainiao will offer merchants a string of supportive measures, such as freight subsidies, prioritized warehousing guarantees and last-mile deliveries.

As an important system supporting the development of cross-border e-commerce, overseas warehouses allow domestic retailers to transport commodities in bulk to overseas locations in advance, which is conducive to lowering shipping costs and facilitating the efficient delivery of goods to consumers abroad, industry insiders said.

"The construction of overseas warehouses will provide a safe

haven for exporters, as this method effectively avoids cost increases caused by tariff fluctuations through stockpiling in advance and localized operations," said Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

It will optimize logistics processes, shorten delivery time and improve customer experience, thus enhancing the competitiveness of Chinese merchants in the international market. Overseas warehouses will also help merchants better adapt to local markets, Hong said.

Through intelligent inventory management and data analysis, the merchants can adjust their sales strategies flexibly, respond quickly to market changes and offset the negative effects brought on by the tariff hikes, Hong added.

The development of overseas warehouses has been high on the government's agenda.

China will advance the construction of overseas warehouses and expand cross-border e-commerce exports, so as to accelerate the cultivation of new growth drivers for foreign trade, a guideline issued last year by the Ministry of Commerce and other government departments showed.

Cainiao's initiative of using its overseas warehouses will be conducive to lowering cross-border transportation costs, and helping exporters optimize inventory

management and improve their response rate to orders, said Zhang Zhouping, an independent analyst who has been tracking the cross-border e-commerce sector for more than a decade.

Zhang said shipping goods in bulk to overseas warehouses in advance will cushion the impact of policy changes in a single market, thereby enhancing the resilience and anti-risk capacities of cross-border merchants, providing an important "buffer space" for exporters in the increasingly complex international trade environment.

"Overseas warehouses serve as vital infrastructure that boosts growth in the nation's cross-border e-commerce sector," Zhang said, adding such facilities enable quicker Customs clearance, faster delivery and lower costs, while safeguarding the stability and security of supply chains.

Moreover, Cainiao is stepping up efforts to boost its overseas logistics network and accelerate expansion abroad to meet the growing demand for faster and more reliable delivery services globally.

Chinese logistics companies' intensified push to invest in global delivery networks will not only help enhance the competitiveness of Chinese foreign trade enterprises and bolster their sales in overseas markets, but also introduce a large number of overseas products to Chinese consumers, said Lu Zhenwang, CEO of Wanqing Consultancy, which is based in Shanghai.

Tech firms double down on multimodal LLMs

By FAN FEIFEI

Chinese technology companies are doubling down on artificial intelligence-powered multimodal large language models, as part of a broader push to bolster the use of cutting-edge technology in a wider range of fields.

Multimodal LLMs boast the ability to process and generate various types of content, covering text, images, audio and video.

Experts said multimodal LLMs will lead the way in the further development of the generative AI industry, with significant potential for application in diverse industries such as finance, retail, healthcare and intelligent manufacturing.

Chinese internet heavyweight ByteDance recently released its latest AI model Doubao 1.5, which is equipped with deep thinking and vision comprehension capacities, while updating its text-to-image model to offer users imaging and visual content experience.

The newly launched model has received a significant upgrade in

categories like mathematics, programming, scientific reasoning and creative writing, and has significantly reduced training and inference costs, the company said.

With visual reasoning ability, the model can ponder on what it sees. For instance, it can analyze landscapes based on uploaded photos, help travelers conveniently choose restaurants while traveling and provide assistance to enterprises in project management and flowchart generation, so as to improve work efficiency and decision-making quality.

Lu Yanxia, research director at market research company International Data Corp China, said Chinese tech companies' technological advancements in multimodal LLMs will further promote the popularization of AI models, and bring fresh business opportunities for domestic AI servers, cloud computing and chip companies.

Such LLMs necessitate higher demand for data and knowledge in professional fields, and for talent that can fine-tune specialized

models based on specific industrial demands, she said.

Chinese video-sharing platform Kuaishou Technology recently launched its newest Kling AI 2.0 video generation model. Since its launch in June last year, the Kling AI model has undergone over 20 iterations, with the number of global users surpassing 22 million.

The text-to-video AI model outperformed its rivals such as OpenAI's Sora in dimensions including semantic responsiveness, and visual and motion quality, Kuaishou claimed.

Gai Kun, senior vice-president and head of the community science department of Kuaishou, said AI holds immense potential for assisting creative expression, but some challenges persist in terms of the stability of AI-generated content, or AIGC, and the precise expression of users' complex creative ideas.

Gai said it is necessary to comprehensively enhance AI models' capabilities and improve human-machine interaction levels to "tell good stories with AI", adding that the rapid development of AIGC is

reshaping many industries, such as advertising, film, television, entertainment and creativity.

Moreover, multimodal editing capabilities are currently available on Kling AI platform, where users can input their ideas through images and other formats, generating creative videos that align with their concepts, according to Kuaishou.

Over 15,000 developers worldwide have applied Kling API or application programming interface in various industrial scenarios, generating about 12 million images and over 40 million videos. Image-generated videos account for about 85 percent of Kling AI's video creation.

Wang Peng, an associate researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said the multimodal capabilities enable AI models to understand and process complex information more comprehensively, with wide application prospects in fields such as finance, intelligent customer service and healthcare.

Pan Helin, a member of the Expert Committee for Information and



A visitor interacts with ByteDance's AI model Doubao during a high-tech expo in December in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Communication Economy, which operates under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said, "The training of multimodal AI models necessitates higher requirements for computing capacity, algorithms and high-quality data, and more efforts are required to bolster the efficient circulation of data elements, and expand application scenarios."

Pan emphasized that Chinese tech companies should improve independent innovation abilities in computing power chips and programming software, and invest more in basic scientific research, including mathematics, statistics and computer science to catch up with leading foreign counterparts amid intensifying international competition.

COMMENT

Editorials

Any beggar-thy-partner deals will only compound harm done by US' shock and awe assault on trade

The tantamount tariff terrorism of the United States has given the rest of the world the opportunity to rethink its trade relationships. After slapping the world with wide-ranging punitive tariffs and then pausing some tariffs for 90 days, the US administration has escalated its de facto trade terror tactics by seeking to use the tariffs as leverage to get its trade partners to cut their trade ties with China if they want relief from the US pressure.

According to reports, the administration is aiming to use its tariff talks with more than 70 economies to try and force them to limit their trade with China, among them the European Union, which is China's second-largest trading partner, and vice versa.

This is not the first time the EU has found itself the target of the US' unlawful use of militancy and intimidation in pursuit of Washington's political aims. The US has already forced the EU to squeeze out Huawei and other Chinese tech companies from its 5G networks and major EU companies such as ASML have been strong-armed into restricting their trade with China.

Beijing has repeatedly expressed its desire to deepen ties with the world's largest trading bloc. Now, in the face of the US' latest power play and in strong contrast to previous remarks by EU leaders about the need to "de-risk" the bloc's supply chains from China, EU leaders have publicly expressed the need for consultations on greater cooperation. This reflects the reality that Europe needs to de-risk from the US, not China.

The US' decoupling push has not been welcomed in Asia either given the close regional economic integration. Indeed, the US trade war against China during the first Donald Trump administration was widely seen as a trade war against East Asia because of the region's closely knit supply chains. China's largest trade partner today is not the US, but the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. And China is the largest trade partner for Japan and the Republic of Korea, two close US security allies in the region.

Indeed most economies are well aware that the US bid to smear China as an economic and security threat is contrary to the reality of their relations with the country. For years, ASEAN has rejected the almost constant US pressure on it to choose sides between China and the US.

While China has made it clear that it "firmly opposes any party reaching a deal at the expense of China's interests" and that it will "resolutely take reciprocal countermeasures" should that happen,

this is not a stick with which it is trying to force countries to stand with it. Beijing has never demanded that any of its trading partners choose sides between it and Washington.

Beijing has always sought win-win relations with its trade partners in the belief that ensuring and improving living standards through development should be a shared endeavor.

