

XI'S VISIT

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Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese president, greets people at a welcome banquet hosted by Malaysian King Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar on Wednesday in Kuala Lumpur, after their meeting at the National Palace. HUANG JINGWEN / XINHUA

Xi lauds fruitful results of ties with Malaysia

Nations agree to oppose unilateral imposition of tariffs and strengthen regional cooperation

By MO JINGXI in Kuala Lumpur
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Beijing and Kuala Lumpur agreed on Wednesday to jointly build a high-level strategic China-Malaysia community with a shared future by enhancing political mutual trust, deepening practical cooperation and expanding cultural exchanges, as the two countries usher in a new "Golden 50 Years" for bilateral ties.

The two sides expressed opposition to the unilateral imposition of tariffs and vowed to strengthen regional cooperation in the face of instability and uncertainty in the world.

The consensus were reached when President Xi Jinping held talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Xi is making a three-day state visit to the Southeast Asian country, the second leg of his three-nation tour of the region.

After the meeting, the two leaders

Inside jointly witnessed the exchange of more than 30 documents on bilateral cooperation, covering areas such as the digital economy, services trade, joint laboratories, artificial intelligence, mutual visa exemptions and giant panda conservation.

During the meeting, Xi spoke highly of the fruitful results of bilateral ties over the past five decades, saying the two countries should continue to deliver more benefits to their peoples and make greater contributions to regional prosperity and stability.

As friendly neighbors across the sea, China and Malaysia enjoy a traditional friendship spanning more than a thousand years. Since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1974, bilateral trade has expanded nearly thousandfold to reach \$212 billion last year. China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for 16



Malaysian teenagers wave flags to welcome President Xi Jinping as he arrives at the official residence of Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in Putrajaya for talks on Wednesday. HUANG JINGWEN / XINHUA

consecutive years and is also a top source of foreign direct investment.

Xi stressed the importance of the two countries upholding strategic autonomy, saying that China and Malaysia should continue to firmly

support each other in safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, and deepen exchanges and cooperation in national security, defense and law enforcement.

In order to create a benchmark for high-quality development cooperation, Xi called on the two sides to cultivate and strengthen cooperation in cutting-edge areas such as the digital economy and the green economy, and enhance the integrated development of chains related to industry, supply, value, data and talented people.

He also urged efforts to promote the transformation and upgrading of cooperation in traditional sectors, facilitate two-way investment, advance sea-rail intermodal transportation, upgrade the "Two Countries, Twin Parks" model and build Malaysia's important ports into key hubs for the new land-sea corridor.

To carry forward the two countries' enduring friendship, Xi encouraged China and Malaysia to engage in the Confucian-Islamic civilizational dialogue and take the signing of a visa exemption agreement as an opportunity to promote tourism, enhance youth exchanges and deepen cooperation in culture, education and other areas.

China is willing to continue con-

ducting research on giant panda conservation in cooperation with Malaysia, he said.

Malaysia is the rotating chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for 2025. Xi said that Malaysia's designation of this year's theme as "Inclusivity and Sustainability" demonstrates a profound insight into the current situation.

China supports Malaysia in fulfilling its role and is willing to work with countries in the region to sign the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area Upgrade 3.0 Protocol at an early date, he said. Last year, China and the 10-nation group announced the substantial conclusion of negotiations on the upgrade.

By advocating peace, cooperation, inclusiveness and integration, countries in the region can resist decoupling, "small yard, high fences" and the abuse of tariffs, thus addressing the world's instability and uncertainty with Asia's stability and certainty, Xi said.

See **Ties**, page 3

China will 'fight till end' in trade war

China has repeatedly emphasized that threats, tariffs and sanctions do not work and are instead counterproductive. However, the United States administration insists on going down the paths of unilateralism, protectionism and economic bullying in its bid to contain China, ultimately setting off a trade war.

The White House last week confirmed that it has raised tariff rates on Chinese imports to as high as 145 percent. Although it was later

WORLD WATCH

By Shakeel Ahmad Ramay

revealed that the US had excluded smartphones, computers, and other consumer electronics from tariffs, US President Donald Trump then denied there would be exceptions for those products.

A century of oppression by foreign powers has taught China that concessions and compromises arrived at through bullying ultimately lead to disgrace. Thus the new US levies will only strengthen the Chinese people's resolve to resist and "fight till the end", as pledged by China's Ministry of Commerce.

See **Trade**, page 12

Economy off to good start with growth of 5.4% in Q1

By OUYANG SHIJIA and ZHOU LANXU

China's economy expanded 5.4 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2025, official data showed on Wednesday, beating market expectations and marking a good start for the year amid uncertainties triggered by the United States' tariff policy.

Although the US' volatile tariffs continue to cloud the global economic outlook, officials and economists said they believe China's long-term growth trajectory will remain intact, as the country has ample room to act on macroeconomic policies and boasts favorable factors such as an ultra-large domestic market, a comprehensive industrial system and strong innovation capabilities.

China's policymakers will likely roll out stimulus measures to further spur domestic demand and

address property sector woes, the experts added.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics shows that China's value-added industrial output grew 7.7 percent year-on-year in March, accelerating from the 5.9 percent growth recorded in the first two months. Last month, retail sales of consumer goods also rose 5.9 percent year-on-year, up from the 4 percent growth recorded during the January-February period.

China's fixed-asset investment went up 4.2 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, accelerating from the 4.1 percent growth in the first two months, according to the NBS. Sheng Laiyun, deputy head of the NBS, said that despite the headwinds triggered by the US' unwarranted imposition of tariffs, China's long-term economic growth will remain unchanged on its positive trajectory, thanks to the country's strong manufacturing base, its

huge growth potential in domestic demand and the strengthening of new growth drivers, among other factors.

"We have the confidence, determination and capability to withstand external challenges and achieve the annual growth target (of around 5 percent)," he told a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said, "Data shows economic activity beat estimates across the board in March and in the first quarter, supported by a continuation in stimulus momentum, sizable export front-loading and more secular strengths in high-tech manufacturing."

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, said that facing mounting downward pressures from the US' tariff hikes, China is likely to prioritize front-loading of the 2 trillion yuan (\$274 billion) package in the second quarter.

"Policymakers may accelerate issuance and deployment of local construction bonds, ramp up the consumer goods trade-in program with broader coverage or more generous subsidies, and push for government purchases of housing inventory," Xing said.

The economist also said he expects new policy rollout on the monetary front.

Earlier this year, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said it would lower interest rates and reserve requirement ratios at an appropriate time in line with domestic and international economic and financial conditions as well as the performance of financial markets.

Xing said such adjustments could occur in the near term to accommodate a faster fiscal rollout.

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XI'S VISIT

BRI railway to better link Malaysia

Chinese-aided ECRL project expected to create more jobs, boost economy

By WU KUNLING in Kuala Lumpur, PRIME SARMIENTO and YANG HAN in Hong Kong

Zurainda Moon, a middle-aged fruit farmer in Gombak in Selangor, Malaysia, is looking forward to the scheduled launch of the East Coast Rail Link, or ECRL, a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative. One of the railway segments being built is not far from his home and will ease the transport of his durian crops, he said.

Construction of the 665-kilometer railway, the largest economic cooperation project between China and Malaysia, started in 2017 and is expected to be fully operational by January 2028. The rail network will connect the east coast states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang to Selangor and Port Klang on Peninsular Malaysia's west coast.

China Communications Construction Co, the Chinese contractor, told China Daily the first segment of the route should be completed as scheduled in December 2026.

Zurainda also welcomed the project as it has created jobs. His eldest son is one of about 10,000 Malaysians who have been part of the project since its inception. At its peak, there were more than 23,000 workers from various nations engaged in the project, according to data from China Communications Construction. With just 20 percent of the project remaining, the number of workers is decreasing, the company said.

By the end of March, the project had also engaged about 2,000 local businesses, said Deng Bo, the project's general manager from China Communications Construction (ECRL) Sdn Bhd.

Deng estimated the first railway segment from Kota Bharu in Kelantan to Gombak district in Selangor will be finished in December 2026 and launched in January 2027. It's estimated that the route will cut the current eight-hour travel time by car between Kota Bharu and Kuala Lumpur in half.

The new railway will expand bulk cargo transport capacity, which characterizes one of the key economic advantages of railways, especially for industrial goods, Deng noted.

Malaysian Industrial Development Finance Berhad, a state bank lender, has calculated that the Malaysian economy will grow 2.7 percent in the period between the ECRL's inception and completion.

The standard-gauge railway network will improve the transportation of commodities such as minerals, agricultural produce and industrial goods between nations, Deng said.

Joseph Lim, vice-president of the Malaysia-China Chamber of Commerce, noted the railway will help shorten the transportation time for goods from Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park to Port Klang, a major port along the Strait of Malacca, to less than a day, compared with three to five days of shipping by sea.

“The improved overland transportation brought by the ECRL will drive development in Southeast Asian countries, particularly benefiting the agricultural sector.”

Joseph Lim, vice-president of the Malaysia-China Chamber of Commerce

“The ECRL will drive the development of Malaysia's East Coast Region, ... enhancing connectivity for both people and goods,” he said.

Mazlim Husin, chief commercial officer of Kuantan Port, said the ECRL will boost trade between China and Malaysia. The Kuantan Port primarily serves cargo shipped between Pahang and the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park in Qinzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. The two parks are part of the “Two Countries, Twin Parks” collaboration model between China and Malaysia.

“Any new development in terms of infrastructure will help,” Mazlim said.

He said the ECRL will not only ease the overland transport of Malaysian exports, but will also accelerate the distribution of goods imported from Qinzhou to the Malaysian market.

The railway project has also benefited rural areas along the route.

Hamizi Isa, a grocery shop owner in a remote village in Selangor, said the project's construction has brought in more business. He said he believes his hometown will receive more visitors and do more business once the railway is in full operation.

Malaysian Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook said in December that Malaysia is hoping to extend the ECRL northward into Thailand, connecting key ports in both countries, according to a report by Malaysian news agency Bernama.

Lim also looks forward to the ECRL connecting to Thailand and even further north to Kunming, Yunnan province, in China and even south to Singapore to form a pan-Asia railway network, as Malaysia is also planning to revive a high-speed rail link with Singapore.

“The improved overland transportation brought by the ECRL will drive development in Southeast Asian countries, particularly benefiting the agricultural sector,” Lim said.

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A worker conducts a routine checkup on the solar panels at a photovoltaic power station in Kedah, Malaysia, on June 6, 2024. This power station is operated by CGN Energy International Holdings Co. It covers an area of 105.2 hectares and commenced operations in 2019. CHONG YOON CHUNG / XINHUA

Company plays big role in Southeast Asian nation's clean energy transition

By ZHENG XIN
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Malaysia's clean energy transition has been significantly propelled by Chinese energy companies' active involvement in recent years, including China General Nuclear Power Corp, or CGN, which has emerged as the country's second-largest independent power producer with 5.08 gigawatts of capacity through key gas and solar ventures, industry experts and company executives said.

The company, China's largest nuclear power operator in terms of installed capacity, has solidified its position as a major energy player in Malaysia, as it has been stepping up efforts in exporting advanced technologies and production capacity overseas in recent years, it said.

The company has been continuously leveraging its integrated industrial chain in recent years, and its international operations have successfully brought Chinese renewable energy supply chains to countries including Malaysia, Laos and Brazil, driving the

export of photovoltaic and wind turbine equipment capable of generating a combined 1.6 GW of power, said Zhang Chaoqun, president of CGN Energy International Holdings Co.

The 2.24-GW gas-fired Edra Melaka Power Plant in Malaysia, built by CGN, is the nation's largest gas power plant with low-carbon combined cycle gas turbines. It is capable of providing about 11 percent of the total electricity demand in the Peninsular Malaysia, CGN said.

The plant supplied 13.17 billion kWh throughout last year.

The EMPP, with a total installed capacity of 2.24 GW, applies the world's most advanced and efficient gas turbine technology and is capable of achieving efficiency of over 60 percent in electricity production, it said.

The power plant will support the Malaysian government's target to achieve 31 percent renewable energy capacity by 2025, according to local government.

Analysts believe the cooperation exemplifies a win-win scenario, as Malaysia gains access to advanced

and efficient power generation technology, enhancing its energy security, while China demonstrates the global competitiveness of its energy sector.

China has been increasing efforts to export advanced energy technologies and green solutions in recent years, and the investments are poised to play a crucial role in the future of energy in countries that import such technologies, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

The EMPP plant's operational success has not only brought security to a substantial portion of Malaysia's power needs, but has also set a new efficiency standard for the region, Lin added.

CGN has significantly ramped up its investment in innovation last year, dedicating 5.95 billion yuan (\$810 million) to research and development. It has expanded its domestic capacity by 11.53 million kW, further advancing its clean energy portfolio.

To date, CGN's cumulative power supply to Malaysia has exceeded 200 billion kilowatt-hours.

Singer-actor rejuvenates career by shifting his focus to the mainland

By XING WEN
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Approaching middle age can be a difficult adjustment career-wise for a former idol, but for Malaysian singer-actor Nicholas Teo, it became a catalyst for reinvention.

Since shifting his focus to the Chinese mainland's entertainment scene in 2021 — the year he turned 40 — Teo has embraced bold new endeavors while mastering an enviable work-life equilibrium.

In recent years, he has enjoyed several career highlights in Chinese reality shows. For instance, in the third season of the music show *Call Me by Fire*, the typically reserved performer surprised audiences with his dynamic singing and dancing, while also showcasing his fit physique. Later, in the second season of the acting competition *Memories Beyond Horizon*, he earned praise from judges for his portrayal of a villain and performing musicals.

Since late 2023, Teo has been busy on his first mainland concert tour, titled *The 21st Story*, which has so far taken him to cities including Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou in Guangdong province, Chengdu in Sichuan province and Changsha in Hunan province. Last year, he also released his latest album, *White Night*.

When reflecting on his thriving career in China's entertainment industry, Teo expressed gratitude: “As a Malaysian, we share the same language. I'm grateful to my team, the production crews of the reality shows I've been part of and all my fans here.”

“Thanks to everyone's kindness and hospitality, I have never felt out of place,” he added.

Teo first entered the entertainment industry in 2002 after winning a singing competition in Kuala Lumpur.

By 2006, Teo had released two successful albums, featuring hit singles such as *Love is the Answer*.

His big break came when he co-starred with Taiwan actress Cyndi Wang in the hit romance drama *Smiling Pasta*, where he played a pop singer who falls for a commoner.

The series became the highest-rated romance drama of 2006 in Taiwan and soon introduced Teo to a large population of mainland audiences. His tender voice while singing love songs and radiant, healing smile earned him the enduring nickname “Prince of Smiles.”

The then 20-something Teo ventured alone to Taiwan to pursue showbiz.

“Back then, I had no clear direction — I just followed my record label's and managers' suggestions,” he said. “They'd say things like, ‘You're good at this — your smile is charming and relatable, people love it, so play to that strength.’ But I didn't understand why I had to keep smiling all the time.”

This lack of self-awareness during his early career left him feeling out of sync. Around 2013, he made a decision to step back from the spotlight. His sabbatical included traveling through Japan, participating in an acting workshop in New York and spending days at home playing with his nieces and nephews.

“I once lost myself,” he said. “I needed solitude to rediscover who I was beyond others' expectations.”

After nearly three years, Teo returned with his album *To Be ... Nicholas* — a bold statement

about himself.

“This album began my journey to authenticity,” he says. “Now I manage to pursue work that truly reflects me: fulfilling, yet sustainable.”

Teo has now learned to recharge without taking extended breaks.

“In today's fast-paced world, even listening to music has become background noise rather than a focused activity,” he said. “But true rejuvenation comes from mindfulness, whether it's tending to houseplants, exercising or simply getting quality sleep. The act of fully immersing yourself in any task, big or small, could become its own form of recharging.”

Meanwhile, his confidence as an actor has grown exponentially.

“The character's morality or screen time doesn't limit me, whether I'm a protagonist or in a supporting role, hero or villain. What matters is having the creative space to fully interpret the character,” he explained.

In recent years, Teo has spent stretches of up to 18 consecutive months working on the Chinese mainland. Yet he has mastered the art of living in the moment while away from home, often exploring cities between performances.

When asked to describe a recent day with perfect work-life balance, he simply grinned and said, “Every day!”

Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Group helps attract Jiangsu investors

By CANG WEI in Nanjing
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In recent years, the Malaysia Jiangsu Entrepreneurs Business Association has been instrumental in fostering a closer economic partnership and increased cooperation between Jiangsu province and Malaysia amid a growing trend of mutual visits and heightened trade activities.

Established in 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, the association has played a pivotal role in leveraging its platform advantages to guide Jiangsu entrepreneurs and enterprises with investment capacity toward international ventures, thereby expanding the scope of cooperation between Jiangsu and Malaysia.

Sun Keqiang, vice-president of the association, highlighted its growth from seven member companies at its inception in 2019 to 70 currently, underscoring the expanding team size and the broadening landscape of China-Malaysia collaboration.

Sun Jianwei, president of the association who was initially involved in real estate in China, recognized Malaysia's potential, particularly in the digital finance and technology sectors, which led him to establish a business in the country in 2012.

“China has experience, technology and financial support,” he said. “It was a natural fit for us to come to Malaysia for localized investment and market cultivation, and to initiate cooperation.”

Sun Jianwei said in 2016, Malaysia did not have mobile or internet payment systems, while China already possessed mature technologies and solutions. He seized the opportunity and successfully introduced these advancements to Malaysia, contributing to the country's progress in these areas.

While facing initial challenges in Malaysia due to skepticism toward unfamiliar digital finance concepts, Sun Jianwei and his team engaged with local regulatory bodies, demonstrating the reliability of their technology.

Through collaborative initiatives with local partners, they gained acceptance and secured a payment license from the country's central bank.

“I'm happy to share Chinese technology with the Malaysian people, ensuring that the local people understand that Chinese entrepreneurs come here to develop and prosper together with them,” Sun Jianwei said.

He emphasized the importance of establishing trust relationships with partners by maintaining a commitment to integrity, nurturing talent and enhancing professional capabilities within his team to ensure the successful progression of projects in the competitive Southeast Asian market.

As China's economy continues to ascend, Malaysia is emerging as a vital player in Southeast Asia, offering strong synergies with China in trade, investment and other sectors, he said.

The association also highlighted the necessity and viability of promoting industrial chain cooperation between Jiangsu and Malaysia. In industries such as palm oil and electronics manufacturing, Jiangsu's advanced technologies and expertise can complement Malaysia's strengths, fostering collaborative development and innovation.

In the biopharmaceutical sector, Sun Jianwei proposed collaboration between enterprises and research institutions from both regions to advance new drug research and clinical trials, leveraging each other's strengths to build a comprehensive biopharmaceutical industry chain.

The association's cultural exchange activities have not only strengthened the cohesion of the Chinese business community, but have also successfully integrated Jiangsu's cultural elements into Malaysian society, fostering a greater appreciation for Chinese culture among Malaysian Chinese.

Sun Jianwei also encouraged the new generation of Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs to engage in China's modernization efforts by enhancing their understanding of the Chinese market and policies.



A locomotive is parked at a dispatch center along the East Coast Rail Link under development in Pahang, Malaysia, on May 6, 2024. CHENG YIHENG / XINHUA

XI'S VISIT

University students help cement links

Younger generation carries forward traditional friendship of both nations

By ZHOU JIN
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For Malaysian student Cheok Xuan Yu, life in China is filled with cultural encounters.

Just a week before this year's Spring Festival, she and a group of international students from Tianjin University traveled to Yangliuqing, an ancient town on the outskirts of Tianjin, to experience the traditional craft of woodblock New Year prints.

"The five-step process — drawing, carving, printing, painting and mounting — showed me how intricate the pictures are and how culture can drive an entire industry," Cheok recalled.

It was the second time Cheok spent the Spring Festival holiday in China. "It feels just like home," she said. "We have reunion dinners and festive red envelopes in Malaysia, and there are many similarities between Chinese and Malaysian cultures."

The 22-year-old, who is now studying at Tianjin University's School of Life Sciences, was among the 87 Malaysian students at the university who jointly wrote a letter to President Xi Jinping in March last year to express their feelings about China's development and the Chinese people's friendliness.

In the letter, the students said they were determined to act as messengers and promoters of Chinese-Malaysian friendship and aspired to use their knowledge to help build a China-Malaysia community with a shared future.

To their surprise, the letter was mentioned by Xi in his congratulatory message exchanged with Malaysian King Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar in May on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations.