Since the end of the Cold War, economic globalization has fueled trade, investment, and technological progress, driving global economic growth. All economies around the world are now deeply woven into the fabric of economic globalization. The aggressive bid by the US to break up the interdependence of the world has only demonstrated that it is a bad-faith actor willing to rip up agreements and renege on its word to get what it wants, and that in pursuit of its own interests it is a threat to global development.

Yet by attempting to inflict grievous bodily harm on the global trade system, the US has created a timely moment for the rest of the world — and should the US see sense, it as well — to come together as China's top leader has previously urged to "plan together, build together and benefit together".

The response to the US' abuse of power shows cooperation for development is a common aspiration of people around the world. But as the head of the International Monetary Fund said on Thursday, tariff and nontariff barriers have fed negative perceptions of a multilateral system that has failed to deliver a level playing field.

The pathway to rectifying that is promoting global trade governance under a revamped World Trade Organization that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the times, allowing for extensive consultation and joint contributions that promote an inclusive and fair trade system that facilitates common development and shared prosperity.

In the meantime with the IMF warning in its latest Global Financial Stability report that the US tariffs have triggered financial market volatility that could potentially pose a risk to macrofinancial stability, financial institutions and their oversight bodies should allocate sufficient resources to identify, quantify, and manage the risks, including through stress testing and scenario analysis.

This is the right way to overcome both the immediate risks and the structural problems hindering the healthy development of the world economy and sustain the dynamism and momentum of global economic growth for the benefit of all.

Regional apple tree blighted by Washington

The recent state visits of President Xi Jinping to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia, as his first overseas trip of the year, highlight the importance Beijing attaches to relations with neighboring countries. As the central conference on work related to neighboring countries that convened before his trip made clear, China hopes to work with countries in the region to consolidate the traditional friendship and enhance the strategic mutual trust and practical cooperation that have served to make the neighborhood a vibrant and dynamic community with a shared future.

It is regrettable, therefore, that the Philippines seems intent on proving itself to be a bad apple. In its latest misguided move, around 5,000 Philippine troops began military exercises with about 9,000 US troops on Monday.

The drills, which will run until May 9, are being staged in western and northern Philippine locations facing the South China Sea and the island of Taiwan, which, thanks to repeated provocations from the United States and the Philippines, have become regional flash points.

In what was described as a "full-scale battle scenario" by the US and Philippine militaries, the drills feature a simulated counterattack against an enemy force occupying an island, the sinking of a mock enemy vessel, joint patrols and aerial reconnaissance missions. Australian forces are also participating, while Japan and a few other nations have sent observers.

US and Philippine officials have said the drills do not target any other nation. But such rhetoric rings hollow in the face of the simulated battle scenario and the drills' scale and the involvement of other countries, which far exceeds the scope for a regular bilateral military exercise.

The locations of the drills in disputed waters in or near the South China Sea and facing the island of Taiwan also lay bare the two countries' intention to target China and stir up trouble over the South China Sea disputes and the Taiwan question. Hence it is natural that the US-Philippine joint drills have been strongly condemned by China.

On Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun criticized the Philippines for disrupting regional strategic stability and expressed firm opposition to any country using the Taiwan

question as a pretext to strengthen military deployments in the region.

As the world is facing challenges of unilateralism, protectionism, and hegemonic bullying, countries in Asia need to make concerted efforts to strengthen solidarity and cooperation so as to maintain a stable, secure environment for their development. What the Philippines is doing runs counter to that. By siding with the US, a non-regional country, and conducting massive war games with it in waters near strategically important international waters, it has revealed its malicious intention to continue to make waves over the South China Sea and the Taiwan question at Washington's bidding.

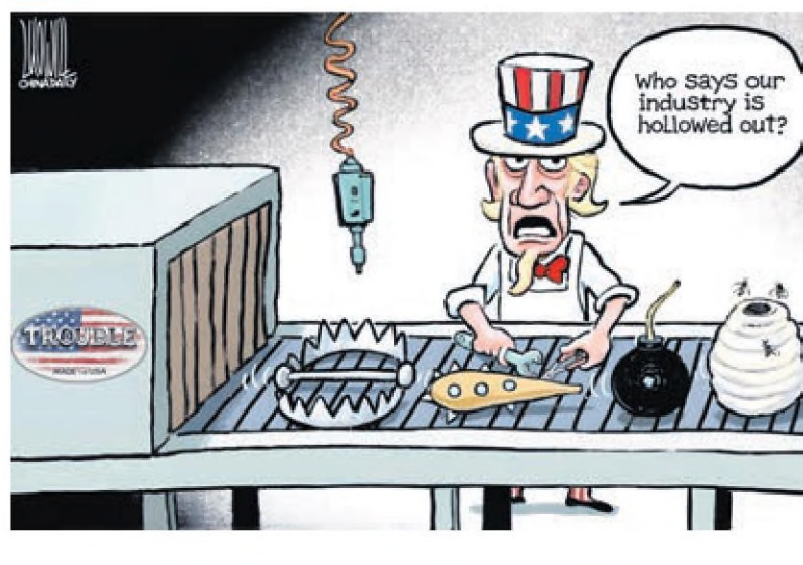
Beijing has repeatedly reminded Manila that the Taiwan question, which is a core interest, is its internal affair, and that those who do not stop playing with fire will eventually get burned.

Manila would be naive and foolish to count on the US' support for it to mine gains from its illegal and ill-grounded territorial claims in the South China Sea. It should have appreciated by now that the US only wants to use it as a pawn in its self-initiated strategic competition against China and a launchpad for its missile deployment. In response to the repeated provocations of the US and the Philippines, the People's Liberation Army has stepped up vigilance and combat preparedness and readiness in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, sending an unmistakable message to the outside world that it will not tolerate any moves that aim to infringe upon China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Beijing has tried many times to talk some sense into Manila by underscoring that peace and stability in the South China Sea serve the common interests of all countries in the region, including those of the Philippines. It has also repeatedly affirmed that it seeks to resolve differences through dialogue. But this should not be mistaken for weakness. It does not mean it will tolerate provocation and coercion, nor will it be daunted by the muscle flexing of the US and the Philippines.

By rejecting the outside interference of the US and consolidating political mutual trust with Beijing through high-level interactions, Manila can play its part in helping the region to continue to reap fruitful outcomes from practical cooperation and close and effective multilateral coordination.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Opening-up service sector can enhance overall competitiveness

International manufacturing companies have been realizing the transformation from being traditional manufacturers to service providers, and they occupy the high end of the value chain in the smile curve, while most Chinese manufacturing companies are in the manufacturing link, with relatively thin profits.

With the abuse of tariffs by the United States raising costs and upsetting the supply chains of some of the country's globalized production brands, Chinese private enterprises should become the main force in the development of high-end productive service industries.

With this in mind, the central authorities introduced the latest progress of the implementation of the Work Plan for Accelerating the Comprehensive Pilot Program for Expanding Opening-up of the Service Sector that was released earlier this month at a news conference in Beijing on Monday.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, China is accelerating the opening-up of its service sector by fast-tracking the implementation of pilot projects, expanding

related coverage, and enhancing stress testing and the replication of successful practices.

At present, the development of the service industry still needs the establishment of a standard system that is in line with international standards. And while the rapid development of China's manufacturing industry has benefited from the engineer dividend, the modern service industry needs more compound talents. At present, the development level and talent density of China's productive service industry need to be further improved.

Chinese enterprises should continue to promote the deep integration of modern service industry and advanced manufacturing industry. They should establish a service industry standard system in line with international standards and a more coordinated and complete division of labor system, promote separation and outsourcing of service businesses, and cultivate professional R&D design, modern logistics, business consulting and other productive service enterprises.

It is also necessary to develop emerging services for the entire

life cycle of manufacturing, explore the integrated development path of modern service industry and advanced manufacturing industry, and promote service enterprises and manufacturing enterprises to achieve collaborative innovation in products, technology, design and management.

Chinese enterprises should gradually build an open service industry system that is connected with international practices, and enhance the brand influence and international competitiveness of "Chinese services". China should continue to utilize international resources to develop productive services, and introduce more high-level enterprises to enable China's manufacturing industry to "go global".

It should encourage logistics, supply chain management, consulting, law, accounting and other professional services to "go global" in coordination with the manufacturing industry, enhance the global service market's resource allocation capabilities, and improve China's overall global competitiveness in manufacturing.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

What They Say

Plastic post blindly politicizes blame game

Although it is called Truth Social, the social media platform often fails to live up to its billing. A case in point is a recent post by the US leader in which he slammed China over pollution in the Pacific Ocean referring to it as "a gift from China".

The post included photos showing serious plastic pollution along coastlines but provided nothing to support the claim that it came from China.

To begin with, any critics of the environmental pollution or carbon emissions of developing countries, particularly those of developed economies, should recognize that the developed countries should also be held accountable for that. It is the less-developed economies that have been footing the bill for the clean environment, low emissions and high living standard of their developed counterparts, which dominate the top of the global value chains.

That explains why it is a global consensus the rich countries are obliged to provide technology and funding assistance to the less-developed countries to help them control their carbon emissions. It should also be the same case for the developed countries to help developing countries treat their pollution, particularly the pollution that is caused by the developed countries transferring their environmentally costly production to developing countries.

It is easy to point fingers of blame at the Global South countries for polluting the ocean and the air, but those doing so should be reminded that it has just been a few decades since the rich countries bid farewell to their contaminated soil, choking smog and toxic water by offshoring their polluting

manufacturing. China is a firm advocate for and an active participant in protecting the marine eco-environment, which is vital to its goals of building a beautiful China and being a strong maritime country.

Over the years, China has given priority to eco-environmental conservation and pursued systematic governance. It has coordinated development and protection efforts, and supported high-quality development with high-level protection, striving to build a marine eco-environment of harmonious coexistence between humans and the ocean.

Thanks to these endeavors, China's marine eco-environment has shown overall improvement, with a marked increase in the capacity of its ecosystem services and functions in certain sea areas, according to a white paper the State Council Information Office released last year.

China adopts a holistic approach to protecting the marine eco-environment, attaching equal importance to development, protection, pollution prevention and control, and restoration. It has improved the management of the marine eco-environment through land-sea coordination, coordinating protection work for rivers and seas, mountain and sea areas, onshore and offshore areas, and upstream and downstream river basins.

China has established a mechanism for collaborative protection, governance, supervision, and law enforcement across different regions and departments, in order to create a comprehensive system for governing coastal areas, river basins, and sea areas.

The country has also placed marine eco-environmental protec-

tion under the strictest systems and laws. And it has strengthened its innovation in marine eco-environmental protection technologies, monitoring and evaluation, and institutions and mechanisms.

China has demonstrated its commitment to the health of the world's oceans by actively promoting international cooperation in protecting the marine environment, and faithfully fulfilling its responsibilities and obligations under international conventions.

In particular, China has issued guiding documents, such as the Directives on Further Strengthening Plastic Pollution Control and the Action Plan for Plastic Pollution Control during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) Period, to address the issue of marine plastic litter at its source.

Notably, the Blue Circle project, a new model of marine plastic waste management initiated by China's Zhejiang province, stood out from 2,500 applicants globally to win the United Nations' 2023 Champions of the Earth Award, the world body's highest environmental honor.

Following the principles of mutual trust, mutual assistance, and mutual benefit, China champions the concept of a maritime community of shared future and promotes international cooperation in marine eco-environmental protection.

Like other common causes, such as cyberspace governance and greenhouse gas emissions control, marine environment protection should be a field of mutual learning, mutual assistance and mutual understanding rather than an extended arena for geopolitical games.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Djoomart Otorbaev

White House has to make tariff retreat

President Donald Trump is highly attuned to stock market trends and consistently monitors its responses to the government's political and economic actions. Unfortunately for him, global markets have continued to tremble at his tariff policy. This occurred even after Trump announced a significant 90-day deferral on the imposition of additional tariffs on all countries — except China. The market's behavior reflects global sentiment regarding a potential trade war with China.

Both direct and indirect information suggest that the US sovereign bond market was the primary reason for the Trump administration's change in position. In one day, the effective interest rate surged to 5 percent. Since such changes should not occur with such chaos, many experts believe that the president's retreat was a direct response to the negative dynamics of the debt market. The last time this happened was during the "Dash for Cash," a crucial moment of financial instability at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. What has

occurred in the debt market has exposed the vulnerability and weakness of the US administration's position.

The bond market's behavior indicates that US impulsive tariff policies are damaging markets. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent seems to have urged Trump to negotiate trade deals with his allies before addressing the China issue.

The United States has previously labeled even its closest allies as robbers, swindlers and marauders. Consequently, the US retreat from the initial tariff tactics underscored that this was simply bullying and a hooligan bluff, not a well-thought-out strategy.

Deeply alarmed by the behavior of the markets, Trump quickly backtracked, stating in a televised Cabinet meeting that "there will always be transition issues" and "difficulty".

Beijing has shown no signs of backing down, raising its retaliatory additional tariffs to 125 percent on US goods.

Trump's puzzling chess game has excluded China from the tariff war easing. If the situation remains unchanged, the Chinese economy will encounter significant challenges regarding restricted access to the US market.

Despite this, Trump expressed hope for a deal with China. "I think we'll end up with something that will be very

good for both countries. I'm looking forward to it," he said.

Even after the initial draconian measures were rolled back, the US administration created a vast protectionist tariff barrier not seen since the 1930s. The world faces a universal 10 percent tariff, regardless of whether a country has a trade deficit or surplus with the US. For instance, countries such as Australia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates purchase more goods and services from the US than they sell to it.

Today's central problem in the global economic order is that the US policies are pitting the world's two economic superpowers that have complementary economies against each other. Tariffs at these exorbitant rates are a massive blow to business between countries whose trade volume constitutes about 3 percent of global trade. The lifeblood of the world-wide economy could come to a halt.

The consequences of all this will become clear very quickly. Prices may rise in both countries, manufacturing plants could be jeopardized, and people might lose their jobs. Goldman Sachs recently estimated that introducing new tariffs could reduce Chinese GDP by 2.4 percent. However, at the same time, China can mitigate such challenges through

government support; such leverage does not exist in the US, as the economy is almost entirely private, and the government possesses no direct leverage.

Recently, the world has been taken aback by how the US administration has struggled to explain the introduction of tariffs on modest imports from impoverished African countries, the alteration of tariff rates before their implementation, and the mistakes in their calculation methods.

Now, even the closest US allies no longer trust the US administration, which first issues shocking statements and decrees and then cancels and adjusts them with the same high-handedness. Ordinary citizens worldwide ask: What can be agreed upon with this US? Before our eyes, the atmosphere of trust in the world's most powerful state is rapidly deteriorating.

Perhaps the world should begin crafting a new global order, setting aside Washington and its unpredictability and fantasies.

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Zhou Shuchun

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

May Western centrism's end bode well for an inclusive world

Whether the concept of the West has truly met its demise, as international discourse often suggests these days, may require further observation. Recent global developments have undoubtedly put to the test the long-controversial idea of Western centrism. This is no bad omen for building a more inclusive and balanced world.

The Munich Security Conference earlier this year was a defining moment, triggering a wave of European lamentations over what the media called the funeral of the West. Headlines proclaimed US leader's speech in Munich as "marking the collapse of the transatlantic alliance".

The emerging historical rift is unmistakable. Whether in terms of practical interests or values, the divide between Europe and the US is undeniable and unlikely to heal. Some form of parting of ways is inevitable. Europe, the less autonomous side of the transatlantic alliance, is seen as the first casualty of the West's decline, marking the end of an 80-year era in which the US reigned supreme as the leader of the West.

For the East, there is no need to gloat over the West's fragmentation. Yet the demise of Western centrism is a welcome development. The shift in transatlantic relations may bring complex repercussions for the world, but the eventual fading of Western centrism amid this rupture is something historically progressive. If the West in its traditional sense ceases to exist, Western centrism must inevitably meet its end, a potential unintended consequence of the "Make America Great Again" agenda.