In the message, Xi said he was pleased to see that the cause of friendship between the two countries has inheritors.

By 2023, Tianjin University had a total of nearly 600 Malaysian students, and more than 100 Malaysian students are enrolled annually, making it one of the Chinese universities with the largest enrollment of Malaysian students.

Cheok said that the friendly relationship and close educational exchanges between the two countries have provided opportunities for students like her to study in China to pursue better self-development, which will then allow her to help promote bilateral exchanges.

During her stay in China, Cheok has had rich experiences not only in cultural exploration but also in academic innovation.

Last year, she joined an entrepreneurial project to promote functional pet food additives — focusing on improving pet immunity and health — in the Southeast Asian market, including in Malaysia.

"We hope to leverage China's mature industrial chain and resources to bring our products to this 'blue ocean' market," she said.

Social media is another window into China for Cheok, whose grandfather lived there before migrating to Malaysia. "I learned about Chinese universities and tech trends through Douyin before I came here," she said.

With the mutual visa-exemption policy, Cheok said she foresees even more frequent exchanges — her family is already planning to attend her graduation in Tianjin this year, while more of her Chinese friends are preparing trips to Malaysia.

According to Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing, nearly 3.8 million Chinese tourists visited Malaysia last year, and there were over 500 flights between the two countries every week.

Teo Jin Yu, another Malaysian student at Tianjin University, said, "Platforms like RedNote and TikTok are very popular among young people in Malaysia, and they use these to learn about Chinese culture, food and lifestyles in preparation for future travel."

While such platforms have strengthened Malaysians' understanding of China, Teo said he also tries to introduce Malaysia to more Chinese people.

Last year, he participated in the university's international culture festival and displayed traditional Malaysian foods and crafts, such as batik painting, at the Malaysian booth.

"Visitors were very interested and supportive, and even when things moved slowly due to the crowd, they waited patiently. This made me feel the warmth and friendliness of China," he recalled.

Teo also said he is attracted to the university's specialization in information management.

"The teaching here emphasizes specialization, and every knowledge point is deeply explored, which has solidified my foundation in my field," he said.

He said he hopes to return to Malaysia in the future to use the skills he has acquired in China, as well as the efficient work ethic and cultural insights he has gained.

As more students travel between the two countries, cooperation in education, technology and culture will only grow stronger, Teo said.

Ties: Malaysia welcomes Chinese firms' investment

From page 1

Anwar said the record-breaking cooperation results achieved during Xi's visit are of great significance and are inspiring for the Malaysian side.

Malaysia welcomes Chinese enterprises to invest and develop in Malaysia and conduct cooperation in emerging technologies so that both countries can achieve greater development, he said.

In the face of rising unilateralism, Malaysia is willing to strengthen cooperation with China to jointly address risks and challenges, Anwar said, adding that ASEAN will not endorse any unilateral imposition of tariffs and will work together to enhance self-reliance and maintain economic growth through cooperation.

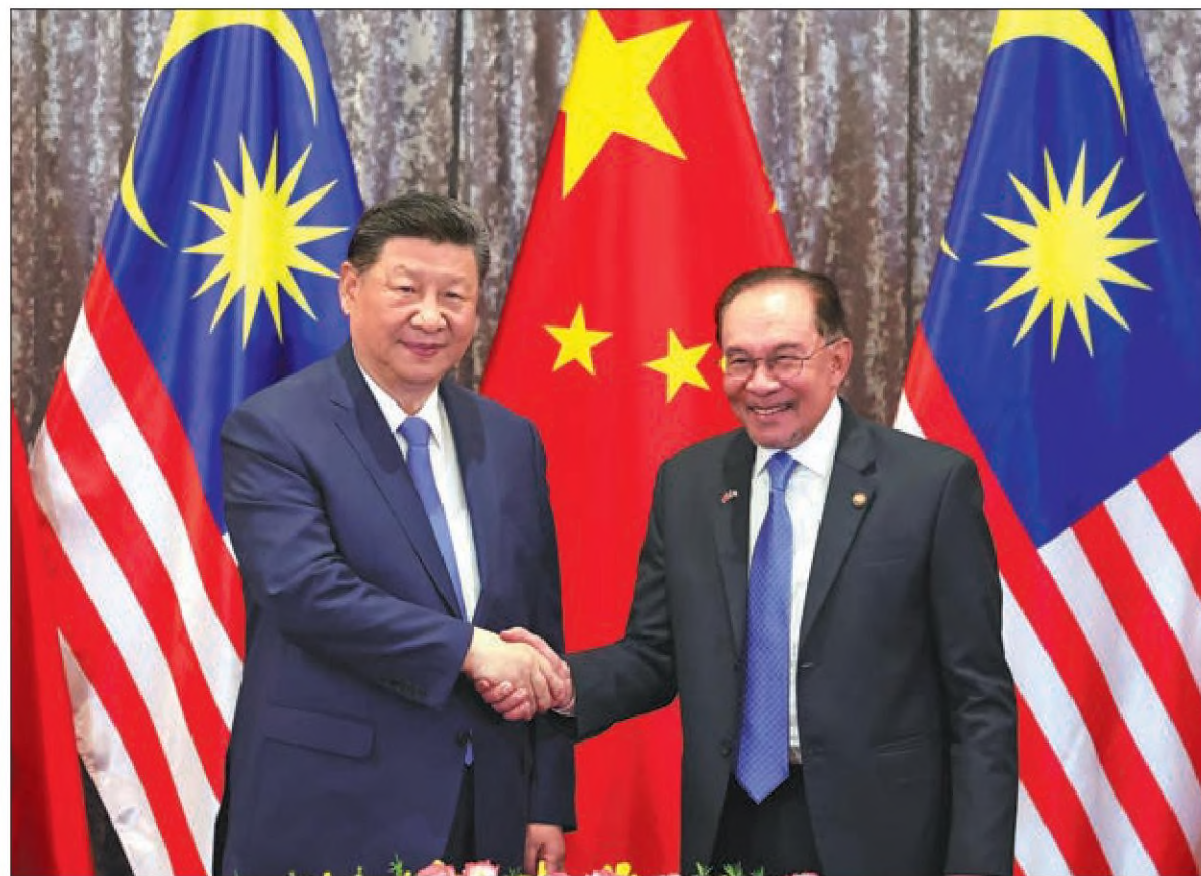
Earlier in the day, Xi also met with Malaysian King Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, who held a grand welcoming ceremony for the Chinese president.

Xi said he is ready to work with the Malaysian supreme head of state to lead the long-term and stable development of China-Malaysia ties, and write a new chapter in good-neighborliness, friendship, solidarity and cooperation.

Xu Liping, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Center for Southeast Asian Studies, said the new definition of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future has specified the direction of relations between China and Malaysia, whose bilateral cooperation has always been at the forefront among countries in the region.

Noting that both China and Malaysia are advocates and beneficiaries of free trade, Xu said it is important that the two countries, together with other ASEAN countries, make better use of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which covers one-third of the world's population, trade and GDP, especially amid the United States' unilateral imposition of tariffs.

Beijing, Kuala Lumpur bolster partnership



President Xi Jinping and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim shake hands on Wednesday after attending a meeting and witnessing an exchange of agreement session between the two countries at the official residence of the prime minister in Putrajaya, outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Xi's three-day state visit to the Southeast Asian country started on Tuesday. HUANG JINGWEN / XINHUA

Hunan cuisine adds flavor to Sino-Malaysian bond

By ZOU SHUO and HE CHUN
in Changsha

The sizzle of chili-filled woks and the aroma of fermented spices of Hunan cuisine have orchestrated a symphony of friendship between Malaysia and China, as delicacies build a flavorful bridge across centuries-old trade routes and modern dinner tables.

From the historic marine corridors of the Strait of Malacca to the neon-lit alleys of Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, this culinary love affair is redefining cross-cultural bonds — one mouthwatering dish at a time, according to a report by Hunan Daily.

Hunan cuisine's journey to Malaysia mirrors a timeless truth: In the alchemy of chili oil and cultural curiosity, borders dissolve. As chopsticks clink over steaming plates, Malaysia and China savor more than just flavors — they taste the future of a friendship, simmered to perfection.

At the National Museum of Malaysia, a replica of a 15th century merchant ship stands testament to the Strait of Malacca's role as a historical spice highway. Centuries

after Spanish and Portuguese traders first ferried chili peppers to Asia, local people have developed a palate for spicy food.

Today, it is the bold flavors of Hunan dishes, such as braised pork and blood duck, that ignite Malaysian taste buds and transform eateries into hubs of cultural exchange.

Leading the charge is Hu Mengyun, a tenacious restaurateur from Huaihua, a city in Hunan. In 2001, after witnessing Malaysian people's untapped appetite for authentic food, she brought six Hunan cuisine chefs with her to open a restaurant in Kuala Lumpur.

"Hunan dishes were mere footnotes in Sichuan or Cantonese menus back then," she told Hunan Daily.

With more Chinese people and enterprises venturing into Kuala Lumpur, Hu's restaurant quickly expanded to three branches and a spin-off noodle brand.

Jerry Aw, 68, shares this zeal. As the taste of a signature Hunan dish — fish head with chopped chili peppers — was tantalizingly out of his reach in Malaysia, he decided to open his own eatery in Kuala Lumpur.

"We never water down our recipes, and stick to the original taste," he emphasized, noting that 80 percent of his customers were locals.

Aw, who is now retired and advises his daughter on running the eatery, said the chefs are all from Hunan and are like his brothers.

"They are direct and hotheaded, just like when I was younger," he said, adding that the chefs have followed him for a long time and wouldn't leave the eatery even if some other restaurant offered them double the salary.

One of the chefs, Zhu Weijin, 43, has worked for Aw for more than 17 years. He went to Malaysia when he was 26, and decided to stay on.

Zhu said his boss trusts him and gives him a lot of freedom in the kitchen. "There are more than 100 Hunan restaurants in Malaysia, but the one where I work is still among the top," he said.

Behind the scenes, supply chain master Feng Guohua ensures freshness. His high-altitude farm in Hunan's Guidong county — where peppers ripen under misty

peaks — delivers harvests to Kuala Lumpur within 10 days through cold chain logistics.

"Running the supply chain is our lifeline," said Feng, who also owns a restaurant chain with 10 overseas branches.

From Guidong's terraced fields to Malaysian kitchens, this seamless network fuels Hunan's global gastronomic footprint.

For media veteran Leong Weiping, executive director of Asia Television Holdings, these dishes are more than meals; they are emissaries. "When Malaysians taste braised pork or chopped chili fish head, they develop a longing to visit Hunan," he said.

Malaysia is a very inclusive country, where different cuisines find ample room to flourish, Leong said, while hailing the power of food in bringing people from different countries together.

"Food is like a big bridge. It forges kinship through shared heritage," he added.

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Joint UNESCO heritage bid for lion dance sees progress

By LI XIAOYUN and WU KUNLING
in Kuala Lumpur

Cultural policymakers and experts from China and Malaysia are now crafting an action plan for protecting and promoting the lion dance, a tradition that has leaped across borders and generations, after submitting a joint bid to UNESCO in late March to recognize the art form as a shared intangible cultural heritage.

The application follows a commitment made in a bilateral statement, signed last year, that said the two countries have agreed to work together on the multinational nomination to inscribe the lion dance on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Confirming the submission in an interview with China Daily, Christina Yeo Ken Yin, undersecretary of the International Relations Division at Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, said, "The application has been smooth so far."

She said the action plan will include measures such as more cross-border performances during festivals, expanded symposiums and a digital archive to facilitate research.

While the lion dance styles of the two countries may differ, the distinctions "don't separate us," Yeo said, but rather "make each other special."

Typically performed during festivals and celebrations, the lion dance — integrating martial arts, dance and



A worker paints a lion head at Lo Fo Chi Enterprise, a lion head-making studio, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on April 5. LI XIAOYUN / CHINA DAILY

music — was brought to Malaysia by Chinese immigrants and has evolved into a cross-cultural spectacle enjoyed by diverse communities in the Southeast Asian nation.

Lee Kok Thow, former president of the Sungai Besi Chinese Hua Ti Dragon and Lion Dance Association in Malaysia, estimated that the country now boasts more than 400 lion dance troupes across all states and federal territories.

In addition, "natives in East Malaysia, such as the Iban and Bidayuh, are increasingly interested in (lion dance performance) and have participated," Yeo said.

This inclusive development not

only broadens the reach of the lion dance, but also inspires local artists to innovate. In the 1980s, Malaysian performers reimagined the traditional Chinese lion dance through the creation of the high-pole lion dance, in which artists execute intricate movements atop poles that are up to three meters high and leap gracefully between them. The creative art form was recognized as Malaysia's national intangible cultural heritage in 2007.

Siow Ho Phiew, renowned as Malaysia's "Lion King" for his masterful performance skills and innovative craftsmanship in the making of lion heads, was deeply involved last month in the third joint heritage

nomination workshop held in South China's Guangdong province to finalize the UNESCO application materials. The 70-year-old provided insights into the evolution of the lion dance in Malaysia, particularly regarding the high-pole variation.

Siow said he believes that the joint application will better showcase the art's full evolution, adding that "both nations' lion dance communities not only acknowledge but deeply respect each other's efforts in promoting this heritage globally."

Having trained more than 150 students worldwide, Siow, like his peers in Malaysia's lion dance community, frequently travels around the world, including China, to teach referee certification courses or participate in competitions and exchange programs.

For instance, two associations from Malaysia clinched second and third places at an international high-pole lion dance competition held in China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in March.

"Wherever there are overseas Chinese, there's the lion dance," said Chin Yew Sin, president of Malaysia's Oriental Culture Research Centre. He suggested that China and Malaysia expand their cooperation to include more Southeast Asian countries where the lion dance is popular, such as Thailand and Indonesia, to enhance regional cultural exchanges.

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XI'S VISIT



China and the World Roundtable | China-Cambodia Relations

Editor's note: The concept of a China-Cambodia community with a shared future has become a cornerstone of the deepening ties between China and Cambodia across various fields. With continued joint efforts, the partnership will become even more dynamic, resilient and beneficial to the region and beyond. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Kin Phea

Cambodia, China's enriching journey

Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Cambodia, from Thursday to Friday, comes shortly after the two countries elevated their relationship to a Cambodia-China community with a shared future in the new era. Xi's visit reflects not only the enduring friendship between the two sides but also their joint commitment to build a brighter and more inclusive future.

Over the past two decades, Cambodia-China ties have grown into a comprehensive and forward-looking partnership. The two countries' agreement to build a community with a shared future in the new era represents their resolve to pursue inclusive, sustainable and mutually beneficial development. It signifies a shared belief in the power of partnership to uplift societies, improve lives and enhance regional connectivity.

Frequent high-level exchanges, especially the recent cordial meetings between Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and President Xi, have reinvigorated bilateral ties and infused new energy into their strategic partnership. These interactions show the depth of understanding between the two countries' leaders and highlight their commitment to promote cooperation and create opportunities.

At the heart of the new era for their relations is the Cambodia-China "Diamond Hexagon" bilateral cooperation framework, a comprehensive road map which accords priority to six key areas of collaboration: political cooperation, production capacity and industrial development, agriculture, energy, security and people-to-people exchanges. The collaboration reflects not only their shared goals but also their shared responsibility to promote prosperity and maintain regional peace.

Concrete initiatives under this framework, such as the Industrial and Technological Corridor in Cambodia's Preah Sihanouk province — envisioned as a "second Shenzhen" — and the Fish and Rice Corridor in north-western Cambodia are inspiring examples of innovation and sustainable growth. These projects are already transforming local economies and creating new pathways for inclusive development.

Politically, both countries continue to support each other's core interests and collaborate closely on regional and global affairs, thus strengthening ASEAN unity and contributing to regional peace, dialogue and cooperation.

In the industrial and production sec-



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY



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tors, China's support for infrastructure development and special economic zones has accelerated Cambodia's modernization efforts. The Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway, for instance, has become a symbol of transformative progress, boosting trade, reducing travel time and connecting key economic hubs across the country.

Agricultural collaboration between the two sides is equally promising. Thanks to Chinese investment and technology transfer, Cambodian farmers now have greater access to modern technologies and international markets, and are earning higher profits. This collaboration is not only improving people's livelihoods in Cambodia's rural areas but also making the country a stronger player in regional food security and agricultural trade.

Meanwhile, cooperation in energy, especially in the renewable sector, is helping Cambodia advance its green growth ambitions, the country is investing in solar, hydro and other sustainable energy sources with support from Chinese enterprises, laying the groundwork for long-term energy security and environmental sustainability.

In the security sector, the two countries are deepening cooperation in capacity-building, disaster response and public safety. These efforts ensure that peace and security remain the cornerstone of the two countries' development efforts, providing a stable environment for trade, investment and tourism.

Perhaps most inspiring are the flourishing people-to-people exchanges which form the heart of Sino-Cambodian relations. From education and cultural exchanges to tourism and digital innovation, the Cambodian and Chinese people are forging strong bonds of friendship, understanding and shared purpose.

China has long been Cambodia's largest trading partner and a major source of foreign direct investment. But their partnership goes far beyond numbers — it includes shared dreams, common values, and the belief that nations, no matter their size, can work together to achieve common development.

Also, China's contributions to Cambodia's infrastructure, technology and human resource development are helping to lay a solid foundation for long-term prosperity and resilience. And initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative resonate with Cambodia's national priorities, offering valuable frameworks for promoting innovation and pursuing green development and inclusive growth.

Cambodia is expected to continue its policy of openness, neutrality and active engagement with the international community. In this regard, its partnership with China serves as a bridge to enhanced bilateral cooperation and stronger ASEAN integration.

Looking ahead, the Cambodia-China relationship offers exciting new possibilities. From smart agriculture and digital transformation to youth entrepreneurship and academic exchanges, the opportunities are boundless.

The elevation of the Sino-Cambodian relationship to a community with a shared future in the new era, and the implementation of the "Diamond Hexagon" bilateral cooperation framework signify more than just policy shifts; they represent a vision for a better world, one where collaboration triumphs over conflict and development is shared by all.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Gu Jiayun

Mutual trust drives growing cooperation

President Xi Jinping's ongoing visit to Cambodia four months after Cambodian Senate President Samdech Techo Hun Sen visited China offers the two sides a good opportunity to strengthen their "ironclad" friendship and realize the full potential of cooperation.

Cambodia has expeditiously developed its economy owing to the Belt and Road Initiative-induced improvement in infrastructure connectivity and logistics and industrial upgrading. Not to mention that China has helped build about 4,000 kilometers of roads, more than 10 big bridges and 10 hydropower stations in Cambodia.

Besides, after the opening of the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway, the travel time between the two places has been halved, the journey is safer, and logistic efficiency has greatly improved. The latest example of the in-depth cooperation between the two sides is the National Road 71C. It opened on Saturday and will boost economic and tourism development.

Once haunted by power and energy shortages, Cambodia was forced to buy electricity from some neighbors at high rates, which made businesses reluctant to invest in the country. When I was studying in Cambodia about two decades ago, power outages could last up to half a day.

Thanks to China-Cambodia cooperation, many hydro and thermal power plants have been built in Cambodia. Today, Cambodia is not only self-sufficient in power but it can also export electricity to countries such as Singapore. With sufficient power supply, the country's power rates have been greatly reduced, making the country attractive to businesses.

The Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone in Cambodia with clustered manufacturing enterprises is another example of win-win China-Cambodia cooperation. The SEZ has attracted over 200 enterprises and provides employment for more than 30,000 local people.

Cooperation in the digital economy, too, has deepened, leading to the construction of digital infrastructure and the cultivation of talents. Chinese enterprises such as Alibaba and Huawei operate many such projects in Cambodia.

Bilateral trade in agricultural products, too, has grown. At a time when the United States' 49 percent "reciprocal tariffs" on Cambodian goods pose a real threat to the country, even though it has been suspended for 90 days, the country urgently needs the Chinese market to maintain its foreign trade growth. In fact, Cambodia can consolidate its presence in the Chinese market by exporting products such as pepper, coconut, freshwater fish, banana and soybean, which will increase Chinese consumers' options.

With global supply chains facing disruptions due to the US tariffs, the two countries are working together to find new ways to overcome the tariff crisis. They can do so by expanding their trade in agricultural products, which in turn can help develop cross-border e-commerce between the two sides. While the production and processing of primary agricultural products are emerging as new fields of cooperation, the two sides are also trying to realize the full potential of agricultural products' added value.

Therefore, the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences has been working with relevant Cambodian institutions to boost the planting and processing of value added products. And many Chinese entrepreneurs have started businesses in Cambodia, improving output, promoting agricultural digitalization, and enhancing agricultural products' added value.