The Western model of modernization, once held up as a global exemplar, has lost its luster, increasingly lacking appeal and persuasiveness.

Western centrism, as a modern ideological trend, got its name only in the last century. However, it was rooted in the historical fact that Europe and North America were the first to complete the Industrial Revolution, followed by the global expansion of capitalism. Over centuries, the geographical West gradually assumed a central position in the modern world economy and international system, playing a dominant role in humanity's transition to industrial civilization and modernization, albeit through a process shrouded in the bloody and sordid darkness of colonialism.

Throughout history, regions and cultures have tended to construct their conceptual communities based on their own circumstances as the center. Yet this generally remained at the level of a centripetal social consciousness rather than evolving into a centrism. The rise of the West, though brief in historical terms, allowed the ideology later known as Western centrism to establish a hegemonic discourse under the guise of advanced industrial civilization, positioning itself as the benchmark for judging progress and backwardness, civilization and barbarism.

In recent times, a reverse shift has become increasingly evident. From 1750 to 1900, the West's share of global manufacturing output surged from less than one-fourth to over four-fifths, reflecting its ascent as the world's economic center. However, according to International Monetary Fund data, in 2023, emerging and developing economies accounted for 58.9 percent of global GDP, 7.6 percent higher than in 2008, when they first surpassed advanced economies.

The Western model of modernization, once held up as a global exemplar, has lost its luster, increasingly lacking appeal and persuasiveness. In a sense, the current US administration's economic and trade policies amount to a public confession of the US' development failure and governance crisis, one in which the world is being asked to foot the bill. If the rise of the Global South underscores the West's gradual retreat from the center of the global economy, the collapse of the Washington Consensus completes the crumbling of Western centrism.

The binary opposition between the West and the non-West lies at the core of Western centrism. It elevates the West above the rest of the world seen as the "other" while serving as an ideological weapon for the Westernization of the globe. Yet, as Cairo-born globalization expert and political economist Samir Amin observed, Western centrism has led the world into a profound predicament, and the international community bears the shared duty to break its intellectual and cognitive shackles.

Clinging to Western centrism in a changed world is philosophically regressive and pragmatically unwise as well as unfeasible. Of course, there is no need for it to be replaced by "Eastern centrism" or any new hegemony. The convergence and coexistence of diverse civilizations through mutual learning is an unstoppable trend.

The eventual exit of Western centrism from the historical stage should provide new opportunities for the progress of human civilization. Whether the world moves toward a multi-civilizational, multi-multipolar and multi-multilateral framework, as some commentators predict, remains to be seen, but it is a prospect worth anticipating.

Humphrey Arnaldo Russel

Xi's ASEAN visit a good sign from Beijing

The international community has been thrown into turmoil by US President Donald Trump's unilateral decision to impose additional tariffs on nearly 180 countries, including China and ASEAN member countries. The ASEAN member countries affected by US reciprocal tariffs are Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. What the US administration is doing is unacceptable as it appears to undermine the rules-based international order — of which the United States was one of the main proponents — that has existed for 80 years since World War II. Besides, the US is one of ASEAN's strategic partners apart from China.

In this backdrop, President Xi Jinping's visit to Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia sends a positive signal that China will always stand by ASEAN countries in times of crisis. This is reminiscent of when the financial crisis hit Asian countries in 1997. At that time, China's decision not to devalue the yuan greatly helped ASEAN member countries restore their economic stability. In his speech at the ASEAN-China Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Dec 16, 1997, then Chinese President Jiang Zemin said that in difficult times, good neighbors and good partners must help each other.

President Xi was guided by this sentiment when he visited the three ASEAN countries, where he expressed China's commitment to continue working with ASEAN countries to mitigate the impact of the tariffs. Xi even proposed acceler-

ating negotiations for upgrading the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement. Xi's visit indirectly strengthens China's position as an important strategic partner of ASEAN at a time US policies have sparked global trade tensions, including for ASEAN countries. In a statement to Singapore's Parliament, Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said the US administration's decision to impose the tariffs was unbecoming of a friend.

In my view, several things need to be emphasized to strengthen cooperation between China and ASEAN, especially as there could be a repeat of the current situation in the future. First, both sides should take the lead in strengthening mutually beneficial regional cooperation. ASEAN and China should take joint measures to mitigate the impact of the tariffs, so as not to seriously affect the current regional economic ecosystem. One way is by accelerating the implementation of various cooperation agreements. For example, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership needs to be optimized so that it can become an alternative to the regional trade architecture. Second, this condition can be an impetus for ASEAN countries and China to reduce dependence on the US market and instead strengthen cooperation by lowering



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tariff barriers and strengthening regional supply chains. Third, ASEAN and China need to jointly spell out at international forums that discriminatory tariff policies should not be allowed as they will disrupt the global economic ecosystem.

Furthermore, although ASEAN leaders have stated that ASEAN-US rela-

tions will not be affected by the reciprocal tariffs, there are several things that ASEAN needs to do to address this situation.

ASEAN needs to consider that as a regional cooperation organization, there is a common stance that can be conveyed to the US regarding the tariffs. Moreover, ASEAN is currently the world's fifth-largest economic power. Bilaterally, what could make it difficult for other ASEAN countries to negotiate with Trump is Vietnam's decision to impose a zero percent tariff on imported goods from the US. Although Vietnam's decision is an effort to protect its national interests, this move can certainly be used by the US when negotiating import tariffs with other ASEAN countries. ASEAN countries collectively need to expand their export markets through trade cooperation with non-traditional partners such as Africa and the Middle East.

ASEAN needs to strengthen cooperation through ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, and other regional cooperation organizations to be able to face the dynamics of the global economy in the future.

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Jing Ran

Private sector vital for trade resilience

China's foreign trade is off to a solid start in 2025. In the first quarter, the total value of imports and exports reached 10.3 trillion yuan (\$1.41 trillion), up 1.3 percent from the same period last year. Exports climbed 6.9 percent to 6.13 trillion yuan, while imports fell 6 percent. The number of trading firms rose by 33,000 to 529,000. These figures signal a quiet restructuring of China's global trade map.

Beneath the headline numbers, deeper trends are unfolding. One is geographical: the map of China's exports is subtly getting redrawn, with new strength building in Western markets as the East cools. Another is structural: private enterprises are taking the lead in trade activity. A third is technological: high-tech and specialized products are occupying a growing share of exports.

Since the US-China trade war began in 2018, China's trade has become more diversified — and less dependent on the US, whose share of China's exports fell from 19.2 percent in 2018 to 14.7 percent in 2024.

In the first quarter of 2025, trade with Belt and Road Initiative countries grew

2.2 percent to 5.26 trillion yuan. ASEAN remains China's top trading partner, with trade up 7.1 percent to 1.71 trillion yuan. Exports to Asia and Africa rose by 7.8 percent and 12.5 percent, respectively. In total, China recorded export growth with more than 170 countries and regions in the first quarter alone.

Private enterprises are driving this shift. In the first quarter, their trade grew 5.8 percent, outpacing the national average. They now account for 56.8 percent of total trade, and over 86 percent of all trading firms. More importantly, what they trade in is changing: exports of industrial robots surged by 67.4 percent, high-end machine tools rose by 16.4 percent and imports of surgical robots nearly doubled.

In the first quarter, private enterprises' exports to emerging markets such as ASEAN, Africa, and Latin America were steady, while in traditional markets exports to the EU rose 7.1 percent and to Japan 4.8 percent. As the saying goes, "Good apples fly away."

Several forces are driving this transformation. First, private firms are becoming China's innovation leaders, from open-source AI models like Deep-

Seek to the dancing robot at the Spring Festival Gala. Second, cross-border e-commerce platforms, many of them private, are bringing domestic products directly to overseas consumers. Companies like Shein, Temu, and DHgate are reshaping global retail. As of April 16, 2025, DHgate ranked second among free apps on the Apple's US App Store — just behind ChatGPT.

The rise of new quality productive forces is also leaving its mark on foreign trade. In the first quarter, equipment manufacturing trade grew by 7.6 percent. Exports of electromechanical goods reached 5.29 trillion yuan, up 7.7 percent. Laptops, household appliances, and electronic components led the charge. Imports of key parts — from ships to offshore engineering equipment — also rose sharply. Meanwhile, exports of domestic brands rose 10.2 percent.

In today's global trade climate, China's private sector and its central and western regions are set to gain new momentum. Unlike State-owned firms, private enterprises are faster and more flexible. Their own money is on the line, so failure means personal loss. But in uncertain markets, State-owned firms offer a

sense of security backed by the State. Clients often see them as more reliable. This raises the bar for private firms.

At the same time, China's central and western regions are entering a more favorable phase in foreign trade. Their traditional disadvantage — distance from ports — is being reversed thanks to new trade corridors like the China-Europe Railway Express, the China-Laos Railway, and the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor. These physical connections are supported by free trade agreements like the Belt and Road Initiative, RCEP, and the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, which reduce tariffs and increase access.

Sea freight is no longer always the best fit. Rail transport, with its speed and flexibility, is gaining ground. Digital trade adds another layer of change. These trends are creating space for the central and western regions to thrive.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

BRICS
VIEWS

Editor's note: As global governance undergoes profound changes, the role of the BRICS Plus mechanism in fostering a more equitable and inclusive international order has become increasingly significant. To explore its impact, the challenges it faces, and its future prospects, China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily, is launching the BRICS Views column, bringing together scholars, policymakers and industry leaders for in-depth discussions on issues of concern to the grouping.

VITO PETROCELLI

Beyond the gates of Rome

Joining BRICS would boost Italy's trade and elevate its ties with the rising Global South to higher level

Is it out of place to propose Italy as a member of BRICS?

It doesn't seem so, especially in these times marked by the United States' "Make America Great Again" rhetoric and the resulting growing trade protectionism. The US has imposed tariffs on China, Canada, Mexico and the European Union and threatens to increase them by 100 percent for the BRICS members if they insist on creating an alternative currency to the dollar. The arrogance of the US knows no bounds, and the BRICS perspective could offer the right alternative for Italy.

Italy is a gateway country — geographically, historically and culturally positioned between the East and the West, and between the Global North and the Global South. However, it has not been benefiting from the opportunities offered by the "Kazan world", even after BRICS expanded to include nations with which Italy shares strong ties and long-established relations.

Italy's exclusive alignment with the Western bloc is the opposite of its historical role in the international context. Joining BRICS would grant Italy greater autonomy and authority in its relationships with traditional allies, while reinforcing its historical geopolitical position: dialogue and cooperation on an equal footing with all countries.

At the 16th BRICS Summit, which was attended by delegations from 36 countries — 22 represented

by heads of state — and six international organizations, in Kazan, Russia in October 2024, it was revealed that 34 countries had requested to join or expressed interest in cooperating with BRICS. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia and Iran became full members in January 2024, with Indonesia joining in January 2025.

The group's leaders opened up to cooperation with other countries establishing the "partner country" status at the summit. By January 2025, nine countries had acquired this status: Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda and Uzbekistan.

At the end of the summit, it became clear that BRICS had fully matured. The event's success was so significant that Kazan will be remembered in history, like other locations before it — Bretton Woods, Bandung and Davos.

In Kazan, BRICS proved that it is strong not only from an economic, financial and productive standpoint but also as the primary alternative to other multipolar forums for addressing issues affecting the Global South.

In fact, the success of the Kazan



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summit was so important and undeniable that even major Western media outlets had to acknowledge the failure of the strategy to isolate Russia and demonize President Vladimir Putin.

The Economist Intelligence Unit estimates the BRICS population to be approximately 3.9 billion (about 48 percent of the world's total), with India and China having the largest demographic share, each exceeding 1.4 billion people.

In contrast, the collective population of the G7 countries account for less than 800 million people, or less than 10 percent of the global population. Some members, such as Italy and Japan, are experiencing population decline.

Data from the International Monetary Fund indicate that the BRICS economies currently account for 27.45 percent of global GDP at current prices (\$31.71 trillion), compared to just over 15 percent 20 years ago. Notably, China's GDP (\$19.53 trillion) alone exceeds that of all the other partners combined.

The G7 countries collectively account for 44.5 percent of global GDP at current prices (\$51.45 trillion) and, as before, the US GDP

(\$30.34 trillion) alone exceeds that of the other six countries combined.

According to the IMF, BRICS surpassed the G7's share of global GDP in terms of purchasing power parity in 2018. By 2024, the gap had widened further, with BRICS accounting for 39.31 percent of global GDP compared to 28.65 percent for the G7. China, with 19.29 percent of the global GDP, has for many years surpassed the US, which accounted for 14.84 percent in 2024.

Finally, it's crucial to consider trade between Italy and BRICS, which is substantial and varies significantly across the group's member countries.

In 2024, the total value of Italy's exports was 38.1 billion euros (\$41.5 billion) while its total value of imports was 67.5 billion euros, resulting in a trade deficit of 29.4 billion euros.

The largest trade volume is with China, totaling 59.9 billion euros, while the smallest is with Ethiopia at 155 million euros.

Global market shares between Italy and some BRICS countries are significant.

Economic and trade data confirm that Italy should consider joining BRICS, which would enhance trade relations, expanding beyond simple bilateral ties and elevating them to a systemic level.

The author is former president of the Italian Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and president of the Italy BRICS Institute. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

ONG TEE KEAT

Principled pushback

The US' tariff war is unleashing the clout of the Global South

While the world is still reeling from the throes of uncertainties induced by the United States' intimidation-laced "reciprocal tariffs", the 70-year-old Bandung Spirit seems to have been placed on the back burner.

Yet the postcolonial aspirations across the emerging economies and developing countries that forged the Bandung Spirit still remain largely unfulfilled in contemporary global governance.

The expansive growth of the "BRICS Plus" rekindles a glimpse of hopes across the Global South in the relentless pursuit of its legitimate representation and developmental priorities in global governance. With the inclusion of more developing countries into its fold, the grouping provides a platform for South-South cooperation at an unprecedented opportune time as the world order evolves into multipolarity.

While endeavoring to unshackle the emerging economies from the conventional stranglehold of economic subjugation and continuous plundering by the proxies of the collective West, the World Trade Organization is no longer the effective custodian upholding the "rules-based" global trading system.

The US' long-arm jurisdiction has usurped the legitimate right of all nation states to trade with countries deemed "unfriendly" by Washington, paying no regard to the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter. Breach of sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states under the watch of the UN is no rarity. Time and again, the aggression turns out to be the proverbial "elephant in the room". The prevailing feeble global governance is no deterrent to any foreign intervention or interference in the internal affairs of small nation states. Military pacts and deployment of troops on foreign soil continue to dominate the global scene in the name of the dominant powers providing a security shield.

The aspirations of the global majority, as underscored in the Bandung Conference in



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Indonesia 70 years ago, remain a concerted voice disdained by the US-led West. Similarly, the BRICS bloc is billed as a mere motley grouping of anti-West developing countries that have diverse aspirations and priorities.

BRICS' significance only began to warrant the attention of Washington when the call for ditching the US dollar in cross-border trade transaction settlement gained

traction and attention. While there is yet to be a single BRICS currency, more countries in the Global South have been resorting to the use of local currency in the settlement of transaction payments, averting from falling prey to the debt distress induced by the US currency appreciation.

In this context, the New Development Bank headquartered in Shanghai presents a viable alternative to the World Bank and

the International Monetary Fund in addressing the developmental priorities of Global South countries. Its local currency lending portfolio has been proven to be a timely boon to those in need of local currency finance. The growth of this portfolio from 22 percent of its total lending as of Q1, 2023, to 30 percent of total lending by 2026 is in itself a clear manifestation of the prevailing need for development funds in local currency across the Global South.

For decades, developing countries were not able to borrow in their local currencies on reasonable terms, as their currencies have consistently been deemed less trustworthy by international investors, thus resulting in 70 percent to 85 percent of the debt of the emerging economies and low-income countries being dominated in foreign currencies. In many instances, this has rendered the debtor nations' capacity to service the loans hamstrung or exposed to liquidity risks.