Moreover, the friendship and mutual trust between the two peoples have made Cambodia sign an action plan to build a community with a shared future with China, which has increased the demand for cultural exchanges. Cultural exchanges, in turn, have helped enhance mutual understanding and mutual support. While 2024 was the Cambodia-China People-to-People Exchange Year, the Cambodian side is also working actively to make 2025 a year of tourism for both peoples.

More good news is that the Cambodian research center at Beijing Foreign Studies University, through its joint research with Royal University of Phnom Penh last year, found that China is the most desired destination for overseas study and outbound trips for Cambodian youths.

Thanks to deepening mutual trust, Cambodia can play a bigger role in intensifying China's cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations now that the upgrading of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 has taken into account the differences among ASEAN members and made adjustments favoring ASEAN member states under the new negotiation framework.

Seventy years ago, when the Bandung Conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia, Cambodia's former king and prime minister Norodom Sihanouk and then Chinese premier Zhou Enlai forged a deep friendship, laying the foundation for the "ironclad" friendship between the two countries. Now, with frequent high-level exchanges, the two sides are not only deepening cooperation but also strengthening their traditional friendship.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



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Neak Chandarith

Shared commitment to friendship and progress

In today's fast-changing but complicated global landscape, where alliances often falter due to pressure, the partnership between Cambodia and China has been resolute — a vivid proof of mutual respect, shared aspirations and an unwavering commitment to sovereignty.

As a Cambodian scholar who has observed the country's ascent from post-conflict recovery to a dynamic center offering many opportunities, I view the "action plans for building a Cambodia-China community with a shared future" — first from 2019 to 2023, and then from 2024 to 2028 — not merely as a diplomatic accord but also as the cornerstone of Cambodia's development.

Sino-Cambodian collaboration is based on mutual respect for sovereignty, a value Cambodia treasures given its long years of struggle before gaining independence. China's support for Cambodia's right to shape its own development path despite external pressures has empowered it to pursue development without interference. On the other hand, Cambodia's adherence to the one-China principle mirrors its commitment to national integrity.

The bilateral relationship, nurtured since 1958, has weathered many a global storm to transform into an "ironclad friendship".

The second action plan (2024-28) builds on the first's achievements, reinforcing trust through frequent high-level dialogue, party-to-party exchanges, and legislative cooperation. It ensures alignment on critical issues



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— regional stability and equitable global governance — while giving Cambodia a greater say in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the United Nations. For Cambodia, this amplifies its role in a multipolar world. For China, this highlights its leadership's role in cultivating friendships that help advance its vision of global harmony.

The economic narrative of Sino-Cambodian partnership is one of shared achievement, propelled by China's strategic foresight. It is not a one-sided exchange but a synergy of strengths.

The Belt and Road Initiative, a hallmark of the first action plan (2019-23), has reshaped Cambodia's infrastructure. The Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway, opened in 2022, has reduced travel time from five to two hours, boosting trade and tourism, and the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone has created more than 20,000 jobs — 90 percent of which have gone to Cambodians.

The two sides' cooperation in energy and security reflects China's focus on practical solutions. In fact, Chinese investments have helped electrify Cam-

bodia, with hydropower and solar power contributing more than 60 percent to the country's grid, while reducing its reliance on imports.

And the proposed low-carbon demonstration zone in Sihanoukville, a flagship project of the new action plan, blends industrial growth with green innovation, ensuring energy stability and aligning with the China-proposed Global Development Initiative and demonstrating China's leading role in sustainable progress.

In security, cooperation on capacity building is a vital pillar of the Sino-Cambodian partnership. The successful launch of the "Golden Dragon 2025" joint exercise at the Cambodia-China Joint Support and Training Center at Port Ream exemplifies the two countries' commitment to safeguard their national security and maintain regional peace.

These efforts, along with joint training and intelligence sharing, counter transnational threats — cybercrime and drug trafficking — while upholding ASEAN's neutrality. The heart of the Sino-Cambodian partnership beats through human connections. The first action plan opened pathways — more than 200 Cambodian students study in China, majoring in engineering, economics and health. China's aid in restoring Angkor Wat's Royal Palace honors Cambodia's heritage, while Cambodian rice, banana, mango, longan and cashew nuts enjoy popularity in Chinese markets.

The second plan expands these ties with initiatives in the cultural and

health sectors, reflecting China's benevolence and forging a shared future grounded in goodwill.

The Sino-Cambodian partnership has been overcoming challenges, with Cambodia prudently managing economic matters — the country's debt-to-GDP ratio remains a safe 34 percent. Besides, Cambodia has been diversifying its trade with countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, guided by a Khmer saying: "A river is fed by many tributaries."

That Cambodia is the first Southeast Asian country to implement two action plans highlights its role in the practical strategy, a role likely to be cemented as the two sides are expected to sign more agreements to upgrade a China-Cambodia community with a shared future.

For China, Cambodia is a gateway to ASEAN and a promoter of the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative. For Cambodia, China's sustained support helps it to pursue its goal of becoming a high-income economy by 2050. In this regard, the two countries' development goals align with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, proving shared progress surpasses competition.

Cambodia and China are crafting a South-South partnership characterized by equality, mutual respect and shared aspirations, a partnership that has weathered many storms before transforming into a rock-solid friendship.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



People visit the Malaysia Pavilion during the seventh China International Import Expo at the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai) in November 2024. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

CIIE strengthens ties with neighbors

Southeast Asian nations shine at annual China International Import Expo

By HU YUYAN
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China cherishes its friendships with neighboring countries, adhering to the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness. The China International Import Expo embodies these values, promoting win-win cooperation with Southeast Asian neighbors including Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia.

Held annually in Shanghai since November 2018, the CIIE has witnessed significant growth in both the number of participating countries and the value of intended transactions. The cumulative intended transaction value of the past seven editions has surpassed \$500 billion.

China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have been each other's largest trading partners for five consecutive years. Vietnam has been a frequent participant in the CIIE and served as the guest country of honor at the first and sixth editions. A total of 180 Vietnamese enterprises have participated in the expo over the past seven years.

At a recent promotional event for the eighth CIIE in Hanoi, Vietnam, members of the CIIE delegation said that a large number of high-quality Vietnamese products have quickly gained access to the Chinese market through the CIIE. They encouraged Vietnamese companies to fully utilize the CIIE as a platform for international collaboration and to seize the opportunities in China's expanding market.

Ho Ngoc Quan, deputy director of the Export Promotion Center under Vietnam's Ministry of Industry and Trade, described the CIIE as a vital gateway for Vietnamese enterprises looking to enter and expand in the Chinese market.

He said enterprises' enthusiasm for the expo remains high and that the ministry will support businesses participating in the eighth CIIE to maximize their outcomes.

During the Hanoi event, the CIIE Bureau and the Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency signed a contract for Vietnam's participation in the eighth CIIE, to be held on Nov 5-10. Detailed information about the expo's effectiveness and its various sections was also provided.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of China-Vietnam diplomatic relations and the China-Vietnam Year of People-to-People Exchanges. The promotional event in Hanoi enhanced Vietnamese businesses' understanding of the expo, encouraging greater participation and practical cooperation between the two countries.

Malaysia, recognizing the CIIE's value in promoting international trade, has also actively participated in the expo. During a recent promotional event for the eighth CIIE in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation, or MATRADE, signed a memorandum of cooperation with the CIIE Bureau to expand its market presence in China and beyond.



Clockwise from top left: An event is held in Malaysia to promote the eighth CIIE. The Cambodia Pavilion at the seventh CIIE. The Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency's booth at the CIIE. Dole launches gift boxes featuring Malaysian durian at the CIIE.

The past seven editions of the CIIE attracted 262 Malaysian companies. Malaysia participated in the Country Exhibition four times and served twice as the guest country of honor.

The year 2024 marked the 50th anniversary of China-Malaysia diplomatic relations. During the seventh CIIE in 2024, many companies, including fresh produce provider Dole and Malaysian-founded TCab Tech, held the global launches for new products.

Syed Farizal Aminy Syed Mohamad, former consul general of Malaysia in Shanghai, said the CIIE is one of the biggest expos he has ever seen, emphasizing the vast opportunities presented by the Chinese market. He noted that the CIIE has enhanced Malaysian companies' capabilities to expand their market share.

"I believe that this is a greater incentive for a trading nation like Malaysia to collaborate deeper with China to further facilitate and synchronize the supply chain connectivity between Malaysia and China. And I believe this is one of the key elements that has strengthened our relationship with China," Mohamad said.

At the promotional event for the eighth CIIE in Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing noted that in 2024, bilateral trade between China and Malaysia reached a historic high, with China remaining Malaysia's largest trading partner for the 16th consecutive year. He encouraged Malaysian businesses to utilize the CIIE to introduce more high-quality Malay-

"Cambodia sees China as a huge market for the kingdom's agricultural produce."

Im Rachna, spokeswoman for Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

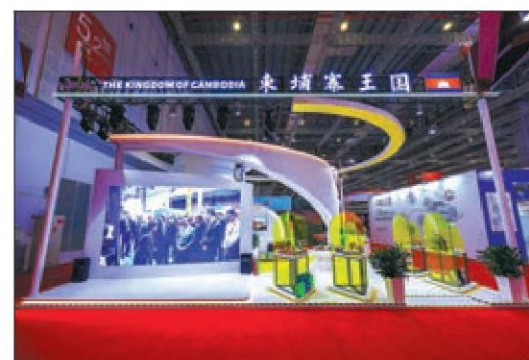
sian products into the Chinese market.

Wu Zhengping, deputy director-general of the CIIE Bureau, reaffirmed the bureau's commitment to enhancing collaboration with Malaysian institutions to support more local businesses to participate in the CIIE and access China's vast market, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.

According to Wu, the eighth CIIE will continue promoting inclusivity by exhibiting more products from developing countries and offering free exhibition spaces for the least-developed countries. The exhibition space will showcase the latest trends and focus on fostering business interactions to better match supply with demand.

Mohd Mustafa Abdul Aziz, CEO of MATRADE, lauded the CIIE as an excellent channel for Malaysian businesses to enter the Chinese market. He revealed that MATRADE is planning to mobilize more than 200 Malaysian companies to participate in this year's CIIE.

At the event, the Malaysia Promas Inter-



popular Country Pavilion activities.

As one of the world's major rice exporters, Cambodia has long been expanding its reach into international markets. Participation in the CIIE has opened up new opportunities for the kingdom.

During the sixth CIIE, Cambodian rice, particularly fragrant jasmine rice, captivated many buyers. Throughout the exhibition, the Cambodia Pavilion frequently heard visitors asking: "How much is a bag of jasmine rice?"

"I believe Cambodian rice will become increasingly popular in China," said Song Saran, former president of the Cambodia Rice Federation. He noted that Cambodian rice exports to China have surged post-CIIE participation. "We hope that through the expo, we can bring more natural, pollution-free Cambodian rice to the Chinese people."

The expo has also aided the entry of other Cambodian agricultural products into China, including longan, cashew nuts and mangoes.

In May 2021, a refrigerated container ship carrying Cambodian mangoes arrived in China after traveling more than 1,000 kilometers. This marked the first time fresh Cambodian mangoes were exported to China, making them the second fresh fruit from Cambodia to enter the Chinese market directly, following bananas.

Prior to this, China and Cambodia had signed and exchanged phytosanitary protocols for Cambodian mangoes, paving the way for their entry into the Chinese market. Six months later, Cambodian mangoes made their debut at the fourth CIIE, attracting many visitors to sample the fruit. Buyers inquired about packaging, quality and ripeness, and left their contact information, hoping for future cooperation.

With the implementation of the China-Cambodia free trade agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, bilateral trade between China and Cambodia continues to expand, bringing more high-quality Cambodian products to Chinese consumers.

The CIIE has also played an important role in enhancing cultural exchanges between Cambodia and China. Air Cambodia used the expo to promote tourist attractions, showcasing representative cultural artifacts from the kingdom such as carved wooden ornaments.

Yin Zheng, general manager of the Shanghai office of the airline, said: "We hope to use the CIIE to build an 'aerial bridge' between the people of our two countries, facilitating cultural exchanges and tourism."

Over about seven years, the CIIE has established itself as a cornerstone event for promoting economic collaboration and cultural exchanges between China and its Southeast Asian neighbors.

With Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia actively participating, the expo not only strengthens diplomatic relations but also promotes mutual prosperity and regional stability, demonstrating a shared commitment to open markets and inclusive growth and paving the way for a brighter future for mankind.

Bilateral trade helps China-Malaysia ties

Infrastructure and agriculture prime sectors of business

By WANG JINHUI
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As regional economic integration and the Belt and Road Initiative continue to expand, trade cooperation between China and Malaysia is experiencing robust momentum. From infrastructure and agriculture to bilateral trade and industrial collaboration, the two countries are entering a new stage of multifaceted and high-level engagement, according to officials and trade analysts from both sides.

The latest data from China's General Administration of Customs indicate bilateral trade between China and Malaysia reached an all-time high of \$212.03 billion in 2024, marking a year-on-year increase of 11.4 percent. China exported \$101.46 billion worth of goods to Malaysia, up 16.1 percent year-on-year, while imports from Malaysia stood at \$110.57 billion, a 7.4 percent increase.

China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for 16 consecutive years, while Malaysia is China's second-largest trading partner in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the largest importer of Chinese goods in the region.

Notably, China's primary imports from Malaysia include integrated circuits, computers and components, palm oil and plastic products. Key Chinese exports to Malaysia include computers and components, ICs, clothing and textiles.

In particular, agricultural products have emerged as one of Malaysia's primary export categories to the Chinese market, with palm oil and durians continuing to gain popularity.

In August 2023, Malaysia's fresh durians entered the Chinese market for the first time, expanding consumer choices and opening new opportunities for Malaysian agricultural exports.

Malaysia became the fourth



Workers inspect the underside of a track-laying machine on a stretch of the East Coast Rail Link project in Pahang state, Malaysia.
CHENG YIHENG / XINHUA

ASEAN country authorized to export fresh durians to China, following Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Previously, Malaysia mainly exported frozen durians.

Arthur Joseph Kurup, Malaysia's deputy minister of agriculture and food security, said this development has significantly enriched China's fruit market and expanded export channels for Malaysian agricultural products.

Flagship project

China's investments in Malaysia are increasingly diverse, with a significant focus on infrastructure. Chinese companies are engaged in constructing railways, bridges, hydropower stations, roads, subways and telecommunications infrastructure.

A cornerstone of the cooperation is the East Coast Rail Link, con-

structed by China Communications Construction Co. Spanning more than 600 kilometers, the railway starts in Kota Bharu on the border with Thailand, travels south to Kuantan, and then turns west toward Port Klang, cutting across the Malaysian peninsula.

Scheduled to begin operation by 2027, the project reached a major milestone in January with the successful laying of track in sections covering approximately 400 km between Maran in Pahang and Kota Bharu in Kelantan. In April, the 3.5-km-long Dungun Tunnel 1 was completed two months ahead of schedule. To date, 38 of the project's 41 tunnels have been completed.

"Dungun Tunnel 1 is a crucial link between Kota Bharu and Port Klang," said Darwis Abdul Razak, CEO of Malaysia Rail Link, the project owner. "Its smooth comple-

tion was made possible by the exceptional efforts, cutting-edge technologies and rigorous safety standards implemented by CCCC's project teams." He added the project has prioritized environmental protection and minimized disruption to local communities during construction.

At a recent joint operations and maintenance agreement signing between CCCC and MRL in Putrajaya, Malaysia, Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing noted that the ECRL would play a pivotal role in driving growth, creating jobs and improving livelihoods. He expressed hope that both sides would continue to operate and maintain the project effectively, thereby maximizing its economic and social returns.

Malaysian Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook also

underscored the importance of the ECRL as a crucial land bridge connecting Malaysia's eastern and western coasts. He said that by linking Kuantan Port and Port Klang, the railway would significantly enhance logistics efficiency and help Malaysia better integrate into the global trade network.

RCEP as a platform

Further reinforcing regional cooperation, China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region announced on April 7 it will leverage the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership to broaden and deepen trade with Malaysia. The initiative aims to expand bilateral trade volumes and contribute to building a closer China-ASEAN community with a shared future.

As China's only provincial-level region with both land and sea bor-

ders with ASEAN, Guangxi has been working to scale up trade with Malaysia. From January to February, Guangxi's total imports and exports with Malaysia surged to 2.9 billion yuan (\$396 million) — up 63.2 percent year-on-year. Among the standout exports from Guangxi are lithium-ion batteries and electric vehicles. On the import side, Malaysian crude oil, palm oil, bird's nests, nuts and frozen fruits are enjoying robust sales in Guangxi's domestic markets.

Two-way investment between Guangxi and Malaysia is also becoming more dynamic. As of March, Guangxi had filed 58 non-financial investment projects involving Malaysian enterprises and institutions, with a cumulative actual investment of \$1.37 billion. In addition, local companies had completed foreign engineering contracts worth a total of \$210 million, with investments spanning manufacturing, mining and services.

Notably, the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park in Qinzhou, Guangxi, and the Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park in Malaysia's Pahang state have pioneered the "Two Countries, Twin Parks" model, offering a new platform for cross-border industrial collaboration. By the end of 2024, the Qinzhou park had registered over 30,000 enterprises, with signed investment agreements surpassing 340 billion yuan. Meanwhile, the Kuantan park saw signed investments exceeding 46 billion yuan.

Malaysia's consistent participation in the China-ASEAN Expo over the past 21 years further underscores the strength of bilateral ties. Since 2004, more than 2,400 Malaysian companies have participated in the event, generating over \$1.4 billion in sales.

Guangxi plans to continue diversifying investment channels, implementing pre-establishment national treatment and a negative list system for foreign investors. Efforts will also focus on expanding exports of high-tech products such as lithium-ion batteries, ICs, construction machinery and new energy vehicles.

Senior supports SE Asia green energy development in global expansion move

By HAO NAN
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As a leading enterprise in China's new energy industry, Senior Technology Material, headquartered in Shenzhen, South China's Guangdong province, has been increasing its global layout and supporting the development of green energy in Southeast Asia.

Notably, the company, also known as Senior, announced its investment in a lithium-ion battery separator production factory in Malaysia in 2023, the first of its kind within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The first phase of the project commenced that year, with a total investment reaching 5 billion yuan (\$684.3 million). Once it reaches full production, the factory is expected to produce 2 billion square meters of lithium-ion battery wet-process separators and supporting coated separators annually.

When discussing the choice of Malaysia, Chen Xiufeng, chairman of Senior Technology Material, highlighted its manufacturing traditions and relatively stable politics among countries in Southeast Asia.

"More importantly, China and Malaysia have always maintained a good political and business relationship. The 50th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-Malaysian diplomatic relations last year also marked a new milestone in the relationship between the two countries," he noted.

Deeply involved in the lithium-ion battery separator industry for more than 20 years, Senior Technology Material adheres to providing differentiated and innovative products to meet the needs of customers.

The company also focuses on nurturing different levels of technical and managerial talents to ensure the vitality and creativity of its operational and technical teams. This maximizes its ability to withstand the challenges and risks brought about by market uncertainties.

Despite the current fluctuations in the global lithium-ion battery market, the new energy industry, as a globally recognized pillar industry, is poised to maintain steady



From left: Ahmad Fuzi (right), governor of Penang state, Malaysia, awards the title of Datuk to Chen Xiufeng, chairman of Shenzhen Senior Technology Material, to recognize Chen's contributions to the development of the new energy industry and the promotion of international cooperation. An artist's rendering of a Malaysia lithium-ion battery separator production project, which the company has announced to invest 5 billion yuan in. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

growth and long-term development in the years ahead.

In this process, globalization and differentiated technology will serve as the core driving forces for the growth of new energy enterprises, according to Senior Technology Material.

"Based on 20-plus years of experience and technological accumulation, we can provide differentiated cost-effective products for all customers at home and abroad. This is also the key to Senior Technology's continued competitiveness in the industry," Chen said.

In addition to innovation in technology and processes, equipment innovation is equally crucial. As a manufacturing-oriented technology company, Senior Technology Material is committed to the research and development of its equipment.

For example, the company

launched the fifth-generation superwide wet-process separator production line in 2023, which signifies a new level in the competitiveness of Chinese separator products.

The digital system integrated with this advanced production line has achieved efficient linkage between the front and back ends of production, leading to pioneering closed-loop management in product manufacturing.