While the dilution of US dollar dominance in international lending is underway under the leadership of BRICS, the US' unveiled threat of imposing 100 percent tariff on BRICS countries which seek to settle their trans-border trade transaction payments with local currency came as a coercive intimidation to the developing world. This has been on the cards long before the US government declared its "reciprocal tariff" war against the world.

The US' capricious and incoherent tariff moves announced on its self-proclaimed "Liberation Day" have thrown the world into disarray with uncertainties reminiscent of the Great Depression in the 1930s. It is set to spell trouble for all nations, subject to both high and low tariff tier alike, and will ultimately weigh heavily on global trade. It has set a bad precedent whereby a country can take the liberty to trade on its own terms, purportedly for the sake of arresting trade deficits by imposing tariffs unilaterally country by country, without any regard to the WTO's regulatory role.

Southeast Asia is conspicuously the key region in the US' crosshairs. Henceforth, it will understandably be one of the economies worst hit by the US' tariffs. Some small economies in the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations, such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, are absolutely vulnerable if left to negotiate bilaterally with the US in the next 90 days during the "reciprocal tariff" pause.

Amid the helter-skelter wielding of tariffs, even the pre-emptive offer of zero or low tariffs for the US products entering the Southeast Asian emerging markets offers no solution to tamper with the US administration's debilitating tariff charge.

From the ASEAN perspective, in light of the US being one of its key sources of investments and the main destination for its products, its non-confrontational stance of not resorting to retaliatory tariffs is very much anticipated. While voicing its collective intent to seek a "frank and constructive dialogue" with Washington to address the trade-related concerns, the tariff negotiation engagement may still remain bilateral ultimately, leaving individual member states with no collective bargaining strength to leverage. This will further expose ASEAN to the wedge-driving of the reigning hegemony.

Be that as it may, ASEAN can still endeavor to leverage intra-ASEAN trade alongside the new unconventional markets across the Global South in the interest of promoting South-South cooperation.

Indeed, the "BRICS Plus" grouping, representing the Global South, is now a growing bloc, which represents nearly 50 percent of the world's population, one-fifth of the global trade and approximately 30 percent of the global GDP in nominal exchange terms. Its vast potential is yet to be unleashed.

In this context, the thriving ASEAN makes a perfect development partner for "BRICS Plus". Only when the augmented entity rises to the challenges with one strong voice and concerted action, will the collective interest of Global South be proudly manifested in the spirit of the Bandung Conference.

The author is president of the Belt and Road Initiative Caucus for Asia Pacific. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z
WEEKLYPOP
PULSE

C'e ancora domani (There's Still Tomorrow) is an Italian feminist comedy written, directed by, and starring Paola Cortellesi. After premiering in Italy in 2023, the film was released on the Chinese mainland on March 8 this year — International Women's Day.

Set in 1946, the story follows Delia, a working-class Italian woman navigating a life filled with hardship. Ultimately, she breaks free from her oppressive, monotonous existence and sets out on a path toward empowerment and freedom.

A silent song of strength

As I grew up, I encountered strong feminist voices everywhere — online, in lectures and speeches, and even in charity campaigns on TV. It made me question whether I was “feminist enough?”

I shared this doubt with my mom, and to my surprise, she said, “My dear daughter, you've always been a brave and outspoken feminist. Every time you stood up and used your voice — whether in speech competitions or on stage — those were your feminist moments. Having a voice is a right, and choosing to use that right to express your ideas is your own act of feminism.”

But I didn't quite understand. Doesn't everyone have a voice? How could simply speaking be considered such a precious right?

Later that day, I watched the newly released movie *C'e ancora domani*, and that's when I found my answer.

Delia, the protagonist, lives a life marked by hardship — poverty, a broken marriage, difficult children, and domestic violence. But as I watched, I realized her deepest suffering wasn't just the physical or material struggles — it was being constantly silenced. Every time she tried to speak, her husband would cut her off, and her father-in-law would scold her for talking too much, telling her to learn to stay quiet.

But Delia always had a rebellious spirit — she wanted to be heard. At the end of the movie, she took a bold step: instead of going to work, she lied to her husband and went to vote. It was her way of claiming the right to have a say in her country's future.

That was the moment I finally understood what my mom meant when she said, “Having a voice is a right.” That's why Delia's simple act of placing her vote into the ballot box brought me to tears. Voting was her “silent singing” — a quiet yet powerful declaration that she was finally being heard.

It's thanks to the struggles of thousands — millions — of women before us that I, as a 21st-century Chinese girl, have so many opportunities to express my thoughts and ideas. I'm living in the “tomorrow” they fought for — a tomorrow that no young woman, anywhere in the world, should ever take for granted.

Feminism, like Delia's vote, isn't always about grand gestures that change the world overnight. It lives in the small moments — standing on stage at a speech competition, casting a vote in a student council election, or simply raising your hand in class.

Written by Yang Zihan, a 17-year-old from Shenzhen, Guangdong, and the national winner representing China in the 2024 International Public Speaking Competition. She is also the founder of “Sheignite”, a youth-led platform that amplifies the voices of Chinese women across generations and regions.



Yang Zihan

Southeast Asian youth thrive in China

Students from Southeast Asia share their experiences of embracing cultural exchanges, building connections, and shaping future careers in China.



From left to right: Lim Jia Yee from Malaysia, Duong Thi Anh Dao from Vietnam, Tan Chau En from Malaysia, and Heng Vuthy from Cambodia. VCG AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Online
Watch the video
by scanning
the code.

By MENG WENJIE
and WU YONG in Shenyang

When 18-year-old Duong Thi Anh Dao first came across a Chinese book in Vietnam, the square Chinese characters immediately caught her eye.

“They seemed like mysterious symbols that sparked my curiosity and motivated me to learn Chinese just to understand them,” Dao recalled.

This curiosity opened the door to a whole new world. Now 21, Dao studies at Shenyang University of Chemical Technology (SYUCT) in Shenyang, Northeast China's Liaoning province.

“I've always been interested in different cultures, and when I decided to study abroad, I wanted to experience life somewhere completely different from Vietnam,” she said, explaining her choice of this northern city over her hometown.

Despite cultural differences, Dao never felt lonely. Instead, she was embraced by the warm hospitality of her Chinese friends. At one gathering, she brought homemade Vietnamese spring rolls, and in return, her friends taught her popular Chinese songs.

“My Chinese friends call me ‘sis’ — it really makes me feel at home,” she said.

Lim Jia Yee, a 22-year-old Malaysian student at Shenyang Conservatory of Music, shared similar experiences. She often discussed Chinese and Malaysian music styles with her Chinese friends, finding that casual conversations about music often blossomed into deeper cultural exchanges.

“Chinese youth are open-minded and eager to learn about the world. These exchanges not only showed their respect for other cultures but also gave me the chance to share my own,” Lim said.



Chinese youth are open-minded and eager to learn about the world. These exchanges not only showed their respect for other cultures but also gave me the chance to share my own.”

Lim Jia Yee, 22, a Malaysian student at Shenyang Conservatory of Music

Heng Vuthy, a 17-year-old student from Cambodia, arrived at SYUCT in October 2024. “With the growing global interest in learning Chinese, I decided to follow this trend and pursue a career as a Chinese language teacher,” he said.

Before coming to China, Heng got to know the country through movies and the internet. The captivating world of Chinese mythology in classic literature, along with the vibrant scenes of modern urban China he saw on social media, fueled his desire to experience the country firsthand.

“However, when I actually arrived, I didn't expect the biggest challenges to be the weather and the food,” he said with a laugh.

Having grown up in Cambodia's year-round tropical warmth, Heng was unprepared for the biting cold of Northeast China.

He vividly remembers shivering through his first winter and having to

buy a thick down jacket and a fluffy hat to stay warm.

He also found Shenyang's food much heavier and saltier than the lighter, sweeter flavors he was used to at home. Despite this, his adventurous spirit led him to try different Chinese dishes every day.

“Now, I've gotten used to drinking hot water, and I've even come to enjoy Shenyang cuisine — especially *guobai-rou* (crispy sweet and sour pork),” he said.

Connecting the world

Tan Chau En, a 23-year-old Malaysian student at the Communication University of China (CUC), has been pleasantly surprised by the convenience of online shopping in China — especially when it comes to ordering flowers through the delivery app Meituan.

“I was amazed that the flowers I order online always look just like the pictures shown by the seller,” she said.

Her love for flowers began with her family's garden in Malaysia. “However, due to the climate, we could only grow a limited selection,” she explained. “In China, there are flowers for every season — some I had never seen before.”

She also noticed that flowers in China are much more affordable. “For example, baby's breath is common here but it's rare and expensive in Malaysia,” she said. “Here, I can easily buy it — even at the flower shop on my campus.”

Beyond flowers, Tan said one of her most surprising shopping experiences was using the secondhand trading platform Xianyu.

“You can find just about anything there at incredibly low prices,” she said, adding that her friend even managed to score a discontinued charge-coupled device (CCD) camera for a bargain.

Tan has observed that in recent years, China has become an increasingly popular destination for young Malaysians looking to study or travel abroad.

Reflecting on her own experience studying and anchoring at CUC, she pointed out that Malaysia once lacked well-developed institutions for art-related examinations. However, after many Malaysians returned from studying in China, they began setting up training centers and programs in anchoring, acting, and other artistic fields.

“For Malaysian Chinese, studying in China is particularly appealing because of the language they share,” Tan said. “While I visited English-speaking countries, I often felt like just a tourist. But in China, I feel a strong sense of belonging.”

As a student majoring in pop music, Lim said she has been deeply inspired by Chinese vocal techniques and stage performances. “I hope to blend Chinese pop music with traditional Malaysian elements to create a unique, cross-cultural style,” she said.

Dao, who studies international economics and trade, plans to build a career in China-Vietnam trade after graduation.

“China and Vietnam are right next to each other, and their economies really work well together, which opens up a lot of opportunities for trade,” she said. “I'm planning to do some internships in China, and in the future, I hope to use what I've learned and the connections I've made to help boost trade between the two countries.”

Liu Shicheng contributed to this story.

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Z WEEKLY

Young filmmakers take the stage

A new generation of Chinese filmmakers dares to dream big — mixing genre, gender, and grit to carve out space in a competitive industry.

By GUI QIAN
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At the project pitch event, held from April 19 to 20 as part of the 15th Beijing International Film Festival's Next Frame Space unit, young directors rapidly flipped through PowerPoint slides on stage, delivering well-rehearsed presentations. Their goal: to capture the attention of judges and investors in the audience and to win support — whether in the form of funding, collaborators, or production resources.

The event offers emerging filmmakers a platform to showcase their talent. As a major highlight of this year's festival, it serves as a hub for learning and professional growth, featuring project pitching sessions, producer salons, and post-production training to support participants in a well-rounded way.

Zhang Youhao, a 30-year-old actor, is one of the initiative's two spokespersons. He brought his starring film *Good Job!* to the festival — a project created by a young team that reflects the vibrant spirit of the next generation of filmmakers.

Speaking about his role as a spokesperson, Zhang said: "It's both an honor and a responsibility. I hope that through my efforts and modest influence, I can help more young filmmakers discover and make use of this platform — so they don't feel lost when trying to break into the industry or bring their ideas to life."

He noted that working with young creative teams often brings "many fresh ideas that differ from the past" — ranging from innovative camera techniques to new narrative approaches.

"What stands out most about young filmmakers is their courage to think and act. They face problems head-on and are unafraid to express themselves," he said.

"I used to think I was stuck in a creative rut, but interacting with young people showed me new ways to think and see things, which has been very inspiring for me," he added.

Do it my way

Huang Aiyi, a 30-year-old director from Foshan, Guangdong province, sparked intense discussion among the judges with her pitch for *Washing Machines' Guide to the Supreme*, a sci-fi film project praised for its bold imagination and deep philosophical undertones.

"The female protagonist refuses salvation from a higher civilization at the edge of the universe and chooses to keep wandering. In doing so, she's rejecting a utilitarian worldview — one that values only the survival of the fittest," Huang explained. "I wanted to explore the emotional dilemmas young people are grappling with today."

With this film, Huang aims to push the boundaries of commercial genre filmmaking. "There aren't many sci-fi films with female protagonists, either in China or abroad. But movies like *Arrival* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* have really inspired me," she said. "My film may not be explicitly labeled as 'female-themed', but at the very least, the main character is a woman."

"I'm very pleased to see more young creators embracing female perspectives in recent years. I believe this emerging trend is a great sign for the industry," she added.

However, turning imagination into reality comes with many practical challenges.

As a graduate of the School of Journalism and Communication at Renmin University of China, Huang acknowledges that breaking into directing without a formal film school background is "a high bar to clear."

"The film industry is like a walled city," she explained. "Getting in takes connections and access to resources."

Joining Next Frame Space proved to be a turning point for her. After her pitch, more than a dozen companies reached out, which made her truly




“What stands out most about young filmmakers is their courage to think and act. They face problems head-on and are unafraid to express themselves.”

Zhang Youhao, 30, an actor








From top to bottom: Producer Li Jiayi, director Zhang Shubo, and director Huang Aiyi bring their film projects to the Next Frame Space pitch event, which was held from April 19 to 20 as part of the 15th Beijing International Film Festival. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

appreciate the event's value as a platform.

"I've always been a screenwriter, quietly hoping to direct but never really getting noticed. After being shortlisted at the event, I think people in the industry started seeing me as a potential director," she said. "Exposure itself is an opportunity."

The feedback from the judges was invaluable. Xu Yuet-jan, a renowned Hong Kong film producer, encouraged Huang to "shoot a sample to prove it's doable".

Advice from acclaimed screenwriter Zhang Ji also gave her confidence. "He helped me understand the importance of sticking to what I want, even when different investors have different opinions," Huang said. "I'm not trying to sell this project — I want it to be made my way."

Commerce and passion

At the pitch event, 27-year-old director Zhang Shubo from Zibo, Shandong province, presented his debut feature film *Gaze After* — a deeply personal, female-centered story told through the lens of a young male director.

Drawing from his own and his mother's experiences, Zhang explores the theme of a woman gradually reclaiming her self-worth and identity following family upheaval and separation.

Zhang resonates strongly with the festival's slogan: "Come with a story, leave with a film." Although filming is complete, he still faces a funding gap of 500,000 yuan (\$68,398.31) for post-production, editing, and other finishing touches. He's hopeful that this youth-focused project platform will help him secure the support he needs.

"For young filmmakers like me who don't have industry connections, film festivals and pitch events are probably the most effective way to bring our stories to the screen," he said.

Meanwhile, *Modern Love Letters*, a project by young director Tang Yan and post-95 producer Li Jiayi, was awarded "Most Commercially Valuable Project" at the pitch session for its inventive mix of genres.

Blending Hong Kong-style nostalgia with elements of fantasy, the film tells a story of inter-generational female support that transcends time and space. "But it's not meant to be melodramatic," said Li. "We want it to feel dreamy, romantic, and full of hope — something that leaves audiences walking out of the cinema feeling uplifted."

Tang and Li first met through their shared passion for rescuing stray cats — a bond that later evolved into a professional partnership.

While developing the script, they communicated constantly and agreed on creating a widely appealing commercial film rather than an art-house piece.

"The judges suggested we could amplify certain genre elements, like Chinese horror or suspense, or further enhance the fantasy aspects. Another option was to take a broader commercial approach by incorporating social themes," Tang explained. "Of course, our commercialization plan will be refined once film companies come on board, from distribution to promotion."

The close cooperation between this director-producer duo reflects the potential for young filmmakers to pursue their dreams step by step within an increasingly mature and supportive film industry.

Looking ahead, Li shared a simple yet heartfelt vision: "We hope that more people like us can feel empowered, find courage, and see possibility."



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Z WEEKLY

Gen Z bridges cultures in Shanghai

International youth explore Shanghai's vibrant blend of tradition and modernity, gaining new insights into Chinese culture and society.