Furthermore, the production equipment of the company's dry-process products has undergone rapid iteration and upgrades in recent years. As of now, Senior Technology Material has achieved independent design and research of its sixth-generation dry-process equipment, offering customers cost-effective separator products.

In the future, the company's Malaysian factory will adopt arti-

ficial intelligence-driven facilities. "AI is a crucial driver for future corporate development, and we will actively explore various possibilities and development opportunities in the company's domestic and international bases.

"In fact, we have already made some preparations and explorations in intelligent algorithm-driven production optimization, and have indeed achieved some results," Chen said.

As major battery and electric vehicle manufacturers from China expand overseas, Senior Technology Material is following suit. It is positioning itself in popular regions for Chinese new energy companies to go global, such as Europe and the ASEAN region.

"Through establishing a complete and stable production system in the ASEAN region, we aim to leverage this bridgehead to swiftly

enter the international market and reach a global audience," Chen said.

Moreover, enhanced collaboration with customers and partners is a pivotal strategy in aiding Senior Technology Material's path toward globalization.

Over the past two years, the company has partnered with globally recognized firms such as Volkswagen to conduct audits of the supply chain and production lines.

Throughout customer inspections, Senior Technology Material has continuously advanced and optimized its operations to adhere more closely to global standards.

In fact, globalization has been a key strategy of the company. Serving as one of the earliest Chinese separator companies to achieve bulk exports overseas, Senior Technology Material has been committed to exploring overseas customers and promoting Chinese brands.

In addition to expanding business, Senior Technology Material has excelled in ESG operation and management. In February, the company received the European Union's Next Generation certification. It is one of the most prestigious ESG awards in the EU and emphasizes the leadership of companies in the global green transformation.

"We highly value ESG planning and strategy and last year we made ESG an entirely independent strategic department within the company," Chen said.

Additionally, Senior Technology Material collaborates with renowned partners to enhance its ESG-based management system. It also researches domestic policy developments and changes to ensure compliance with disclosure and regulatory requirements, he added.

CHINA

SHANGHAI LEADS CHINA'S BASIC RESEARCH DOMINANCE

City's policies, investment help nation maintain global edge in science

By XU XIAOMIN and ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai

Shanghai's leading role in ensuring China's global preeminence in basic scientific research got off to a stellar start this year, with four major papers published in a single issue of the prestigious journal *Cell* in late January.

The papers were from teams at the Synthetic Science Innovation Research Center at Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU), the Center for Excellence in Molecular Plant Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), and the CAS' Center for Excellence in Brain Science and Intelligence Technology.

Also, in the first two months of this year, researchers from Shanghai's Fudan University published six papers in the world's top three journals — *Cell*, *Nature* and *Science* — while another four papers have been accepted. As of early March, researchers from SJTU had published seven papers in these journals.

All the research projects focused on significant scientific questions and clear prospects for industrial applications.

With the surge in these publications, Zhao Weishu, an associate researcher at SJTU's School of Life Sciences and Biotechnology, believes the brightest era for the country's basic research is about to arrive.

"With the current breadth of research, sample size, and industrialization capabilities, we are on the verge of a qualitative leap — perhaps a landmark scientific event, such as the emergence of a new theory. This should be something that all scientists work together toward," Zhao said.

"And amid this wave of scientific research, Shanghai, as an important center of basic research in China, shoulders the mission to promote breakthroughs with innovation at the source," she said.

Paper trails

In 1997, Chinese researchers' original research papers published in *Nature* accounted for about 0.4 percent, data from the Springer Nature Group showed. By 2016, Chinese contributions had risen to around 11 percent.

Fast forward to 2023, when Chinese researchers published over 110,000 papers in leading international journals, representing roughly one-third of the global total, according to the latest annual report released by the China Institute of Scientific and Technical Information in September.

These papers were cited over 818,000 times, ranking China at the forefront globally, the report said.

Researchers said it is no accident that Chinese universities and institutions, especially those in Shanghai, have recently produced world-class research in batches. These achievements are underpinned by a systematic research support mechanism that attracts top talent, while encouraging innovation.

"Last year, 158 papers by scientists from the city were published in *Cell*, *Nature*, and *Science*, accounting for 30 percent of the country's total. They were published at a rate of one paper every two or three days," said Luo Dajin, director of the Shanghai Municipal Science and Technology Commission.

James Crabbe, a supernumerary fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford University, and a former editor-in-chief of an international academic journal, said the situation is "quite different" from the past, when Chinese submissions were sometimes of a lower quality. Since then, remarkable improvement has been seen, he said.

"There are now more scientific papers published by authors from China than in the United States, which is wonderful. That's a tremendous testament to the value China has given to the world in our science understanding," Crabbe said.

Academic freedom

Since 2014, when Shanghai began to build itself into an international science and technology innovation center, the city's total investment in basic research has grown by 13.8 percent every year.

Last year alone, the proportion of the city's investment in research and development reached about 11 percent, higher than the national level of 6.91 percent.

This year's Shanghai Government Work Report proposed speeding up the construction of basic research pilot zones, strengthening organized scientific research, and continuing support for high-risk, high-value research.

Shanghai's adherence to large-scale, long-term investment to support scientists conducting high-risk, high-value, and long-cycle research is beginning to pay off, experts said.

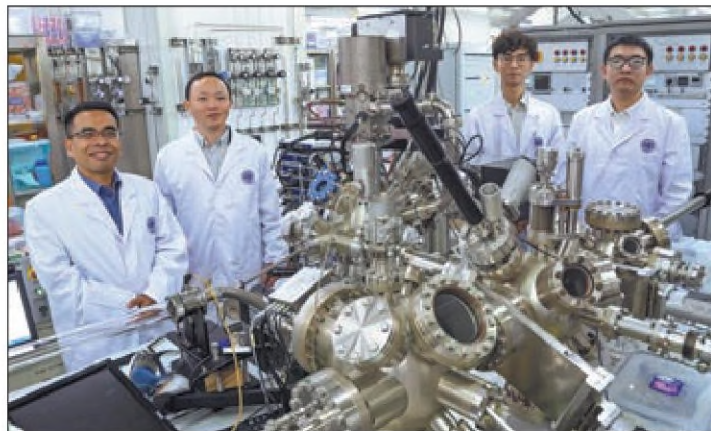
Outstanding young scientists in Shanghai are aiming to make breakthroughs and provide solutions to academic challenges and benefit the world.



Above: A paralyzed patient undergoes rehabilitation on Jan 20 under the guidance of Fudan University's research team that pioneered global brain-spine interface technology.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Left: Zhou Peng (first, left) and his fellow researchers with Fudan University's State Key Laboratory of Integrated Chips and Systems, published a paper on the world's fastest semiconductor charge storage device in *Nature* in April. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY



In-depth

Providing researchers with a good working environment and allowing them to explore freely are decisive factors in achieving real scientific breakthroughs, experts said.

Jin said Isaac Newton's discovery of the law of universal gravitation was not the result of a "boss" instructing the English physicist to discover the theory in three months.

The dean cited the difference between scientific research and engineering to further illustrate this point.

"When it comes to engineering, I can specify that the workers must build this building within three months. However, scientific research is spontaneous, with no one being able to dictate how it should be done," said Jin. "It's entirely up to the scientist to figure it out, without any set plan."

When recruiting a researcher, Jin said they look for individuals recognized by their international peers. Once recruited, they are not required to report frequently to their superiors and their work is not interfered with, Jin said.

Also, scientists at the institute are not restricted to publishing research papers only in their field. In March, a mathematics professor and a physics professor jointly published a paper in *Physical Review Letters*, a top physics journal. "We encourage interdisciplinary research. As long as they can do something truly impactful, we think it's fantastic," Jin said.

Problem solvers

Senior scientist Zhu Shujia, from the CAS's Center for Excellence in Molecular Plant Sciences, was involved in the research published in *Cell* in January. The study made a research breakthrough on the molecular structure of a particular receptor in mice brains.

"I've been on a quest to push boundaries in this field for 18 years. Unraveling the mysteries of the molecular mechanism of neuronal ion channels and brain diseases has always been a clear scientific goal," said Zhu.

"Rather than publishing papers, I'm more interested in solving scientific problems and leading the development of the discipline," she said.

Zhou Peng, a researcher with Fudan University's State Key Laboratory of Integrated Chips and Systems, said China's top universities, including Fudan, provide a highly supportive environment for scientists to immerse themselves in exploring their fields, and also delve into new areas.

He compared scientific quests to climbing Mount Qomolangma, which might be challenging, but has "many beautiful sights along the way".



Top: Zhao Weishu (right) from Shanghai Jiao Tong University and her teammates seen in a deep-sea exploration vessel. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Middle:** Members from the Synthetic Science Innovation Research Center at Shanghai Jiao Tong University return from their expedition in December 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Above:** Bao Wenzhong from Fudan University's State Key Laboratory of Integrated Chips and Systems explains the latest development in chip tech during a news conference in March. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

"A large number of outstanding talented people, especially the young and middle-aged who are at the peak of their creativity, have returned to China in the past decade," said Jin Shi, dean of the Institute of Natural Sciences at SJTU.

"Their return represents the future, and is an important sign of the vitality of Chinese science," he said.

The main factors behind the influx of talent include the government's unremitting support for scientific research, and the increasing internationalization of local universities, with a growing emphasis on scientific research.

FIRST PERSON

University's flexibility let me dive into my potential



Zhao Weishu installs a sampling basket. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Zhao Weishu, 37, an associate researcher with the School of Life Sciences and Biotechnology, Shanghai Jiao Tong University

My career path has been a testament to SJTU's unique approach to acquisition and development of talent, which stands out for its flexibility in recruiting individuals based on their potential rather than just past achievements.

I believe this is one of the reasons why scientific research results and young talent have come to the fore in recent years. The school's ethos allowed me to thrive in the realm of deep-sea life sciences, despite initial challenges.

Having completed my undergraduate and graduate studies at SJTU, I pursued a postdoctoral fellowship in the United States before returning to China in 2020.

At that time, the global research field of deep-sea life sciences faced significant challenges, and I doubted the possibility of returning to my alma mater due to the competitiveness in the academic landscape, and the perceived lack of influential research publications on my part.

However, the university's supportive network of mentors and professors, including my PhD adviser, advocated for my return. More importantly, the school's forward-thinking recruitment system took a chance on me, recognizing not just my existing accomplishments but also my potential for future growth and contributions to the field.

Another aspect of my experience here has been the opportunity to engage in both research and teaching, although I was recruited for the research side.

Upon starting working at SJTU, all of us received training on teaching skills, and were each requested to give a 10-minute mock lesson. After I finished the trial lesson, the teacher said that I had great potential in teaching.

I was recommended to teach lessons and provided with opportunities to participate in various activities, including the 2024 National University Young Teacher Teaching Competition. I won first place in the science group, and I now teach two courses on the school curriculum.

Through teaching, where I have to talk to the students about a variety of extreme environments, and what such environments have in common and what is special about each of them, I have learned to connect diverse concepts and think in a broader way, sparking new avenues of exploration in my research.

In early March, four papers about research I was involved in were published in the journal *Cell* as a cover feature. The papers were a result of a three-month expedition of the hadal zone, the deepest part of the ocean floor, that we took in 2021. Riding in China's self-developed deep-sea vessel, we systematically explored the 6,000 to 11,000-meter-deep regions of the Mariana Trench, Yap Trench, and the Philippine Basin.

We identified more than 7,500 species of hadal prokaryotic microorganisms, with nearly 90 percent being unreported species. Their diversity is comparable to the total number of all known marine microorganisms.

That expedition marked several firsts, including the first human descent to the deepest point of the Yap Trench, which is located in the western Pacific Ocean and is nearly 9,000 meters deep.

Looking ahead, I am preparing for our expedition to the hadal zone of the Southeast Indian Ocean beginning in late March.

I believe the upcoming adventure at a location where several ocean currents meet promises a wealth of biodiversity, and the potential discovery of whale falls — an intriguing phenomenon where a whale carcass creates a thriving ecosystem on the ocean floor.

Now we are capable of systematically unraveling the mysteries surrounding the impact of whale falls on marine life and the underwater environment. I am so much looking forward to it.

Zhao Weishu was talking with Zhou Wenting.

Contact the writers at zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

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

Singaporean student bridges gaps in Chinese orchestra

Muhammad Iman Mohamed Irfan understands only the most basic of Mandarin words — like *lian* (practice) and *zhun bei* (get ready) — but he has already performed solo parts on stage with a Chinese orchestra.

The 18-year-old is the only non-Chinese member of Temasek Polytechnic Chinese Orchestra in Singapore and the only bamboo flute, or *dizi*, player in the current cohort.

He is helped by his conductor, who is used to communicating in Mandarin but makes an effort to repeat his instructions in English for Iman.

When in doubt, Iman turns to his friends in the orchestra, who are “more than happy to help”, as well as the Chinese dictionary app Pleco. He picked up the language after joining the orchestra as a cocurricular activity, or CCA, in 2024, his first year at the polytechnic.

His passion for Chinese music began at the age of 12, when he stumbled upon a Chinese orchestra performance of Bai Niao Chao Feng (A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix) on YouTube.

“After I watched it, I really fell in love with the style, so I started listening to more and more (Chinese music),” he recalled.

By his upper secondary years, he had saved up enough money to buy his first *dizi* for \$70. Subsequently, he added a \$230 double-reeded horn, or *suona*, and a \$100 vertical flute, or *xiao*, to his collection of wind instruments.

By watching videos, Iman taught himself the three instruments.

“I’m one of the few people I know who really enjoys traditional Chinese music. (My friends and family) knew about my passion for music and supported me all the way, even though it was something different for them.”



“My dream is to join a professional Chinese orchestra in future, but even if that doesn't work out, Chinese music will still be my passion.”

Muhammad Iman Mohamed Irfan, member of Temasek Polytechnic Chinese Orchestra

His family always cheers him on by attending his performances, said Iman, who is starting the second year of his chemical engineering course in April.

When he entered Temasek Polytechnic, Iman auditioned for a spot in the Chinese orchestra. After playing the three wind instruments, along with other orchestra instruments, he was assigned to the woodwind section.

Second-year student Walter Yeo Boon Kai, 19, who is also in the woodwind section, was impressed by Iman when they first met. “I asked him what he knew about Chinese culture and how much he had learned, and I was very surprised,” Yeo said.

Despite Iman's background in music, he admitted the transition from playing in a concert band to a Chinese orchestra was challenging.

In addition to the language barrier, he said that “everything is different — the instruments, the (music) genres, and my conductors' personal ways of teaching”.

To catch up, Iman often sought help from them and practiced difficult sections of the music repeatedly to improve his technique.

The efforts have paid off — he played multiple solo parts during the orchestra's performances, one of which was the Chinese orchestra's annual concert in February.

His passion for traditional Chinese music has led him to explore Chinese opera and Chinese tea, in what was a “natural segue” for him.

“My dream is to join a professional Chinese orchestra in future, but even if that doesn't work out, Chinese music will still be my passion.”

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE



Mountaineers climb during their ascent to the summit of Qomolangma in 2021. PEMBA DORJE SHERPA / AFP

The number of climbing permits for Qomolangma, or Mount Everest in the West, have already surpassed 120 in the first week of April — twice as fast as last year — indicating the potential for another record-breaking season on the world's tallest peak.

This will be the last spring climbing season under the existing regulations.

Leeladhar Awasthi, director at Nepal's Department of Tourism, the government body responsible for issuing climbing permits, confirmed that 120 individuals have been granted Everest climbing permits as of April 8, generating 180 million Nepalese rupees (\$1.3 million) in revenue.

Of these climbers, 95 are men and 25 women.

“It's a good start,” said Awasthi. In 2024, the department issued 421 climbing permits, a decline from 479 the previous year.

Around 200 climbers reached the summit last year, supported by more than 600 climbing guides.

This spring, operators anticipate an even busier season on the 8,848.86-meter peak.

Mingma Sherpa, managing director of Seven Summit Treks, the largest expedition agency in Nepal, said they have already confirmed bookings from 100 climbers. However, Seven Summit Treks has yet to apply for permit applications on behalf of the climbers.

“Based on bookings from other major operators and our own company, we are expecting more than 500 Everest aspirants this season.”

Operators say upcoming changes in mountaineering regulations, set to take effect on September 1, have contributed to the surge in interest.

One of the most significant changes is the increase in the Everest climbing fee, which will rise by \$4,000 to \$15,000 per person starting in September.

The government has also raised the daily allowances for liaison officers, wages for high-altitude guides, and salaries for base camp workers, all of which must be borne by climbers.

Daily wages for liaison officers will more than triple, increasing from 500 Nepalese rupees to 1,600 Nepalese rupees. Sirdars, or lead Sherpas, will now earn 1,500 Nepalese rupees per day, up from 500 Nepalese rupees. Similarly, the high-altitude guides have will now make 1,200 Nepalese rupees a day, up from 350 Nepalese rupees, and base camp workers' wages have been increased from 300 Nepalese rupees to 1,000 Nepalese rupees.

Insurance coverage for high-al-



From top: Tents at a base camp of Qomolangma in Solukhumbu district, some 140 kilometers northeast of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, on April 18, 2024. PURNIMA SHRESTHA / AFP Mountaineers trek along the Khumbu glacier near the base camp in Solukhumbu district in 2021. PRAKASH MATHEMA / AFP

\$15,000 climbing fee

per person will be charged in September, up from \$4,000, according to Nepal's Department of Tourism.



“A climber who has been preparing for a year might delay the climb by a year or two, but Everest's allure is timeless, regardless of expense.”

Dambar Parajuli, president of the Expedition Operator's Association of Nepal

titude guides has been raised to 2 million Nepalese rupees from 1.5 million Nepalese rupees, and for base camp workers to 1.5 million Nepalese rupees from 800,000 Nepalese rupees.

Under the revised rules, solo expeditions will no longer be allowed, and each pair of climbers ascending peaks above 8,000 meters — including Everest — must be accompanied by at least one guide. For other mountains, at least one guide per group will be mandatory.

Mingma Gyalje Sherpa, also known as Mingma G, the managing director of Imagine Nepal Trek and Expeditions, said the new charges may increase the total cost of an Everest expedition package in the range of \$7,000 to \$10,000.

The average package, currently around \$40,000, could rise to \$50,000, while elite climbers may end up paying close to \$100,000. Preparations for the season are

already underway. Icefall doctors — specialist high-altitude guides responsible for fixing ropes and ladders along the climbing route up to Camp II — have been mobilized. Climbing is expected to begin early next month.

Dambar Parajuli, president of the Expedition Operator's Association of Nepal, is optimistic about the season.

“Given the ongoing issuance of climbing permits, we expect a better-than-expected season,” he said. However, he noted that high airfare remains a limiting factor.

But he believes the rising costs will not discourage serious climbers. “A climber who has been preparing for a year might delay the climb by a year or two, but Everest's allure is timeless, regardless of expense,” said Parajuli.

Beyond government regulations, the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee, or SPCC, which oversees waste management in the Khumbu region, has implemented additional measures starting from the spring climbing season.

Each climber is now required to pay a \$600 deposit for the Khumbu Icefall Route fee.

Waste segregation is mandatory at the base camp and higher-altitude camps, with waste sorted into different categories: plastics, paper and cardboard, tin and cans, glass bottles, kitchen waste, batteries and medical waste, and human waste.

Toilet tents are no longer allowed over crevasses at Camp II, and expedition operators must remove all their equipment after the climb.

In spring 2024, the SPCC collected 77 metric tons of waste from Everest Base Camp, with another 9 tons brought down from higher camps by expedition teams, bringing the total to 88 tons.

Of this, 27.99 tons were burnable garbage, 7.51 tons recyclable, 27.53 tons human waste, and 14.15 tons kitchen waste. The Nepal Army assisted by hauling down 11 tons.

This year, Nepal will deploy heavy-lift drones to airlift garbage from Everest, marking the first commercial use of unmanned aerial vehicles in the country's high-altitude regions.

In addition, the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality has introduced a rule requiring climbers to carry personal “poop bags” during their ascent.

Since 1953, nearly 8,900 people have summited the world's highest peak from the Nepal side.

THE KATHMANDU POST, NEPAL

Indonesia's textile makers struggle amid US tariffs

The textile industry is set to be among the hardest hit by the recent United States tariff hikes, with 40 percent of Indonesian textiles and apparel exports bound for the US market.

Industry players warn that the 32 percent so-called “reciprocal” tariff to be imposed on Indonesian goods once the 90-day suspension granted for bilateral negotiations ends could “accelerate layoffs” in a sector already struggling before the policy surfaced.

Efforts to diversify Indonesian exports beyond the US are deemed infeasible in the short term because of either limited market demand or intense competition from local players in target countries.

Indonesia, which recorded a \$16.8 billion trade surplus with the US last year, has landed on a long list of countries facing steep tariff hikes. On April 2, US President Donald Trump announced a 32 percent tariff on Indonesian goods.

However, Trump reversed course temporarily lowering duties for all affected countries to a “baseline” rate of 10 percent for 90 days.

Redma Gita Wirawasta, chairman of the Indonesian Fiber and Filament Yarn Producers Association, or APSyFI, said around 40 percent of the wider industry's exports went to the US, mostly in the form of finished goods. Indonesia is currently the fifth-largest textile and apparel exporter to the US behind China, India, Vietnam and Bangladesh.

He warned that the new US tariffs could erode Indonesia's price competitiveness in the US market. At the same time, other countries might also start redirecting their supply to Indonesia.

“That would disrupt the domestic industry and accelerate layoffs across the board,” Redma said during a news conference on April 4.

Even before Trump's tariff announcement, Indonesia's textile, apparel and footwear sectors were under pressure.

One of the most striking cases is textile giant PT Sri Rejeki Isman, which declared bankruptcy in October last year and officially ceased operations on March 1, leaving more than 10,000 workers unemployed.

On March 5, the Banten Manpower and Transmigration Agency reported that two major footwear manufacturers, PT Adis Dimension Footwear and PT Victory Chingluh Indonesia, which produce for global brands like Nike, Adidas, Reebok and Mizuno, had either laid off or were in the process of laying off thousands of workers.

Some other exporters, including the Indonesian Association of Metal Work and Machiner said the 90-day delay in enforcing the reciprocal tariffs could trigger a surge in demand from US importers eager to capitalize on the temporary reprieve.

However, APSyFI's Redma cautioned against ramping up exports during this window, as a sudden spike could further widen the US trade deficit with Indonesia, the excuse US has given for tariff policy.

The Indonesian government has pledged to negotiate with the US. Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati also emphasized the importance of diversifying export destinations to reduce Indonesia's heavy reliance on the US market.

Jenny Kartiwa Sastraatmaja, chairman of Indonesian Textile Association, said: “What we need to do now is negotiate smartly with the US, while also smartly protecting our domestic market.”

THE JAKARTA POST, INDONESIA



A woman shops for clothes at the Tanah Abang textile market in Jakarta, Indonesia, on April 10. TATAN SYUFLANA / AP

WORLD

Lawsuits filed against cancellation of visas

Over a thousand international students in the US see records getting terminated

By MAY ZHOU in Houston, Texas
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

Zhuo'er Chen is a student pursuing a master's degree in architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. She is set to graduate next month. However, her student visa was suddenly terminated by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, on April 8.

It seems that thousands of students have had a similar experience.

According to a report by the Association of International Educators, as of Monday, there have been almost 1,300 reports of international students and scholars either having their visas revoked or their records in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, or SEVIS, terminated. The affected include undergraduate, graduate and Optional Practical Training students.

Chen, joined by another three Chinese students whose visas were terminated, filed a federal lawsuit in the US District Court in the Northern District of California last week.

The suit alleges that "without notice, explanation, or any form of due process, ICE terminated the student status of individuals who have done nothing more than maintaining academic standing and complying with their visa requirements".

Plaintiff Mengcheng Yu, who has lived in the United States since age 16, is also close to completing her master's degree at Carnegie Mellon University. She is set to graduate in August this year.

Plaintiff Jiarong Ouyang is from University of Cincinnati, and Plaintiff Gexi Guo is a graduate of Colum-

bia University currently residing in New York.

"This lawsuit seeks declaratory and injunctive relief to halt this unlawful pattern of SEVIS record terminations, restore plaintiffs' legal status, and prevent further irreparable harm to their educational trajectories, professional futures and immigration standing," the lawsuit document stated.

The lawsuit named Kristi Noem, secretary of the US Department of Homeland Security, or DHS, and Todd Lyons, acting director of ICE, as the defendants. The plaintiffs are represented by DeHeng Law Offices.

The plaintiffs challenge ICE's actions "for being arbitrary, capricious and contrary to law, and assert that the lack of due process also violates their constitutional rights under the Fifth Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause".

The lawsuit argues that DHS and ICE may unilaterally strip students of lawful status through SEVIS without legal authority, in defiance of regulatory limits, and without affording any procedural safeguards.

'Abrupt and sudden'

Clay Zhu, one of the lawyers representing the students, said in a virtual meeting on Monday that they have received a lot of information from students "telling us about an abrupt and sudden cancellation of their F-1 visa and service records".

He said a team of five lawyers worked overtime in the last five days to investigate the situation.

"There is no pattern based on the information I have right now. Some of the students have arrest records but have never been convicted.

Some of them have minor traffic violations, and some of them have a very clean record. So, it is random to me, and there's no explanation being provided by the agency as to why this is happening on a blanket scale. This is unprecedented," Zhu said.

He said the termination of student status has been done in the past on a very individualized basis for failing to maintain full-time student status or being convicted of committing some kind of serious crime.

"Those basically are forcing the students to self-deport," Zhu said. "They have to leave the country right away. Otherwise, they would incur the so-called unlawful presence under immigration law."

"Our goal is, of course, not to just represent those four students. Our goal is to seek a nationwide temporary restraining order and also an injunction against this kind of practice. We're trying to restore service records for all the affected students," Zhu said.

Lawsuits have also been filed on behalf of the students whose visas were terminated without notice. Atlanta law firm Kuck Baxter filed a lawsuit representing 17 international students from several states.

Nineteen state attorneys general from Arizona, California, Michigan, New York and others have asked a federal judge to stop the Trump administration from canceling international student visas.

It appears that visa cancellation is not limited to international students. The Cougar, a news outlet at the University of Houston, reported on Sunday that a professor's visa was terminated unexpectedly.

Without disclosing the identity of the professor, The Cougar reported that another professor had to step in for the rest of the semester while the issue was being resolved.

'Tax the rich'



People protest on Tax Day calling for billionaires to pay more tax, in New York City on Tuesday. Activists suggested a 90 percent wealth tax to guarantee universal healthcare, free college education and the elimination of hunger and homelessness. ADAM GRAY / GETTY IMAGES

Briefly

FRANCE 12 Algerian officials expelled amid tensions

France on Tuesday ordered the expulsion of 12 Algerian diplomats and consular officials and recalled its ambassador in the latest escalation between the two countries.

The measure, announced by President Emmanuel Macron's office, came after Algeria on Sunday ordered 12 French officials to leave within 48 hours in response to the arrest of an Algerian functionary in France. The Algerian officials in France have also been given 48 hours to leave. Macron's office called Algeria's actions "incomprehensible and unjustified" and said Algiers should "resume dialogue" and "take responsibility for the degradation in bilateral relations".

SWITZERLAND WHO states reach deal on future pandemics

Members of the World Health Organization reached a landmark agreement on Wednesday on how to draw lessons from COVID-19 and prepare the world for future pandemics. Sticking points on the road to the deal included how to share drugs and vaccines fairly between wealthy countries and poorer ones. The legally binding pact is widely seen as a victory for the global health agency at a time when multilateral organizations like the WHO have been battered by sharp cuts in US foreign funding. US negotiators left the discussions after President Donald Trump began the 12-month process of withdrawing the US from the agency in January.

SOUTH KOREA Police raid Yoon's office and security compound

South Korean police on Wednesday raided the office of former president Yoon Suk-yeol and his security detail, as part of a spiraling criminal probe into the impeached leader. Police said they had "initiated the execution of a search and seizure warrant at the presidential office and the presidential residence complex". They seized encrypted phone servers and raided the office of Yoon's presidential security detail, and also his chief of security's house - in what they said was part of a probe into "alleged obstruction of an arrest warrant execution".

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

与自然共生
#CONNECT2EARTH

多彩的世界
源自多样的自然

A vibrant world
stems from diverse nature

WORLD

Manufacturers in US brace for a supply shock

Firms face limited alternatives as tariffs increased on capital goods from China

By **BELINDA ROBINSON**
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Manufacturers and companies across the United States — who collectively spend billions of dollars every year importing durable, production-critical machinery from China — could soon face higher prices that would affect their operating margins and stifle future investments, experts warn.

“Given the trade and supply chain structure of the US economy, the tariffs will largely be imposed on equipment and inputs,” said Tom Fullerton, an economist and professor at The University of Texas at El Paso.

“Unfortunately, that will damage operating margins for many businesses, increase the risk of a business cycle downturn and raise inflation.”

Last year, the US imported about \$1.1 trillion worth of capital goods — roughly three times the value of domestic orders for similar equipment, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Capital goods refer to essential machinery or assets valued at more than \$5,000, used across industries including manufacturing and construction to generate income. These goods typically last more than a year, and the bulk are sourced from China.

However, as the tit-for-tat trade war revs up, US tariffs on Chinese imports now range from a minimum of 145 percent to as high as 245 percent on certain goods. In response, China has raised its additional tariffs on US products to 125 percent.

The situation is of particular concern to US manufacturers — a vital sector that contributes \$2.65 trillion to the economy, accounts for 10.3 percent of the GDP and employs nearly 13 million people, according to US Commerce Department data.

Over the past 20 years, China has become a major player in exporting and importing capital goods. Its top exports in this category include large gas turbines, electronic components, machinery and transport equipment, while its major imports consist of petroleum oil, iron ore and integrated circuits.

Stifling growth

Kyle Pomerleau, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, warned that US tariffs could stifle growth and investment in US businesses that are heavily reliant on capital goods.

Tariffs on capital goods not only “raise the overall cost of investment, but they also distort the relative price of different types of investment made by businesses,” he said.

Neel Kashkari, president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, wrote in an essay that in the short run, tariffs, which he says act like a consumption tax on US consumers and firms, could result in investments being lower,

because the prices paid for imported capital goods will be higher.

“The large increase in tariffs raises the prices firms will pay for capital goods sourced from abroad, and the significant increase in economic uncertainty will likely reduce firms’ desire to invest.”

US orders rose in February, according to Commerce Department figures, likely boosting capital expenditure in the first quarter, Reuters reported. Orders for machinery climbed 0.2 percent in February, and those for transportation equipment increased 1.5 percent.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said one of his key goals with tariffs is to bring back manufacturing to the US, but economists say this could take some time, while noting the growing use of automation.

Sourcing problems

Carmakers have already spoken out about the difficulty of sourcing highly specialized things domestically, and not from Asia or elsewhere.

Last month, Ford applied for a tariff exemption over a specific tool used in making electric vehicle battery cells.

“We cannot obtain comparable equipment from sources in the US,” Ford said.

Tesla, whose CEO Elon Musk is a Trump adviser, also filed for a similar exemption.

Trump said on Monday that he was considering an exemption for automakers as car companies may need “a little bit of time” to transition to US-made parts.

The US imported \$438.9 billion worth of goods from China last year, a 2.8 percent increase from the previous year, the Office of the United States Trade Representative said.

Of that total, at least \$127 billion consisted of electrical and electronic equipment, while \$85 billion covered boilers, machinery and nuclear reactors.

Notably, a Goldman Sachs report seen by CNBC found that for 36 percent of US imports from China, more than 70 percent can only be sourced from a specific Chinese supplier — making them a specialist in that trade.

In contrast, just 10 percent of Chinese imports from the US are completely reliant on a US supplier, the report said.

In most sectors, US companies would need years before they could match Asian expertise.

Over the weekend, Trump created a carve-out from the tariffs on smartphones, computers and some other electronics imported largely from China. The exclusion applies only to “reciprocal tariffs.”

China’s Commerce Ministry said on Sunday that it was a “small step by the US to correct its wrong practice of unilateral ‘reciprocal tariffs.’”

The ministry said earlier that if the US continues to play its tariff numbers game, then China will not respond.

Flames of faith



Members of the Yazidi community celebrate Red Wednesday, their New Year festival, at the sacred Lalish Temple in northern Iraq on Tuesday. The annual celebration marks the holiest day in the Yazidi calendar and begins on the eve of the third Wednesday in April. GAILAN HAJI / EPA-EFE

Seoul plans levy talks with Washington

By **YANG HAN** in Hong Kong
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South Korea’s finance minister will visit the United States next week in a bid to minimize the impact of Washington’s tariffs on Asia’s fourth-largest economy, though uncertainty remains.

Choi Sang-mok, also deputy prime minister, is scheduled to meet US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent in Washington during next week’s G20 finance ministers’ meeting and the annual International Monetary Fund gathering, Yonhap News Agency reported.

The meeting was initiated at Bessent’s suggestion, South Korea’s finance ministry said.

Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun is also expected to travel to the US as early as next week for tariff negotiations, Yonhap said.

The scheduled talks come in the wake of a Wall Street Journal report that the administration of US President Donald Trump is planning to use tariff negotiations with some 70 countries to restrict their interactions with China, including curbs on goods transit and business operations.

South Korea’s economy is under increasing pressure as Washington’s tariff war escalates. On Wednesday, Morgan Stanley projected the country’s growth rate to

slow down to 1 percent this year, citing tariff uncertainty.

Although South Korea maintains near-zero tariffs on US goods under a bilateral free trade agreement, Washington has imposed an additional 25 percent “reciprocal tariff” on South Korean imports based on trade deficit.

A 90-day suspension of the proposed tariff hikes on countries other than China has since been announced to allow time for negotiations.

South Korea is the sixth-largest trading partner of the US. The bilateral trade reached \$197.1 billion last year, with the US recording a \$66 billion trade deficit — a 29.2 percent increase from 2023, according to the Office of the US Trade Representative.

Rise in investment

However, a report published on Sunday by the Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade said South Korea’s expanded exports to the US in recent years were driven by a rapid rise in South Korean corporate investment in the US, which led to increased exports of intermediate and capital goods.

South Korea also faces challenges in industry-specific tariffs, such as a 25 percent duty on vehicles and levies targeting semiconductors and biopharmaceuticals.

In response, the government has proposed an extra budget of 12 trillion won (\$8.46 billion) to support key sectors.

During a meeting with Maryland Governor Wes Moore on Wednesday, South Korean Acting President Han Duck-soo said Seoul is seeking a “win-win solution” with the US, according to his office.

Han also spoke by phone with Trump last week, discussing South Korea’s trade surplus, tariffs, shipbuilding, among other issues.

The call drew criticism from the opposition Democratic Party. Former lawmaker Hong Sung-kook said on Wednesday that Han should respond to the tariff issue carefully and leave the decision to the next administration.

“Following soaring interest rates and a plummet in the stock market, an economic recession of the US has become a reality ... there is no need to rush (for negotiations) at the moment,” Hong said.

In a Tuesday editorial, South Korea’s Hankyoreh newspaper said Trump’s “temperamental tariffs” are eroding trust in the US, given the lack of a rational basis for treating trade deficits as evidence of foreign “trade barriers.”

“The South Korean government should not attempt to pursue any reckless negotiations under the current irrational conditions,” it said.

Despite trade tensions, China holds lead in clean energy manufacturing

By **ZHAO HUANXIN**
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China’s role as the world’s leading clean energy manufacturer remains intact despite rising trade tensions and shifting climate policies, thanks to its broad export base, cost competitiveness and technological edge, according to the latest analysis from Moody’s Ratings.

While new US tariffs could push companies to diversify their supply chains, China’s entrenched position in the market “limits the pace at which companies can shift away,” Moody’s Ratings said in an infographic released on Tuesday.

Moody’s highlighted China’s ability to serve more than 200 countries and regions as a critical advantage in navigating trade barriers.

Its export destinations are geographically diverse, spanning across continents, including key partners such as Germany, Brazil, Australia and Saudi Arabia, minimizing exposure to any single market’s restrictions.

The country holds substantial shares across several key clean energy sectors: 91 percent of global solar panels and cells, 82 percent of lithium-ion batteries, 59 percent of wind turbines, and 58 percent of new energy vehicles, which include battery-electric, plug-in hybrid, and fuel-cell models.

While China’s clean energy reach spans multiple sectors, lithium-ion batteries seem to have emerged as the most strategically sensitive link in US-China trade.

About a quarter of all Chinese lithium-ion battery exports are to the United States, according to the Moody’s analysis.

Iaria Mazzocco, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, cautioned that while the US is building its own battery value chain under the Inflation Reduction Act, capacity lags demand — especially for stationary energy storage, where most Chinese battery imports are used.

“A lot of the production is not online yet ... not enough to actually supply all the demand in the United States, especially for storage,” Mazzocco said at a briefing on Tuesday.

The Moody’s report also noted that Chinese authorities are taking steps to prevent excessive price competition among domestic firms, a move Moody’s said will support more stable sector margins going forward.

Over the past decade, Chinese manufacturers have not only expanded their global reach in clean energy exports but also have significantly improved the performance and affordability of their products, according to Moody’s Ratings.

It cited solar panels, whose efficiency has improved from around 15 percent in 2014 to 23 percent in 2024. That allows panels to generate more electricity from the same amount of sunlight.

Meanwhile, the average price of solar cells has dropped sharply, from \$0.40 to about \$0.10 per watt over the same period, a three-quarters decline that has made solar power far more affordable worldwide.

Those improvements are driven by

China’s industrial advantages, including economies of scale, vertical integration and sustained investment in clean tech innovation.

China’s investment in clean energy reached an estimated \$940 billion in 2024, up 7 percent year-on-year, according to an analysis by experts at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, published on Carbon Brief, a United Kingdom-based climate website, in February.

That outlay was close to the global total put into fossil fuels in 2024 and was of a similar scale to the overall size of Saudi Arabia’s economy, they said.

The official data released on Wednesday by China’s National Bureau of Statistics further reinforces the clean energy sector’s momentum.

The bureau reported that clean energy industries — represented by new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaics — continued to grow at a high rate in the first quarter, when the country posted 5.4 percent growth year-on-year.

Meanwhile, the share of non-fossil energy in total energy consumption rose by 1.5 percentage points compared with the same period last year, underscoring China’s internal shift toward greener development alongside its export strength, according to a release from the bureau.

Looking ahead, China’s position could strengthen further as global demand rises.

According to Moody’s, the world will need to invest up to \$3.9 trillion annually in clean energy technologies by 2035, based on current climate pledges.

Living cost key issue in Singapore elections

By **PRIME SARMIENTO**
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Singapore’s national election on May 3 will serve as the first electoral test for Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and the fourth-generation leadership of the ruling People’s Action Party.

Voters head to the polls as the city-state grapples with domestic and external challenges — from rising cost of living in one of the world’s most expensive cities to geopolitical uncertainties that threaten its open economy.

Analysts said the PAP, in power since Singapore’s independence in 1965, could be “under pressure” to win the popular vote, despite the country’s “first-past-the-post” system to elect its parliament.

The election date was announced after President Tharman Shanmugaratnam dissolved parliament on Tuesday.

Candidates will compete for 97 seats across 33 constituencies — with 11 parties, including two opposition alliances, expected to participate.

Nomination Day is set for April 23, kicking off a nine-day campaigning period.

In a statement on X, Wong said the global conditions that enabled Singapore’s success in the past few decades “may no longer hold.”

“That is why I have called this general election. At this critical juncture, Singaporeans should decide on the team to lead our nation, and to chart our way forward together.”

This will be the first election under Wong’s leadership since he was sworn in as Singapore’s fourth prime minister in May last year.

Bilveer Singh, an associate professor in the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore, said Wong is “under pressure to get the popular vote” for the PAP.

The rising cost of living is “the mother of all issues” in the elections, Singh said, citing widespread concerns over property prices, electricity bills, and the goods and services tax.

While higher tariffs imposed by the United States are a major concern for Singapore as a key trading center in Asia, he said rising consumer prices remain top of the mind for most voters.

However, he added, younger voters have other priorities beyond bread-and-butter issues. “They are more focused on hope, equality and fairness.”

Rohan Gunaratna, a professor in the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, said an aging population, rising cost of living, housing needs, jobs, and a growing demand for healthcare are the key election issues.

Mitigating challenges

However, he believes that the PAP-led government has mitigated these challenges and may again win this year’s elections.

For James Chin, a professor of Asian studies at the University of Tasmania in Australia, the uncertainties caused by higher US tariffs may bolster the PAP’s chances in the polls.

“Because we know from past elections, when there’s a lot of uncertainty, people always vote for the incumbent government because they are worried that if they let somebody else win, you create even more uncertainty,” he said.

He described PAP as “the most successful political party” in Southeast Asia.

While he expects the PAP to remain the dominant party in Singapore, Wong’s big challenge is whether his party can secure at least 60 percent of the popular vote.

The percentage of the popular vote “is the most important thing to watch out for” in the Singaporean elections, he said.

Mustafa Izzuddin, a senior international affairs analyst with policy and business consultancy Solaris Strategies Singapore, forecasts that PAP will retain its dominance.

However, he said there is a chance that dominance could get chipped away, depending on how many electoral seats the opposition, in particular the Workers’ Party, wins.

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BUSINESS

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E-commerce helps take bite out of duties

JD, Taobao, Tmall, Freshippo among portals soaking up would-be exports

By FAN FEIFEI
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Chinese e-commerce platforms have taken steps to help the country's exporters sell their products at home, expand sales channels and alleviate inventory pressures, as part of a broader push to hedge against the impact of United States' tariff hikes and expand domestic demand.

They said that these supportive measures will help export-oriented companies open up the domestic market, strengthen domestic circulation and boost consumption, while further unleashing the vitality and potential of China's ultra-large market to address challenges posed by external shocks.

JD has announced it will purchase 200 billion yuan (\$27.3 billion) worth of goods from exporters over the next year to help them sell products domestically. It will send professional procurement teams to foreign trade companies and directly purchase their high-quality products.

The Beijing-based company said it will establish a special area on its online marketplaces to sell selected goods and provide data traffic and omni-channel marketing support for them. It will also provide training, step up subsidies and offer other resources and support for exporters to quickly boost domestic sales.

Alibaba Group's online marketplaces Taobao and Tmall said on Tuesday that it will provide assistance to at least 10,000 Chinese companies involved in foreign trade and promote domestic sales of 100,000 foreign trade goods, helping exporters shift their focus to the domestic market. Detailed measures include simplified registration, commission incentives, localized sales guidance and direct procurement services.

Chinese online discounter PDD Holdings has rolled out plans to invest 100 billion yuan over the next three years, including stepping up subsidy support for small and medium-sized enterprises engaged in cross-border e-commerce to stabilize their production and help them cope with external challenges in overseas expansion.

Zhuang Shuai, founder of Bailian Consulting and an expert in e-commerce and retail, said, "The increased US tariffs have raised export costs for Chinese enterprises and forced them to seek out new channels to expand sales."

These relief measures will help foreign trade companies tide over difficulties in the short term, while in the long run, they will be conducive to cultivate a new consumption ecosystem as the deep integration of foreign trade enterprises with the domestic consumption market may nurture more homegrown brands with international competitiveness, he added.

Freshippo, Alibaba Group's grocery and fresh goods retail chain, announced similar supportive measures for Chinese exporters. The platform said it has opened a fast-track path for exporters to explore the domestic market, and set up a special zone on its platform where products from these companies will be sold.

Liu Junbin, a special researcher at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy, said such efforts to support foreign trade enterprises will provide a boost to domestic consumption and provide shoppers with a more diverse range of high-quality products to meet their expanding needs in pursuit of a better life.

Moreover, against the backdrop new US tariffs from the Trump administration, Chinese cross-border e-commerce app DHgate is gaining increasing traction among US consumers, and has secured the second spot on the free app download charts in the US Apple App Store, just behind OpenAI's ChatGPT.

Industry insiders attribute DHgate's sudden popularity in the US to Chinese suppliers and manufacturers using short-video platform TikTok to educate US consumers on the global luxury goods market. Many products, such as clothing, handbags, and accessories that are assumed to be European-made, originate from factories in China. Shoppers can now buy these products directly from Chinese suppliers via cross-border e-commerce platforms like DHgate, they added.

Electric warmth



Staff members from State Grid Suqian Power Supply Co's "Electric Warmth" convenience services station visit Guanmiao comprehensive agricultural services center in Jiangsu province, offering door-to-door services on power usage of seedling cultivation facilities. WU DI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Gold prices hit new highs in China

As international gold prices continue to climb, gold prices in China have reached record highs. On Wednesday, several major gold brands reported prices for pure gold jewelry exceeding 1,000 yuan (\$138.63) per gram, marking an all-time high. Driven by the surge in global markets, the spot gold price on the Shanghai Gold Exchange rose to above 775 yuan per gram, while the main gold futures contract on the Shanghai Futures Exchange climbed to 777.36 yuan per gram.

More cities report rising home prices

Commercial home prices in March rose in more Chinese cities from a month ago as transactions became more vibrant in the real estate market, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Wednesday. An NBS survey covering 70 major cities said the prices of new houses were higher in 24 cities last month, up from 18 in February, while resold homes in 10 cities logged price increases, up by 7.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

New Model Y cars



The first batch of export-bound updated Tesla Model Y vehicles await shipment in Shanghai on Tuesday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Firms bullish on beating global woes

By WANG XIN in Shanghai
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Chinese companies are positive about seizing opportunities and navigating through uncertainties amid the ongoing tariff and trade tensions, driven by a diversified global business footprint and efficiencies brought on by the application of advanced technologies, experts and industry leaders said.

They made the remarks at a forum held by the Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business (CKGSB) in Shanghai on Monday.

Teng Bingsheng, a professor of strategic management and associate dean for strategic research at CKGSB, pointed out that the tariff and trade tensions may be the catalyst for restructuring global supply chains and reshaping the world trade landscape, already evolving over the past few years.

Free trade, globalization and multilateralism under the rules-based WTO system are facing challenges and undergoing big changes, with regional economic and trade cooperation expected to grow.

"The changing global trade landscape is likely to help bring some regional partners closer in cooperation, such as China and the European Union as well as China, Japan and South Korea. We have seen a remarkable increase in regional economic and trade agreements, and we expect such cooperation to further expand and get strengthened," said Teng.

He also pointed out that the ongoing trade tensions have not come about suddenly.



The changing global trade landscape is likely to help bring some regional partners closer in cooperation ..."

Teng Bingsheng, professor at CKGSB

Compared with the tariff increases that took place during the first term of US President Donald Trump, Chinese companies are better prepared this time.

"Although the tariff and trade tensions will bring challenges to Chinese companies in the short term, especially in export sectors including traditional clothing, furniture and applications as well as emerging new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaics, Chinese companies hold irreplaceable positions and are becoming rather 'immune' to the tensions this time," said Teng.

He further explained that Chinese companies have been committed to improving their overall competitiveness and optimizing their global business layout in the past few years, which have emboldened them to face the current challenges. Particularly, in fields like advanced technology and AI, Chinese companies are doing even better than their US counterparts, and thus have more confidence.

Despite the increasing challenges

and global uncertainties, industry experts and business leaders agree that the globalization of Chinese companies will not reverse, and they still see tremendous business opportunities in overseas markets.

Zhuo Fumin, chairman of V Star Capital and rotating president of the Shanghai Entrepreneur Association, noted that against the backdrop of global industrial restructuring, an international presence has become a "sure" strategy for Chinese companies to expand.

Emerging markets have an urgent demand for advanced technology, management experience and professional talent, which are the core competitive advantages of Chinese companies.

"For companies, uncertainty means new opportunities. It is part of business and a source of motivation. In such an uncertain era, the one certain thing for entrepreneurs to do for survival is to strengthen themselves and improve competitiveness. Also, in the age of AI, (operation) efficiency and digitalization have become increasingly critical for traditional industries to reduce cost and improve efficiency," said Zhang Qingyuan, chief executive officer of Kingsoft Office Software Inc, which has developed the WPS Office suite.

Looking to future overseas expansion amid uncertainties, Teng advised Chinese firms to highlight "diversity" in both business portfolio and global layout to better prevent risks — even within certain regions.

Britain sees expo as springboard to local mkt

By CHEN BOWEN
and CHEN CONGZHI

British businesses are seizing the spotlight as the United Kingdom takes center stage at the 5th China International Consumer Products Expo in Haikou, Hainan province, with exhibitors expressing optimism about the vast potential of the Chinese market.

The UK, this year's Guest Country of Honor, has brought 27 brands spanning foods and beverages, personal wellness, fashion and sporting goods to the ongoing expo, which runs from Sunday to Friday.

Claire Urry, chief commercial officer of the China-Britain Business Council, said the event underscores China's growing importance as a key market amid global economic challenges.

"Companies are developing their strategies for China, and we're already seeing results — one exhibitor or just signed a memorandum of understanding with a Chinese partner to localize packaging and production here, giving them a cost advantage," Urry said.

"Strengthening trade ties benefits both countries, and we're committed to supporting these partnerships."

Among the British participants is the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which is showcasing plant-based skincare products inspired by its botanical research.

"This expo is a unique platform to highlight our sustainability ethos," said Alex Chen, a business partner with Kew. The brand's hand creams, soaps and fragrances feature scents derived from its gardens and packaging modeled after historic plant atlases.

Tea specialist Whittard of Chelsea is using the expo to introduce its blends to South China consumers. "Hainan attracts tourists from across China, so it's perfect for expanding our reach," said Katherine Oon, Whittard's senior China manager. The company is conducting daily tea tastings in the morning and afternoon to engage international visitors.

Meanwhile, tableware brand Denby is capitalizing on China's demand for premium home goods. The company is launching bowls and plates tailored for Chinese cuisine, emphasizing durability and nontoxic materials.

With Hainan Free Trade Port's booming tourism and trade-friendly policies, British brands see a lucrative foothold in the Chinese market. "The enthusiasm here confirms our confidence in China's economic growth," Urry said.

Contact the writers at chenbowen@chinadaily.com.cn

Digital boom, AI growth bring Qingyang good fortune

LANZHOU — On a windswept plateau in northwestern China, 29-year-old Wang Ting sat in front of a computer, with her eyes darting across a cascade of images depicting bustling urban streets in the southern Chinese tech hub of Shenzhen in Guangdong province.

With meticulous precision, she marked vehicles, pedestrians and traffic signs on the screen. Outside her window, the landscape was a vast expanse of endless yellow hills, their raw beauty forming a striking contrast to the vibrant cityscapes that filled her digital world.

Once a migrant worker, Wang has now returned to her hometown. She is employed as an artificial intelligence trainer for autonomous driving projects, one of China's most cutting-edge emerging sectors. The data she annotated will become key "human knowledge" for training advanced self-driving systems.

This scene in Gansu province, in which Wang featured prominently, unfolded in the city of Qingyang. Notably, a quiet digital transformation here is reshaping the future of one of the country's previously economically less-robust regions.

Wang's story is an example of the transformative changes driven by

the "East Data, West Computing" initiative, a mega data project launched in 2022 to accelerate the development of an integrated national computing network.

This initiative is designed to see less-developed inland regions storing and processing data transmitted from the country's economically vibrant eastern areas — thereby creating a digital bridge across China's economic divide.

Once heavily reliant on oil and coal extraction, Qingyang had to confront a significant challenge to its fossil fuel-dependent growth model, as China advanced its ambitious carbon reduction goals.

In response to these targets, Qingyang and its neighboring regions have in recent years witnessed a surge in renewable energy infrastructure, with numerous wind and solar power installations now operational. These facilities are poised to supply abundant electricity to satisfy the huge energy appetite of the data centers.

Also, the city's natural advantages, such as its central location in China and cooler climate — have transformed geographical remoteness from a liability into an asset. Qingyang is now one of China's major computing hubs.

By the end of 2024, the Qingyang

Data Center Cluster had put into operation 31,000 standard racks, with a computing power capacity reaching 50,000 petaflops.

"At that scale, the servers can process 500 billion photos per second," explained Jing Lirong, a manager at China Mobile's computing center in Qingyang.

He pointed out that in the space of just one second, creative design teams in China's southern province of Guangdong can utilize Qingyang's computing power to render ultra-high-definition 3D models.

"With AI-driven computing needs rising in eastern cities, there is growing urgency for western data center clusters to speed up construction," Jing added.

"Determined to become a leading AI computing hub in China's western region, Qingyang's computing power relies on home-grown AI chips," said Mi Shitao, deputy director of Qingyang's data bureau.

Computing power facilities have spurred a cluster of midstream and downstream enterprises. The city has even introduced a graphene sodium-ion solid-state battery production line to support the growing data center ecosystem.

"When fully operational, this pro-

duction line will generate over 2 billion yuan (\$273 million) in annual output and create more than 1,000 jobs," said Gong Xiaozheng, a local commerce official.

The digital boom has also sparked an unexpected industry. Qingyang is leading the way in Gansu by building the province's first "low-altitude economy city", designing and producing drones for applications such as emergency communications and geographical mapping.

Last December, the city successfully tested its "No 001" drone. Equipped with cutting-edge technology, including electro-optical pods, satellite communications, oblique cameras and multispectral sensors, the drone is designed for a variety of applications — such as inspections, emergency communications and geographic mapping.

"Drone design and production demand significant computing power to minimize development costs," said Hou Yutong, general manager of Super Mach Aviation Technology in Qingyang. "The current scale of computing resources available here greatly enhances our overall R&D efficiency."

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Editorials

China-Malaysia cooperation can reinforce the storm resilience of Southeast Asia

The warm reception given to President Xi Jinping during his trip to Southeast Asia speaks volumes of the region's readiness to work with China to build a neighborhood community with a shared future.

Wrapping up his two-day state visit to Vietnam on Tuesday where the two sides pledged joint efforts to accelerate the building of a community with a shared future that carries strategic significance through deepening pragmatic cooperation and strengthening mutual trust, President Xi embarked on his state visit to Malaysia the same day.

Like the series of collaboration agreements, plans and initiatives signed during his visit to Vietnam, President Xi's visit to Malaysia, the current chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, has produced rich results paving the way for concrete cooperation projects in the digital economy, green development, the blue economy, industrial investment and transport infrastructure construction, and closer strategic coordination on regional and world affairs.

By injecting fresh energy into the traditional friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries, Xi's visit has helped elevate the building of a China-Malaysia community with a shared future to a comprehensive strategic partnership at a new height.

And reinforced by the two sides' deep mutual political trust their relations can withstand the test of Washington-fomented tempests.

Southeast Asia learned its lessons from the regional division and instability caused by the previous US administration's speculative "Indo-Pacific" strategy, and it is holding true to its desire to be a harmonious family even in the face of the incumbent US administration's coercion and extortion.

China became ASEAN's largest trading partner in 2009 and ASEAN became China's largest trading partner in 2020. That is not just because of economic reasons. It is also the result of the two sides' willingness to leverage their cultural proximity, geographical closeness, traditional friendship, economic complementarity and common Asian values to form a de facto community with a shared future.

Against this backdrop, as President Xi indicated in his signed articles published on Vietnamese and Malaysian media as well as his interactions with his hosts in Hanoi and Kuala Lumpur, China is calling for ASEAN bolstering its strategic communication and aligning their development strategies with it for the good of the region as a whole.

China is not demanding that its neighbors choose a side, instead it is urging them to remember the past, look to the future and to continue to stand on the right side of history.

That is why Xi is urging Vietnam and Malaysia to work with China to safeguard international fairness and justice and advance open and inclusive development. That message is also likely to be conveyed during his visit to Cambodia, which is the last stop of his trip.

Thanks to the generally healthy and stable development of relations between China and the ASEAN member states, the region has weathered the storms of the times through its unity, and it will weather the destructive typhoon the US administration has conjured up by staying true to that Asian family solidarity.

China and ASEAN pulled together in response to multiple challenges over the past decades, and they should do so again in the face of the fierce headwinds blowing from Washington. These adverse blasts seek to pull them apart and take the vigor out of the region's development, which is the product of their combined efforts and shared commitment.

As President Xi stressed, unity brings strength, and cooperation leads to mutual success. China will work with Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia and other ASEAN countries to combat the undercurrents of geopolitical and camp-based confrontation, as well as the countercurrents of unilateralism and protectionism, in keeping with the historical trend of peace and amity that have been the hallmarks of the region's dynamic development.

By jointly building a stronger China-ASEAN community with a shared future, the region can be a bright spot for other countries to steer to amid the gathering gloom emanating from Washington.

Appeasement will not relieve the EU of pressure

As a major economic powerhouse and trading entity, the European Union holds great responsibility for upholding an open global economy. It must therefore avoid sending the wrong signals to Washington, which has been engaging in unjustified global trade and tariff conflicts in pursuit of its geopolitical objectives.

Brussels has been working hard lately in the hope of persuading Washington to spare the bloc from its punitive tariffs, which include 25 percent on EU steel, aluminum and cars. On Tuesday, the EU officially paused for 90 days its retaliatory tariffs against the US' steel and aluminum tariffs despite the fact that the US having not suspended its metal tariffs.

Emphasizing the EU's readiness for a fair deal and reciprocity, notably through its proposed 0-for-0 tariff arrangement on industrial goods and addressing nontariff barriers, European Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic travelled to Washington early this week to explore a mutual solution within the 90-day window.

However, the zero-tariff offer, which was first proposed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen last week, has already been rejected by US President Donald Trump, who instead demands the EU buy \$350 billion of US energy each year. Such a move will keep the US energy giants, which were major donors to the US president's election campaign, happy. But it has drawn sharp criticism from experts and environmental groups for creating new EU dependence on US fossil fuels, not to mention that liquefied natural gas from the US is expensive and the demand in the EU is limited.

Furthermore, the EU's willingness to procure more US weaponry, despite calls from some EU leaders to reduce reliance on US arms and prioritize local EU purchases, raises concerns. The EU's heavy dependence on US military equipment only underscores its vulnerabilities and the need for its strategic autonomy.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who was the only EU leader to attend Trump's inauguration as president in January, has meetings with Trump in Washington on Thursday and Vice-President JD Vance on her return to Italy on Friday. Vance's recent remarks have underscored the EU's security dependence on the US and the complexities of the transatlantic relationship and once again highlighted the need for the EU to assert its own strategic autonomy. The EU should not let its appeasement efforts fuel the US administration's geopolitical ambitions.

Vance told US media on Monday that "it's not good for Europe to be the permanent security vassal" of the US. This was a typically blunt message from the US vice-president. But it is in line with those who view the US' tariffs on the EU as being merely leverage for the US administration to get Europe to take more responsibility for its own security. In that way the EU can continue the containment pressure on Russia while the US focuses its attention on the Asia-Pacific. Dependence on the US security umbrella and energy is one of the major reasons that the EU is vulnerable to the Trump administration's pressure tactics.

Of course, Brussels is worried that the trade war will cause more hardship for the already difficult EU economy. It will also be hard for the 27 member states to agree on retaliation against the US, especially the use of the Anti-Coercion Instrument. However, since the US leader has threatened the tariffs for issues totally unrelated to trade, it would be naive for the EU, which has such a weak bargaining position, to think that it will be able to appease the transactional US president from taking a yard once it gives an inch.

The EU should therefore bolster its resolve and assert its global leadership credentials by collaborating with like-minded nations to counter the tariff-wielding bullies in Washington that are tearing up the global trading system and causing huge damage to the global economy in pursuit of a golden past. Strengthening ties with China and other partners who stand in opposition to the tariff war launched by the Trump administration can pave the way for a more resilient and rules-based global economic order.

The EU's latest outreach to China and some other countries is a step in the right direction, one it should more decisively go in. It is hoped that as the US retreats from the global trading system and global treaties to focus on fighting with windmills, the EU will seize the opportunity to step up with others and fill the void, reinforcing the principles of an open global economy and advocating a rules-based trading system. By standing firm and rallying international cooperation, the EU can assert its position as a global leader and contribute to a more stable and prosperous global economic landscape.

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Jin Ding



Opinion Line

Shutting its doors on thinkers won't make America great again

The lawsuit filed on April 11 by four international students against the Department of Homeland Security and other immigration officials, stating that their student immigration status was illegally terminated, which was followed by a court hearing, is not only a legal challenge, but also an urgent alarm bell for the US administration.

The recent wave of student visa cancellations, many carried out without any public explanation or procedural clarity, marks a radical departure from the long-standing tradition of welcoming foreign talent to the United States. Since the end of World War II, the US has been like a magnet for the brightest minds of the world over, with international students forming a key pillar of the nation's scientific and technological dominance. Yet under the second Donald Trump administration, this tradition is under threat.

By April 11, as many as 700 international students had their visas revoked — some just weeks before their graduation. Many were abruptly ordered to leave the country, leaving universities scrambling to find ways to allow them to complete their studies remotely. No consistent rationale has been provided for this sweeping crackdown. It appears to be motivated more by ideological fervor than by any sound policy analysis.

The harm this inflicts on the US is both immediate and long-term. At an economic level, international students contribute billions of dollars annually, funding that supports not just the universities, but also local economies in cities and towns where these students live and study.

The actual cost of driving the students away goes far beyond financial calculations. Throughout modern history, international students have been at the heart of the US' most profound scientific and technological achievements. The US owes some of its most groundbreaking discoveries to immigrants who first arrived as students. Among them are Nobel laureates of Chinese origin such as Yang Chen-ning, Tsung-Dao Lee, and Daniel Chee Tsui — trailblazers in physics whose work has shaped entire fields.

Cultural and political life, too, has been enriched by international scholars. Former US president Barack Obama's father, a Kenyan, met his American mother while studying in the US. When their son became president he changed the nation's political narrative. Elon Musk, originally from South Africa, studied at the University of Pennsylvania before founding revolutionary companies such as SpaceX and acquiring the platform now known as X (formerly Twitter).

One has to imagine a US without these individuals to realize what is at

stake. Would it still be a beacon of innovation, freedom, and global leadership had it turned away the people who helped define its modern identity?

Expelling international students may offer temporary satisfaction to a political base driven by "fears of cultural dilution or economic competition". It may create the illusion of "taking care of our own". But such shortsighted nationalism undermines the country's long-term interests. A less diverse, less connected, and less innovative US will only end up with a shrinking economic pie.

Fortunately, not everyone in the US is turning a blind eye. As early as March 25, the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University filed a lawsuit against the government's visa policies. On Friday, attorneys general from 19 Democratic states urged a federal judge to block the Trump administration's decision to cancel hundreds of international student visas.

These actions show that many in parts of the US still know what truly makes the US great. It is not the walls it builds or the borders it tightens, but the openness it once offered to the world's dreamers, doers and thinkers. Abandoning that openness now would not only betray its own legacy — it would accelerate its decline.

—ZHANG ZHOUIXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Trade: Strong leadership builds resilience

From page 1

Trump should remember the debacle the trade war against China resulted in during his first term, when stiff Chinese resistance against high tariffs and sanctions dashed all hopes of slashing the US trade deficit.

According to data from the US Census Bureau, the country's total trade volume in 2017 was \$3.8 trillion, with a trade deficit of \$792 billion. In 2024, its total trade was worth \$5.33 trillion, and the trade deficit ballooned to \$1.2 trillion. Simultaneously, bilateral trade between the US and China shrank from \$635.2 billion in 2017 to \$582.5 billion in 2024. The trade deficit followed the trend and shrank from \$375.2 billion in 2017 to \$295.4 billion in 2024. The figures clearly show that the US trade deficit continues to grow despite tariff increases.

This time, despite the US administration targeting almost all of China's trading partners, it will still be impossible to achieve the desired results.

The US tariffs are blatant violations of free-trade principles and rules, especially those of the World Trade Organization. For decades the world has been on the free trade track with continuous efforts made — largely led by the US — to cut tariffs bilaterally, multilaterally and even globally. By reversing the trend, the current administration is disrupting the economic order the US helped create, betraying the trust the world community had in the US, and profiteering at the cost of everybody else.

The White House is pleased that dozens of countries are seeking deals on tariff cuts under pressure. However, such high-handed bullying may win short-term gains, but will certainly erode trust and moral integrity.

Furthermore, the new wave of tariffs will enhance China's determina-

tion to fight back and secure its interests. Past experiences have made China better prepared to face the renewed trade war. Thus it did not hesitate to hit back against the unfair tariffs imposed by the US.

China's swift and resolute responses signal strengthened guard. As the current US administration sharply escalated additional tariffs imposed on Chinese goods, China began responding with restrictions on more rare earth metals and dual-use materials, used widely in the US defense and aerospace industries.

China has been preparing for such turmoil for long and has reached out to other countries to do trade and business in anticipation of adverse changes. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has invested globally to create alternative avenues and mechanisms, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, China International Import Expo and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

These initiatives are paying off. The BRI has become the world's largest economic and investment initiative with more than 150 participants. CIIIE has proved to be a great success, providing over 2,900 new technologies, products and services during the last seven years. This year, it provided more than 120 free stalls for 37 least-developed countries. AIIB is reshaping economic order by adopting principles of sustainability, innovation and prosperity for the people. AIIB functions as intended to deliver an apolitical, constructive, balanced and consensus-oriented decision culture, which is reflected in its funding decisions. India is the largest borrower from AIIB, having received \$9.7 billion, followed by the Philippines with about \$2 billion.

The resilience of the Chinese economy has vast potential thanks to effective decision-making under a

strong central leadership. Multiple events this year, especially the two sessions, or the annual meetings of China's top legislature, the National People's Congress, and its top political advisory body, the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, have shown that China is focused on the domestic front to prepare for the future. Policies and mechanisms are at work to strengthen the innovation base, enhance domestic consumption, ensure monetary health and diversify domestic supply chains to face uncertain times.

The US will find it increasingly hard to cope with rising protests at home and abroad against the backdrop of the strong collective will of the Chinese. The US citizens will soon realize they must face the harsh facts by other means: The goal of the administration to make manufacturing return is illusory, judging from the tariffs and high production costs in the US; the wish to reduce US deficits to the minimum by high tariffs will remain just that as it is impossible as deficits result from a number of economic operations embedded with the country itself; and, the White House's threats to suppress China will only turn China stronger and more popular.

Thus the US should refrain from escalating a trade war, which would be a lose-lose proposition that can lead the world toward a recession. The wise policy option would be to immediately engage with China to find a win-win approach for cooperation and solving outstanding issues. It will be beneficial for the US, China and the whole world.

The author is CEO of the Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research and Development in Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

STEPHEN NDEGWA

Rekindling the Bandung Spirit

Articulated in 1955, it remains as relevant today as it was in the aftermath of colonialism and offers a strategic compass for navigating the complexities of a multipolar world

As the world commemorates the 70th anniversary of the historic Bandung Conference, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the enduring relevance of the Bandung Spirit in today's complex geopolitical landscape. Held in April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, the conference brought together 29 Asian and African nations, many of which were newly independent states emerging from the shadows of colonialism.



The leaders of these nations articulated a shared vision of solidarity, self-determination and collective resistance to imperialism. The Bandung Conference laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement, which sought to carve an independent path for the Global South amid the polarizing tensions of the Cold War.

Seventy years later, the world once again stands at the precipice of a new Cold War, with escalating rivalry between major powers reshaping global political and economic alignments. The resurgence of great power competition threatens to divide the world into opposing blocs, forcing developing nations into strategic dependencies reminiscent of the Cold War era. In this context, the Bandung Spirit's emphasis on political sovereignty, non-interference and peaceful coexistence remains strikingly relevant. The collective rise of the Global South presents a historic opportunity to harness this spirit to advance global governance reform.

The Bandung Conference was a bold assertion that the future of global governance could not be determined solely by the dominant powers of the Global North. By advocating political sovereignty and economic self-determination, the Bandung principles challenged the entrenched global power structures that had marginalized the Global South.

For African nations, the Bandung Conference's legacy was profound. The conference affirmed their right to self-governance and provided a platform for collective action against political subjugation and economic dependence. The call for racial equality and justice emboldened liberation movements across the continent, from Ghana's independence in 1957 to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa decades later. The establishment of the Organization of African Unity in 1963, now the African Union, reflected this newfound confidence and the desire to institutionalize the ideals of unity and self-reliance championed at Bandung.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

The principles articulated at Bandung — such as mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in domestic affairs, equality and peaceful coexistence — provided the moral and political foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement. Throughout the Cold War, the Non-Aligned Movement member states resisted pressure to align with either Washington or Moscow, instead advocating a "third way" rooted in the principles of self-determination and economic independence. This ethos empowered developing nations to negotiate trade agreements, demand fairer

resource pricing and resist exploitative conditionalities tied to foreign aid.

The Global South now possesses significantly greater economic and political leverage than it did during the Cold War. The rise of China, India, Brazil and other emerging economies has shifted the balance of power in international forums such as the G20, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The AU's recent inclusion in the G20 underscores the growing influence of the Global South in shaping the global agenda.

The emergence of new diplomatic and

trade frameworks, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area and the Belt and Road Initiative, reflects the strategic and economic potential of South-South cooperation to reshape the global order. At a time when great power competition is intensifying, the Global South must resist being co-opted into external spheres of influence and instead assert its agency through coordinated action and strategic alignment.

The Bandung Spirit offers a path to navigate global tensions without succumbing to external pressures. The principles of non-alignment and peaceful coexistence provide a framework for developing nations to assert their agency, pursue independent foreign policies and negotiate from a position of strength. By prioritizing South-South cooperation and collective bargaining, the Global South can resist being drawn into a zero-sum competition between the major powers.

Despite the growing economic and political clout of the Global South, however, international institutions continue to reflect post-World War II power dynamics. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are still dominated by Western financial interests, while the United Nations Security Council's permanent membership continues to exclude African and Latin American countries. The failure of developed nations to honor their climate finance commitments under the Paris Agreement and the inequitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines further underscore the need for a more just and balanced global order.

The Global South's growing leverage in multilateral platforms such as BRICS and the SCO presents an opportunity to push for these long-overdue reforms. The establishment of the New Development Bank and the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement is a concrete step toward reducing dependency on Western-dominated financial institutions. The AfCFTA, launched in 2021, embodies Bandung's vision of intra-regional economic solidarity, aiming to uplift people on the continent

through reduced trade barriers and shared prosperity.

Climate change, economic inequality and global health crises represent existential threats to the Global South that demand collective action and solidarity. Developing nations, despite contributing least to global carbon emissions, are bearing the brunt of climate-related disasters. The Bandung principle of mutual benefit calls for greater collaboration among developing countries to demand climate justice, increase green technology transfer and push for more ambitious emissions reductions from industrialized nations.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of global solidarity, as hoarding of vaccines by wealthy nations undermined global recovery efforts. However, initiatives such as India and South Africa's campaign for a temporary World Trade Organization waiver on COVID-19 vaccine patents, though initially resisted by Western nations, reflect the Bandung-era ethos of collective bargaining and moral persuasion.

The Global South's response to these challenges will determine whether the Bandung Spirit remains a historical relic or a living political philosophy. To harness this spirit effectively, developing nations must invest in institutional capacity-building, strengthen regional cooperation and leverage their collective economic and political weight to challenge inequities in global governance. Strategic alignment within platforms such as the AU, BRICS and the G77 can amplify the voices of developing nations and create a more balanced global order.

The Bandung Spirit articulated in 1955 remains as relevant today as it was in the aftermath of colonialism. The Bandung Spirit offers a moral and strategic compass for navigating the complexities of a multipolar world. By embracing collective action, the Global South can assert its agency, advance global governance reform and champion a more just and equitable international order. The Bandung Conference's enduring legacy is a reminder that unity and self-determination are not just historical aspirations, but also the keys to shaping a more balanced and prosperous future.

The author is executive director of South-South Dialogues, a Nairobi-based communications development think tank. 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.

LI XING AND JOHN PANG

Reviving the historic legacy

On the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, it is worth recalling the spirit that can help foster trust and deepen ties between China and ASEAN, and the Global South, through the BRI

The Bandung Conference, also referred to as the Asian-African Conference, was the first international gathering organized by newly independent Asian and African nations. It brought together 29 participating countries determined to assert their influence in global affairs. The conference aimed to shape relations among these emerging states by promoting solidarity, cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Additionally, it sought to foster South-South economic and cultural cooperation and create a unified stance against colonialism, imperialism and racial discrimination.



Li Xing



John Pang

The most remarkable and long-lasting impact of the Bandung Conference was the endorsement of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which was originally formulated by China and India in 1954. These principles — mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence — played an important role in guiding post-war international relations and laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, which sought to maintain autonomy from Cold War's rival blocs.

While evaluating the contemporary relevance of the Bandung Conference, it is necessary to compare its foundational principles with the norms of the Westphalian Order. The Westphalian Order originated from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which marked the end of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) in Europe. Driven by the desire of European powers to restore stability following extended religious and territorial conflicts, the treaty established the foundations of the modern nation-state sys-

tem, highlighting state sovereignty and the norm of non-interference in domestic affairs.

While Westphalia is often hailed as the foundational moment for the modern international system of sovereign states, its concept of sovereignty was far from universal. The treaties codified the principles of non-intervention and state sovereignty, but only within the context of European Christian states. Non-European societies across Africa, Asia and the Americas were systematically denied equal recognition within the international order. This exclusion served to justify colonial expansion, as European powers invoked narratives such as the "white man's burden" or divine missions to "civilize" the world. In effect, the Westphalian framework ignored the structural inequalities that limited the ability of postcolonial states to fully exercise their sovereignty, particularly within global economic and political systems.

In contrast, the Bandung Conference aimed to dismantle the international hierarchies that persisted despite the formal end of colonial rule. Whereas the Westphalian system tacitly accommodated colonialism, Bandung openly condemned it, reframing sovereignty as inseparable from racial equality and the right to self-determination. This contrast highlights Bandung's dual character: it both extended Westphalian state-centric norms and simultaneously rejected their selective, hierarchical application. For the Global South, sovereignty was not merely a matter of territorial control — it was inherently tied to the right to develop free from economic exploitation, a dimension absent from the original Westphalian model.

The Bandung principles embedded economic justice and solidarity into a vision of global order that reflected the aspirations of the Global South. Its call for South-South cooperation recognized that political sovereignty without economic autonomy was hollow. Initiatives such as collective resistance against exploitative trade terms reflected a rejection of the Westphalian

order's indifference to economic imperialism. Similarly, the Bandung principles' emphasis on peaceful coexistence addressed the Cold War's ideological polarization, advocating neutrality in a world pressured to align with either the US or Soviet blocs. It offered instead a pluralistic vision of a world where political systems from A to Z could coexist without coercion. Its goal was not merely political liberation but the structural inclusion of Global South states, such as Southeast Asian countries, in global governance mechanisms.

In the post-Cold War era, the United States-led liberal international order has notably challenged, and even abandoned, traditional Westphalian principles of state sovereignty and non-interference. This shift is reflected in some new concepts such as "Responsible Sovereignty" and "Responsibility to Protect" (e.g., Kosovo, Libya). The most notable example is the 2003 Iraq War, widely condemned as an illegal violation of sovereignty due to the lack of United Nations Security Council approval. The erosion of Westphalian norms has contributed to the crises in Ukraine and the Middle East, disrupting traditional geopolitical balances, intensifying inter-state tensions, and provoking divisions and conflicts by challenging state sovereignty and disregarding legitimate security concerns.

In contrast, the Bandung Conference played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1967. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, emphasized at Bandung, became integral to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 1976. ASEAN's early foreign policy was shaped by the Bandung Spirit, enabling Southeast Asian nations to navigate Cold War tensions without being directly entangled in superpower rivalries. In line with Bandung's ideals, ASEAN aimed to foster solidarity among post-colonial nations, ensuring Southeast Asia remained free from external domination while promoting regional cooperation.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Bandung's emphasis on South-South cooperation also influenced ASEAN's economic initiatives, such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area and the ASEAN Economic Community. Furthermore, Bandung's call for stronger diplomatic engagement among developing nations helped shape ASEAN's consensus-driven approach to negotiations and dispute resolution.

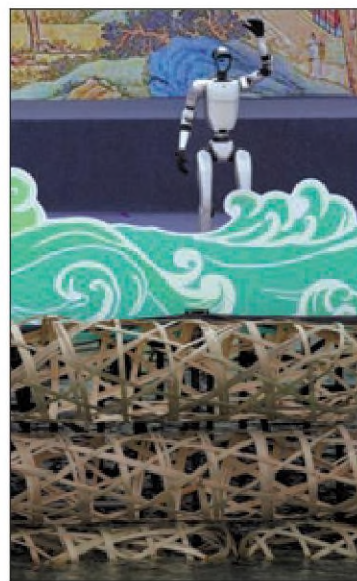
Armed with the Bandung principles, ASEAN has sustained economic growth for decades, emerging as one of the world's most dynamic economic regions despite deep internal diversity in political systems, development stages, and cultural identities. ASEAN is home to a rich mixture of civilizations and religions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and indigenous belief systems, reflecting centuries of cultural exchange, migration and historical interactions across the region. This pluralism has shaped ASEAN's approach to regionalism, fostering a model of coexistence that values harmony, mutual respect and non-interference over rigid uniformity.

China has deeply honored the legacy of

the Bandung Conference, viewing it as a valuable historical lesson in fostering solidarity among developing nations. It draws on the Bandung principles to support its vision of building a community with a shared future with neighboring countries and promoting a new type of international relations grounded in mutual respect and win-win cooperation. Thus, the Bandung legacy provides a historical and political foundation that can help foster trust and deepen ties between China and ASEAN, and the Global South, under the evolving architecture of the Belt and Road Initiative.

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CULTURE



From left: In April, popular tourist destinations include the Palace Museum in Beijing; Ziyang Street in Linhai, Zhejiang province; Taijiang county of Guizhou province; a corner of the Palace Museum; Sichuan province's Duijiangyan, which hosts a robot show; and colorful blooms at Dajue Temple in western Beijing. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

Noel Su Nuoyi, a Spanish social media influencer with over 3 million followers on short-video platforms like Douyin, says an unexpected encounter with an android charmed his mother when she visited China following its recent visa relaxations for inbound visitors.

"We were in a hotel in Shanghai, and then it came. A really cute robot brought the food, and my mom opened the door, and she was (in shock). She was like: 'How do I do this? What's this? What's going on?'"

"I showed her how to take out the screen, and she took out the meal. Then, the robot left, and my mom closed the door. She came back to me and was like: 'Can we order something more? I want the robot back.'"

She snapped a photo with the android the next day.

"I think that's also a cultural difference because we're living here, and we're used to that. We see robots, we see technology everywhere. But for my mom, she came from Spain, she was shocked to see how technology is in our daily life here," he says.

Su Nuoyi joined a recent Embracing Cultures salon hosted by China Daily that examined how travel to China has become more accessible to international visitors as the country has appreciably relaxed visa policies. That is, while also undertaking corresponding measures to make travel easier after arrival.

These led to a sixfold increase in arrivals last year compared with 2023, China Odyssey Tours president Zhou Xiaoguang says.

Source countries fueling this growth include Southeast Asian nations like Singapore and Malaysia; as well as European countries, including Italy and Spain. Zhou expects more visitors from France, Germany, Australia and New Zealand this year.

Ease of entry

Zhou says industry insiders often deliberated inbound tourism's main "pain points".

"We came to the conclusion that probably one of the biggest difficulties was the visa because, years ago, foreigners coming to China had to spend a lot of time filling in all the forms. It took a long time for them to apply and finally get the visa from the embassy or consulate," he recalls.

"So, we kept having a wish in our hearts that if sometime in the future our customers can travel to China just by buying air tickets with their passports, they can come to China as they like. This was a kind of a dream. But finally, it came true."

Su Nuoyi says the policy has inspired many of his friends and family from Spain to book flights to China. "They just text me, and they're like, 'I'm going to Beijing, and I just want you to show me around,'" he says.

"People have always been interested in this country. It was just harder to get here, and now it's easier. I think I feel like there's no barrier anymore. So, for them, it's very comfortable just to hop on a plane to come to China just to look around."

Farther flung

Ecuadorian-Italian Andres Rodriguez, market development director at Dragon Trail International, advises first-time visitors: "You should plan, and you should also let it go. Go with the flow."

The policy changes are prompting international travelers to change their plans and where they go in China.

The Great Wall is great, the Grand Canal is grand; and armies of tourists march to see the Terracotta Warriors every year. But the influx of

Welcoming the world

A recent salon examines how China's visa relaxations and parallel developments are coaxing a surge of inbound visitors, **Erik Nilsson** reports.



From Left: Erik Nilsson talks with Noel Su Nuoyi, a social media influencer, Zhou Xiaoguang, president of China Odyssey Tours, and Andres Rodriguez, market development director at Dragon Trail International, about the bustling China travel market. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

Travel information for inbound tourists — from the experts' talks

Visa

In 2024, China broadened its unilateral visa-free policy to include 38 countries, allowing a stay of up to 30 days. The country has been welcoming global travelers with open arms, as it further optimizes tourism policies, including the 240-hour visa-free transit option to 54 countries since Dec 17, 2024. Go on the National Immigration Administration official website (<https://en.nia.gov.cn>) for the detailed lists.

Language

Many destinations and transportation systems are posting English-language or even multilingual signage.

Technologies like AI are fulfilling the functions of translation. With mobile translation applications, it will be easier for visitors to get around. DeepSeek, an AI tool available on multiple websites and mobile apps, will always offer answers to questions like the historical background on any tourist attraction. Always feel free to ask passerby, because Chinese people are known for their hospitality.

Currency and payment

Payment in China is highly digitalized, thus new measures have improved those mobile payment platforms' capabilities to link to international credit cards. More hotels are

buying readers for international credit cards; please check before you transact. Platforms such as Alipay offer options for inbound visitors to board the Beijing subways with Mastercard. And there is also traditional cash and banks for your service.

Traveling plan

Some trip-planning AI platforms offer real-time info on flights, transportation, attractions and the like. There's also one called Kayak, which, besides providing travel tips, integrates local car-hailing service Didi or others. Or, visitors may check the hashtag for "China Travel" on social media like

YouTube, TikTok and Instagram for more information as the optimized visa policies have already attracted many to experience China, several of whom are happy to share.

Tickets

Many cities have launched measures that enable foreigners to use passports onsite to get tickets for some top destinations, like the Forbidden City in Beijing and Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. Check the official websites of your destination for updated ticket information.

So download a map in English (or in your language), and enjoy China Travel!

Social skills

But social media is doing more than introducing new destinations. It's also shaping international audiences' understandings of everything from government policies to ordinary people.

Rodriguez says more needs to be done to publicize measures beyond visa relaxations that are making it easier for inbound visitors. Many hopeful visitors are concerned about their ability to use Chinese mobile payment platforms and don't know new measures have improved their capabilities to link these to international credit cards. "That needs to be extensively communicated. You have to convey the message: It's not as hard as you think. I understand it was harder before, but things are evolving. Things are

changing," Rodriguez says.

And promotions should go beyond just destinations to include festivals, cuisine, and increasingly, events, he says. He explains that his Italian friend learned about and visited Yunnan province because it hosted a major cycling event.

Also, new media should use "creativity in storytelling" to introduce China travel.

Su Nuoyi says: "I've realized that when I publish any video related to Chinese people is when they get more engagement on international social media platforms. Most of the people who come to China cannot speak Chinese, and we don't expect anybody here to speak English to us. So, it's like, you're here, but sometimes you cannot get close enough to get to know them."

That's where social media can bridge gaps, he says.

"Sometimes, (international audiences) can rely on me and my conversations with Chinese people to get to know people better," Su Nuoyi says.

Zhou says many travelers have reported their in-person interactions with locals as highlights of their trips.

"For foreigners coming to China, the best scenery is the people," Zhou says.

"Coming to China, they can enjoy not only the beautiful view, the rich culture, the old history and everything, but also meet Chinese people in different places. That will be a very different experience."

Measuring up

Authorities' efforts to improve access for inbound travelers is extending beyond visa relaxations and mobile payments. More hotels are buying readers for international credit cards, and more destinations are posting English-language signage, Zhou says.

New measures enable foreigners to use passports onsite to get tickets for some top destinations like the Forbidden City in Beijing and Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an, Shaanxi, which are otherwise hard to obtain, even for Chinese citizens, Zhou says.

"Foreigners can just walk there and buy it themselves. There are no restrictions at all!"

He points out many major attractions still don't have such services. "But more scenic spots are trying to apply these policies. This is a great improvement," Zhou adds.

The government is investing more in foreign-language training for guides, especially in less-visited regions. And it's working to meet the growing demand for languages other than English.

"We are very short of Spanish and Italian-speaking tour guides all over China," Zhou says.

Gesturing toward Su Nuoyi and Rodriguez, he says: "If you choose to work as tour guides in these places, I can assure that you will have a very healthy income."

Tech touch

But technologies like AI are fulfilling many functions, such as translation and travel planning.

"If I need a simultaneous translation, I go to my (AI) app," Rodriguez says.

"If I'm visiting a cultural historical spot and I want to have insights about this site — let's say, I'm visiting the Forbidden City — if I want to have some historical background on it, I can go to DeepSeek to search about it."

Some trip-planning AI platforms offer real-time info on flights, transportation, attractions and the like, he explains.

Su Nuoyi says: "My mom and my brother came here, and they were shocked by how technology is part of daily life in China. I think that's also part of the culture."

Zhou believes technology can only enrich what ultimately remain human experiences.

"You can use an app to make an easy translation. You can get an itinerary from the app very easily. But still, you need to talk with the people and know what they're really thinking," he says.

"This exchange is more important. This is something that'll never be replaced by any technology."

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LIFE

Unlocking Greek mythology



From top: Key exhibits of Minoan civilization include: a clay tablet with Linear B writings from 1375 to 1300 BC; a clay female figurine from 1650 to 1600 BC; a clay boat model from 2600 to 2300 BC; and a flask with marine decorations from 1500 to 1450 BC. A Chinese bronze ritual vessel from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century to 771 BC) was also on display. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG AND WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY



Visitors to the *Daedalus: Legends of Crete* exhibition enjoy a close-up view of a chlorite bull-head rhyton, dating to 1500 to 1450 BC, a signature artifact on display. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

By exploring Minoan civilization, exhibition aims to build mutual respect and trust, **Wang Kaihao** reports.

In Crete, the birthplace of the Greek god Zeus, legendary architect Daedalus was inspired to create a labyrinth beside the rolling waves of the Aegean Sea.

In Greek mythology, Daedalus was commissioned by King Minos to build the labyrinth to imprison the Minotaur, a terrible beast with a bull head. When Athenian hero Theseus penetrated the labyrinth and vanquished the beast, he also elevated the Daedalus myth to an everlasting classic of Western culture.

Mythology has driven archaeologists to shatter the hard walls of time and bring long-lost ruins back to life. Some of these artifacts are on display in Beijing at the Shenwumen (the gate of divine prowess) Gallery of the Palace Museum, and, coincidentally, demonstrate Daedalus' miracles.

In collaboration with the Heraklion Archaeological Museum in Crete, the Palace Museum is presenting the exhibition *Daedalus: Legends of Crete*, a display of 172 ancient artifacts from the collection of the Greek museum. It will run through July 27.

Painted pottery, bronze ware, gold ornaments, architectural fragments, and other artifacts take visitors back to Minoan civilization (c. 3000 to 1100 BC). It is the first thematic exhibition focusing on this civilization, which lies at the roots of ancient Greece, ever held in China, though the Classical Age and other historical Greek periods have been the focus of many exhibitions across China.

"The public may not be familiar with the Minoan civilization," says Bo Haikun, curator of the exhibition at the Palace Museum. "Through a mixture of mythology and physical archaeological evidence, we unroll a broad view of Minoan civilization."

"Museum visitors nowadays are no longer satisfied chasing after 'stars' from abroad. Lesser-known



Top: A visitor views a clay chest larnax decorated with marine creatures and vegetal motifs from 1300 to 1200 BC. **Above:** Visitors are shown signature painted pottery vessels from the Minoan civilization in the Shenwumen Gallery of the Palace Museum in Beijing on Monday. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

but key historical indicators also tell appealing stories," he says.

A chlorite bull-headed rhyton dating to 1500 to 1450 BC is displayed near the gallery entrance and serves as a guide into the Minoan world. The intricately carved vessel was used to hold sacrificial wine.

According to Bo, images of similar vessels are found in the frescoes of ancient Egyptian Pharaonic tombs of the time, indicating that the bull-headed rhyton was given by rulers of Crete as a kind of gift.

A special royal flask with marine patterns of special palatial tradition from between 1500 and 1450 BC is a

hymn to the ocean, and a symbol of the peak of Minoan pottery art. A clay boat model from 2600 to 2300 BC illustrates the tradition of shipbuilding at the time. Sailboats were introduced to Crete when the Bronze Age came to an end. Before that, this canoe-like boat was the main way for the island to connect with the rest of the world.

Traveling across the Aegean on simple ships, Minoans had a wide network of communication, absorbing elements from other civilizations, as the exhibition shows. Their culture also spread across neighboring islands.

"It inspires us to evaluate the shared community of mankind in a modern context," Bo says.

Other artifacts demonstrate a kaleidoscope of facets of the everyday life of the Minoans. Decorations on a gold signet ring show a typical sacrificial scene of a priestess in the center. A clay figurine vividly portrays a pregnant woman, who instinctively protects her belly. A bronze mattock also reveals farming life in the royal palace.

According to the Homeric epics, if he actually existed, King Minos may have lived in the 15th century BC. However, modern carbon dating results show that the Palace of Knossos, which might have inspired the mythical labyrinth described in the tales of Daedalus, existed 500 years prior.

Archaeologists speculate that the deified architect Daedalus was an artisan who participated in restoring the palace centuries later, rather than the man who first created the wonder.

Nevertheless, it may not matter. A line in the exhibition says: "When myths are no longer confined to the realm of fantasy, they become keys to unlock the treasure chest of history."

For the exhibition, Bo also prepared a surprise by the gallery exit. Thirteen Chinese artifacts from

roughly the same period of Minoan civilization, ranging from jade and bronze vessels to painted pottery from the Palace Museum's collection, are on display.

"They demonstrate neither the cultural diffusion nor shared technological origins (between China and Greece)," Bo says, "but reveal the spiritual resonance of human beings at similar stages of development."

"Civilizations, agrarian or maritime, may follow distinct historical trajectories, and they jointly compose human's early symphony through the worship of nature, technical innovation, and the establishment of the social order," he says.

"Daedalus, the mythical craftsman ... represents, as his name allows, artistic and technological advancement, creativity and innovation," said the Ambassador of Greece to China Evgenios Kalpyris at the opening ceremony of the exhibition on Monday. "These are not just Greek characteristics. They are universal."

A series of related public lectures and educational programs will be available during the exhibition to further stir the public's interest in ancient civilizations from the rest of the world, and also serve as a celebration of the Palace Museum's centennial anniversary this year.

"Promoting dialogue among civilizations is the only way to deepen international cooperation," says Stella Chrysoulaki, general director of the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion. "To this end, museums are transforming from inward-looking institutions to outward-looking, multifaceted organizations. They become fora for mutual respect and trust among countries with different backgrounds."

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Prose finds its place in the former residence of historical figure

By XING WEN
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The 2025 Crabapple Gala and Crabapple Poetry Party kicked off on April 7 at the Former Residence of Soong Ching Ling, attracting diplomats and representatives from over 40 countries, including Switzerland, Turkmenistan, Portugal, Singapore, Luxembourg, Pakistan and Bulgaria.

Soong Ching Ling (1893-1981) was one of the founders of the People's Republic of China and the wife of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925).

Amid the fragrant air, the residence was adorned with blooming crabapple blossoms, where several performances unfolded, from dance and Peking Opera to ensembles blending Chinese and Western instruments and choral recitals.

Representatives from various countries also took to the stage to recite poems inspired by the floral theme. Among them, Michael Crook, a council member of the China Soong Ching Ling Founda-



Left: Diplomats enjoy a traditional Chinese tea ceremony at the 2025 Crabapple Gala and Crabapple Poetry Party held at the Former Residence of Soong Ching Ling this month. **Right:** The Swiss Embassy set up a booth at the event to offer traditional desserts. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tion, delivered an emotional recitation of Chairman Mao Zedong's *Ode to the Plum Blossom* (1961) in both Chinese and English.

Reflecting on the event, Khalil Ur Rahman Hashmi, the Pakistani Ambassador to China, praises the

poetry segment for its diverse languages, expressions and emotions.

"Poetry, as a universal language, serves as a powerful medium to bridge cultures, bring people together, and deepen mutual understanding," he says.

The event also featured interactive booths where guests could engage in hands-on cultural experiences such as calligraphy, painting, and tea ceremonies. Additionally, specially designed postcards for the gala were available to mail on-site.

Jurg Burri, Swiss Ambassador to China, tried his hand at tea preparation.

He shares that his most memorable cultural experiences in Beijing are the annual Spring Festival and Lantern Festival.



"I love the atmosphere with all the red lanterns at the end of winter. It's truly a special time when families gather to eat dumplings and the lanterns make the city glow red," he says.

For Beate Trankmann, the United Nations Development Programme's resident representative in China, it was her second visit to the Former Residence of Soong Ching Ling.

She points out that Soong was a female leader who broke barriers. Soong became one of China's national leaders during a time when very few women rose to such positions, Trankmann says.

"She used her position to advocate for women's participation in social and political life, and also to promote women's rights."

"As a female leader myself, I feel here as a very moving place. I think her mission in life remains very important, especially in this age — a tech-dominated world where we must work to ensure women are not only included, but in a position to shape the future," she says.

LIFE



From left: Cellist Jan Vogler, harpsichord player Shen Fanxiu, Major Trio ensemble, and cellist Wang Jian will perform during the upcoming NCPA May Festival, an annual chamber music event that will take place from May 1 to 25. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

NCPA chamber festival set to wow

Celebration of early European classical music includes fresh twists, Chinese elements, **Chen Nan** reports.

German cellist Jan Vogler vividly remembers his debut performance at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing in March 2023. He was thrilled to be one of the first foreign musicians to perform at the venue after the pandemic. During his recital, which lasted three hours, Vogler presented Bach's six complete cello suites.

Two years later, Vogler is returning to the NCPA, but this time, he will perform with Chinese musicians during the upcoming NCPA May Festival. The annual event, which shines a spotlight on the beauty and diversity of chamber music, began in 2009.

This year's festival, which takes place from May 1 to 25, includes 27 concerts by musicians from all over the world.

"For the past 15 years, the May music festival has focused on chamber music, connecting well-known artists and ensembles, exploring cross-genre collaborations, and making it accessible to a broader audience," says Wang Luli, deputy director of the NCPA's program management department. "This year, we will continue to celebrate the rich tradition of chamber music, while incorporating elements from jazz, classical guitar, a cappella, and other genres."

Vogler's participation will begin with the opening concerts on May 1 and 2, when he will perform Ravel's *Sonata for Violin and Cello, M. 73* with violinist Zhu Kaiyuan, and Tchaikovsky's *Andante Cantabile* alongside violinists Lyu Siqing, Huang Mengla, violist Su Zhen, and clarinetist Wang Tao.

"Chamber music has the wrong reputation," Vogler says, reflecting on his experience at the NCPA in



Violinist Lyu Siqing (middle), cellist Jan Vogler (third from right), pianist Chen Sa (second from right), and pianist Sun Yingdi (third from left), at the news conference in Beijing on April 10 for the latest edition of the NCPA May Festival.

Beijing on April 10. "People often think it is played by small groups with little energy, but the opposite is true. Composers often wrote chamber music for their friends, and poured their hearts into it. In the 19th century, in Germany, where I come from, many composers created their most celebrated music for the chamber, not orchestras.

"If you listen to these pieces, they are full of energy," he adds. "You might even feel more energy than you would at a large orchestral concert. Let's rethink the idea

of chamber music."

Born into a musical family in Leipzig, Vogler credits chamber music as one of the driving forces behind his decision to become a cellist. "My parents would play chamber music with their friends at home. As a child, I was surrounded by the sound, and that's how I learned to play the cello."

In addition to the opening concerts, Vogler will also join forces with pianist Chen Sa for a special performance at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre on May 4, where they will present the complete cycle of Beethoven's five sonatas for cello and piano.

Chamber music, often referred to as the "conversation of instruments", is one of the most intimate and intricate forms of classical music. According to celebrated violinist Lyu, artistic director of the NCPA May Festival, chamber music is a dialogue among musicians.

"In chamber music, the musicians are not just performers, but active participants in a shared interpretation of the music. They react to each other's nuances in real time," Lyu says. "Every year, we strive to present a diverse program to demonstrate the particular beauty of chamber music. This year, we've invited a new generation of composers and performers, as well as friends like Jan Vogler to join us," he adds.

One highlight will be the premiere of *The Four Seasons of China*, a new composition by Wen Ziyang. Inspired by Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, the piece consists of 12 movements with a duration of approximately 45 minutes.

"The 12 distinct melodies, each with its own style, evoke vivid imagery

encompassing poetry, landscapes, and emotions," says Lyu, who premiered the piece last year with young musicians.

On May 4, harpsichordist Shen Fanxiu will perform at the NCPA alongside violinist Li Da, cellist Yu Jia, and soprano Zhang Zhang. A professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, Shen explains how chamber music and the harpsichord are historically intertwined. "The harpsichord was at its height during the Baroque period, and many early composers, like Bach and Handel, wrote music specifically for it. Featuring the harpsichord in a chamber music setting connects modern audiences to the roots of Western classical music.

"In a chamber setting, the harpsichord blends seamlessly with familiar instruments like strings, flute, or voice. This setting helps introduce the harpsichord to new listeners and bridges the gap for those unfamiliar with early music."

Other major performances will include a concert on May 8 at the NCPA by violinist Ning Feng and his ensemble, featuring work by Shostakovich to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the composer's death.

On May 24, Lyu's ensemble, Major Trio — including pianist Sun Yingdi, and cellist Li-Wei Qin — will appear at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre. The same evening, cellist Wang Jian will deliver a recital at the NCPA, closing the 2025 festival.

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The many pleasures of life and studies in fascinating Wuhan



By MUFIZAL ABOOBUCKER
for China Daily

My name is Mufizal Aboobucker, I'm a senior lecturer at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. Currently, I am pursuing my PhD in International Politics at the Central China Normal University in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, a journey that has been enriching, both academically and culturally. One of the most memorable parts is being able to visit scenic spots and immerse myself in Wuhan's vibrant culture.

In the course of my PhD, I have had the opportunity to engage in academic discussions and research collaboration with scholars from other universities in the city. This engagement has greatly broadened my perspective on international politics, and deepened my understanding of China's role in global affairs. As a significant education and research hub, Wuhan is home to a number of prestigious universities and research institutions.

Aside from my academic endeavors, I make sure to explore the city's most famous landmarks and cultural sites. These visits have not only provided much-

needed breaks from my studies, but have also allowed me to appreciate the city's beauty and history.

Visiting the Yellow Crane Tower was one such remarkable experience. This ancient tower, one of the Three Great Towers of Jiangnan (the region south of the Yangtze River), enjoys a breathtaking view of the Yangtze River. Its history, coupled with its beautiful architecture, left a lasting impression. Climbing to the top, I was able to enjoy panoramic views of the city, with its beautiful blend of modern skyscrapers and historical landmarks.

The Hubei Provincial Museum was another highlight. It houses an extensive collection of artifacts, including the famous bronze bells of the Marquis Yi of Zeng. Walking through the museum, I gained a deeper appreciation for China's ancient civilization and cultural heritage. I was particularly fascinated by the detailed exhibits of musical instruments and pottery, which revealed the artistic and scientific advancements of early Chinese society.

As someone with an interest in art, I also thoroughly enjoyed the Hubei Museum of Art. It is a showcase of a wide range of contemporary Chinese art, and reflects traditional influences and modern creativity. I spent hours exploring the different gal-



Mufizal Aboobucker at the Hubei Provincial Museum. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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eries, each presenting a different perspective on China's evolving artistic landscape.

Hankou Beach Park is a serene escape from the bustling city. Situated along the Yangtze River, it has beautiful walking trails and peaceful surroundings. Spending time there allowed me to reflect on my studies, and enjoy the natural beauty. Watching the sunset over the river was a particularly memorable experience thanks to the tranquil atmosphere, perfect for contemplation.

The Wuhan Botanical Garden was another unforgettable destination. Managed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, it is home to well-maintained landscapes and a vast array of plant species. It was fascinating to see the extensive research being conducted on conservation and biodiversity. I was impressed by the layout, which seamlessly combines educational exhibits with natural beauty, making it a perfect place for both learning and leisure.

Beyond scenic spots, my time in Wuhan has been marked by cultural immersion. I have had the chance to interact with residents, try traditional cuisine, and participate in cultural festivals. The warmth and hospitality of the people have made me feel at home, despite being in a foreign country. I vividly remember trying dishes

such as hot dry noodles, a popular breakfast in Wuhan. Exploring markets and food streets is an adventure in itself, and offers a glimpse into the daily life of residents. Additionally, I have had the privilege of attending traditional festivals, where I have seen vibrant performances, parades, and rituals that celebrate the region's rich cultural heritage.

My time in Wuhan has been a significant chapter in my academic journey. Its blend of history, culture, and modernity is an ideal environment in which to pursue my studies in international politics. Exploring scenic spots has not only deepened my knowledge of Chinese culture, but also given me moments of reflection and inspiration.

I am deeply grateful for the experiences I have had in Wuhan, and the friendships I have forged during my stay. These memories will hold a special place in my heart as I continue my PhD journey, and beyond. The insights I have gained, both academically and personally, have enriched my life and will undoubtedly influence my future endeavors in the field of international politics.

The author is a senior lecturer at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka, who is currently pursuing his PhD in International Politics at the Central China Normal University in Wuhan, Hubei province.