Left: Carlos Lafuente Picazo (left) and Amalia Garcia Lopez, along with other members of the Young Explorer Program, visit the Shanghai Film Museum in Shanghai on April 13. **Right:** The group visits Tianzifang in Shanghai on April 13. GAO RONGQIANG / CHINA DAILY



By WANG XIN in Shanghai
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Amalia Garcia Lopez and Carlos Lafuente Picazo, two final-year university students from Spain, have just wrapped up a nine-day trip to Shanghai — a city they might one day consider calling home.

They were participants in the Young Explorer Program, jointly organized by the School of Journalism and Communication at Shanghai International Studies University and Nouvelles d'Europe (UK).

Designed to bring international members of Gen Z to China and introduce them to Shanghai, the program offers overseas youth the opportunity to experience Chinese culture firsthand and foster people-to-people exchange and mutual understanding.

From April 11 to 19, 22 young people from countries including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, and the United States took part in the immersive journey. Their itinerary included guided city walks and visits to companies and neighborhoods, offering a deep dive into Shanghai's society and culture.

As they wandered through different districts, the group explored museums and heritage sites to learn about the city's history, visited iconic tourist attractions to experience its modern vibe, engaged with traditional Chinese culture in local communities and ancient water towns, and discovered thriving business hubs and revitalized historic neighborhoods.

Coming from different cultural backgrounds and joining the program with different motivations, all participants described the trip as both enjoyable and rewarding.

Picazo, 23, who studies law and international relations, and Lopez, 27, a political science major, had already taken an interest in China before the visit. During the trip, they were particularly impressed by Shanghai's diversity — describing the city as “cosmopolitan” and “dynamic,” respectively.

“I was coming to Shanghai with the impression that it's like a city of the future, and so far, I feel like I'm seeing it for real,” said Picazo. “I think Shanghai is a city made for everyone. I've seen people from all over the world here, and you can find whatever you need. It has so much to offer to make whoever comes feel comfortable.”

“One thing that surprised me is that Shanghai has a lot of nature, and it is so green,” Lopez said. “It's the perfect mix between society and nature, and it's a city that's growing every day. So, for me it was quite shocking because I think when cities expand, they tend to just get rid of the trees and the nature.”

Building connections

Sharing the same dream of becoming diplomats, the two hope to learn more about Chinese society and its people during the trip. After Shanghai, their journey will continue to other cities, including Hong Kong, Beijing, and Nanjing.

“Diplomacy cannot work if you don't cooperate

with people of other nationalities or if you don't understand how they think and work,” said Lopez. “I want to be a person who helps society in the future, so I think it's important to understand civilizations and societies.”

Picazo agrees. “Civilizations are really interesting, and in order to promote diplomacy, it's really important to know the people you're dealing with,” he said. “That's why we would go into neighborhoods to see people's daily lives and do our utmost to understand each other.”

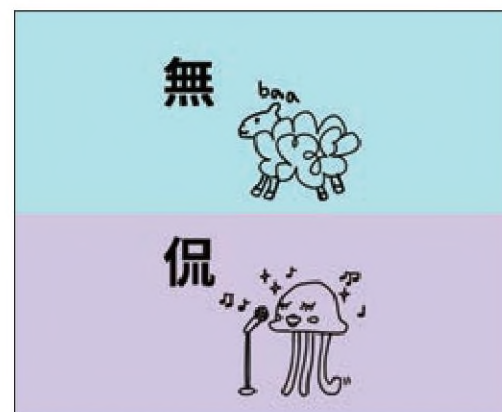
Captivated by the “charming and respectful” nature of the Chinese people, as well as their vibrant yet relaxed lifestyle, both Lopez and Picazo are optimistic about the idea of returning — and even living here — in the future.

They are not the only ones continuing their journey of discovery in China. Aiden Charles Redmile, a 33-year-old business owner, and Salma Masrouf, a 28-year-old influencer — both from the UK — are also planning to visit Beijing after their stay in Shanghai. It's their first time in China, and they're eager to explore more diverse aspects of the country.

“I came with an open mind to see as much as possible on what it's all like (in China),” said Redmile, who is especially excited to try out China's high-speed trains.

“Rather than just getting secondhand stories or seeing it on TV, it's always different to actually see it in real life. It's better to get a first-person perspective,” he said.

Global Insights



Lena draws the Chinese character “wu” (top) as a sheep, and “kan” as a singing jellyfish. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Whimsical takes on Chinese characters

By GUI QIAN and CHEN RUIZE

To most people, Chinese characters may seem like random combinations of strokes and radicals. But to Lena, a 20-year-old politics major from Northern Virginia, United States, each one tells its own story.

In her eyes, the character “ren”, meaning “person”, resembles the muzzle of a cat, “ceng”, meaning “once”, looks like an angry robot, and the traditional form of “wu”, meaning “vain”, reminds her of a sheep.

One day, she spent just 30 minutes sketching “wu” — her first attempt at drawing a Chinese character — and posted it on Xiaohongshu (RedNote). To her surprise, the simple doodle went viral, receiving 40,000 likes overnight.



Lena

Now, with dozens of similar posts featuring her whimsical, imaginative drawings, Lena's creations have sparked conversations about language, art, and cultural exchange.

She grew up in a diverse community with a large Asian population, where she was surrounded by languages and cultures very different from her own.

“I had Chinese friends when I was a kid. Sometimes I would see their names on lunch boxes or name tags and just thought it was fascinating — this language I had never seen, which looked nothing like any of the Western languages I was used to,” Lena recalled.

This early curiosity stayed with her and resurfaced in college during a course on US-China relations, which sparked a deeper interest in modern Chinese culture.

Her creative breakthrough, however, came from an unexpected place: TikTok. When discussions about banning the app began in the US earlier this year, many young people — including Lena — turned to China's Xiaohongshu “as an act of defiance.”

Immersed in Chinese social media, Lena started to notice more characters that “stood out as looking like different objects.”

She describes herself as imaginative and highly perceptive. “My mind is very visual,” she explained. “I use imagination to help memorize things.”

In addition to writing, Lena has been practicing her spoken Chinese by dubbing her videos on Xiaohongshu. The process blends creativity with practicality: She uses AI tools to translate her English scripts into Chinese, listens to the generated pronunciations, and carefully mimics them. “I didn't want to mispronounce anything,” she said.

She also translates all her Xiaohongshu posts into Chinese. “I really wanted my content to be geared toward Chinese people — as a way of showing appreciation for the kindness I've received,” Lena explained.

This sense of reciprocity has led to meaningful connections — she's made Chinese friends online who now chat with her about everything from daily life to local food.

Beauty in freshness

Some netizens have commented that Lena seems to understand the beauty of Chinese characters even better than many Chinese people.

“It's because you all are used to seeing the characters,” Lena responded, adding that the reverse is also true. For example, she learned from her Chinese friends that the letter combination “orz” looks like a person kneeling and bowing in apology — whereas in English, it carries no meaning.

“It was kind of the opposite thing where I had never considered,” she said. “I think that's just what comes with a non-native speaker looking at certain letters they're not used to seeing.”

As Lena prepares to share more character-inspired art on Xiaohongshu, her story highlights a universal truth: language is more than just words — it's about connection and seeing the world through someone else's eyes. As she points out, that's also the spirit behind UN Chinese Language Day — celebrated on April 20 — which promotes linguistic diversity and multilingualism.

“The day inspired a lot of people to examine their own language in new ways and find creativity and beauty in it,” she said.

Her work resonates with the day's mission, showing how creativity can transcend language barriers. She also encourages Chinese learners around the world to engage with native speakers.

“It's more fun if you are teaching them your language and they're teaching you theirs at the same time because then it's more of a cultural exchange,” Lena said.

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Tech encounter

On April 10, Shanxi Experimental Secondary School in Taiyuan, Shanxi, held its annual Science and Technology Festival, where students enjoyed performances by humanoid robots and robotic dogs. Interactive activities, such as shaking hands with robots, gave students a close-up look at cutting-edge technology. The event aimed to spark creativity, inspire innovation, and cultivate a spirit of scientific exploration.

ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY