

Promising signs

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# CHINA DAILY

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## Xi urges sound and orderly AI advancement

Nation strives to gain first-mover advantage and secure competitive edge in the sector

By CAO DESHENG  
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President Xi Jinping has underlined the need to leverage the strength of the country's system for mobilizing resources nationwide to promote the sound development of artificial intelligence, and he called for efforts to overcome challenges regarding core technologies such as high-end chips and foundational software.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks on Friday when presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

He emphasized that in the face of rapidly evolving new-generation AI technologies, China will uphold self-reliance and self-strengthening, prioritize application-oriented development, and promote the healthy and orderly advancement of the country's AI sector in a beneficial, safe and equitable direction.

Xi's remarks came as China strives to take the initiative in AI development to fuel its high-quality growth amid the mounting uncertainties of the international landscape, particularly caused by the disruption of industrial and supply chains due to the tariff and trade wars launched by the United States. In the Government Work Report for 2025, China vowed to effectively combine digital technologies with its manufacturing and market strengths. It will support the extensive application of large-scale AI models and develop new-generation intelligent terminals and smart manufacturing equipment, including intelligently connected new energy vehicles and intelligent robots.

Earlier this year, Chinese AI startup DeepSeek surprised the global AI landscape. DeepSeek, which built its open-source AI models at a fraction of the cost of building similar large language models and with fewer chips, has reduced financial barriers for global AI participation and promoted a more level playing field through technological advancements.

At the group study session, Xi pointed out that the CPC Central Committee attaches great importance to the development of AI, and has improved top-level design and strengthened implementation efforts in recent years, thereby driving a holistic and systematic advancement of the country's comprehensive AI strength.

Noting that there are still gaps and deficiencies in areas such as fundamental theories and core technologies in key fields, Xi urged

acknowledging these weak links and strengthening efforts to comprehensively advance sci-tech innovation, industrial development and applications of AI.

Xi stressed that breakthroughs must be achieved in fundamental theories, methodologies and tools to gain a first-mover advantage and secure a competitive edge in AI development. He called for efforts to consistently strengthen basic research and build an independent, controllable and collaboratively functioning foundational software and hardware system for AI.

Noting the importance of leveraging AI to drive paradigm transformation in scientific research and accelerate breakthroughs in technological innovation across all fields, he highlighted AI's role in the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and the opening up of new tracks for strategic emerging industries and future industries.

Noting that AI can serve as a global public good that benefits humanity, Xi said that it is important to widely carry out international cooperation in AI, help Global South countries strengthen their technological capacity building, and make contributions to bridging the global AI divide.

Efforts should be made to promote the alignment and coordination of development strategies, governance rules and technical standards among all parties, and to form a global governance framework and standards with extensive consensus as early as possible, he said.

In 2017, China adopted its New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan, which outlines a phased approach to AI development. According to the plan, China aims to become a world leader in overall development of AI theory, technology and applications by 2030, positioning itself as a primary global hub for AI innovation.

Seymour Mammadov, a member of the think tank EurAsiaAz in Azerbaijan, said that China's strategy in the field of AI is guided by long-term strategic planning, with clearly defined benchmarks and development stages. "Government agencies, research institutions and private companies operate within a unified framework that promotes innovation while ensuring oversight and risk management. China also encourages international cooperation on AI through multilateral platforms and bilateral initiatives, signaling its intent to shape global norms and governance in the digital era," Mammadov said in an article published by the China Global Television Network.

## Deadly explosion



Above: A helicopter drops water to douse a raging fire that started after a massive explosion rocked a port near the southern city of Bandar Abbas, Iran, on Saturday.

Left: Rescuers work at the blast site on Saturday. The explosion has killed at least 28 people so far and injured more than 800 others. ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES See story, page 7

## China refines departure tax refund policy

By ZHONG NAN  
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China has introduced a new policy that enables foreign visitors to claim departure tax refunds for purchases as low as 200 yuan (\$27) per day at the same store, significantly reducing the previous threshold of 500 yuan.

This is part of the country's latest move to optimize the departure tax refund policy for foreign visitors. The updated policy will streamline refund procedures and attract more overseas visitors, government officials said on Sunday.

According to a policy document jointly released on Saturday by six government branches, including the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Finance, the country will encourage the establishment of more departure tax refund stores in major commercial areas, pedestrian streets, tourist attractions, resorts and airports to expand nationwide coverage.

Measures will also be taken to promote the inclusion of international brands, popular domestic products and time-honored brands, as well as souvenir, gift and specialty stores, as part of the tax refund network.

The policy move comes as China is

ramping up efforts to boost consumption amid fresh trade tensions triggered by the United States' imposition of arbitrary tariffs on many trade partners including China.

Speaking at a news conference in Beijing, Sheng Qiuping, vice-minister of commerce, noted that inbound consumption contributed about 0.5 percent to China's GDP last year, compared with 1 percent to 3 percent in other major economies, underscoring substantial growth potential.

He said the tax refund mechanism plays a critical role in lowering shopping costs for foreign visitors and attracting greater inbound consumption. "For example, under the prevailing value-added tax system, the refund rate for general goods is set at 11 percent, effectively providing a more than 10 percent discount."

Under the policy, foreign visitors can claim VAT rebates directly at departure tax refund stores, enabling them to reuse the refunded amount in real time for further shopping. Previously, VAT rebates were only available for withdrawal upon departure, according to information released by the State Taxation Administration.

The upgraded tax refund policy,

initially implemented in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, has been expanded to a nationwide rollout.

The Commerce Ministry said that last year, the total spending by inbound travelers reached \$94.2 billion, up 77.8 percent year-on-year.

Miao Muyang, director of the industrial development department of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, said the upgraded policy will not only help expand inbound tourism, but also promote the outbound reach of more high-quality domestic products.

In addition to raising the cash refund limit from 10,000 yuan to 20,000 yuan, the government will also strengthen cooperation between tax refund agencies and payment institutions to offer refund services through multiple channels, including mobile payments, bank cards and cash.

"These adjustments are aimed at encouraging foreign visitors to purchase a wide range of products in China," said Jia Rong, director of the Finance Ministry's tax policy department.

See *Refund*, page 3

## DECLUTTERING SERVICES FOR HOARDERS TURNING A TIDY PROFIT

'Shopping therapy' for lonely elders, stressed workers sees rise in messy homes

By YANG FEIYUE  
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Jin Wei and his wife were in a state of shock as they dug through the piles of trash in his mother-in-law's apartment.

From moldy rice infested with bugs, to bags of expired snacks, an old spittoon, a large bundle of used toothbrushes, stained floors,

and a dirty washing table, the couple had been slaving away since February and a month later were still only halfway through the cleanup.



Apart from the toil, they had to deal with his mother-in-law's regular protests about not throwing out her clutter.

For Jin, a 30-something father from Shandong province, the challenge of dealing with her hoarding began long before he fully understood the extent of the problem.

See *Hoarders*, page 2

## WORLD WATCH

By Alan Barrell

## Innovation, leadership build better world for all

We live in a world of knowledge and human capability unimaginable even a short time ago. The evolution of knowledge, the understanding of and engagement with computer science, digital technology, artificial intelligence and machine learning have brought humankind astonishing capability to apply and engage its collective intelligence and digital competence to make the world a better place for all.

However, the media is not celebrating the achievements, but is instead obsessed with "who is leading and who is stealing technology" rather than focusing on cooperating with competitors to achieve a common goal.

On the international stage, ever since late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping nearly 50 years ago announced that China would open up to become a full-scale participant in the global economy, China has invested and developed to excel in technology and innovation.

The Economist recently described China as "the world's innovation lab". Innovation is now frequently spoken of, but I am unsure whether innovation is understood as being an important set of often complex processes that enable creative ideas to become life-improving products and services and contribute to economic and social development.

I have been visiting China for more than 30 years. I have seen so much, learned so much and been privileged to observe the emergence of leadership — not only in the position and performance of China in the technical aspects of innovation, but also in China's positioning in education, research, and understanding of the significance of digital technology and its application.

I have also witnessed how China explores ways through which advanced technology, human values, and the continuing evolution of human intelligence can best be enabled to work together for optimal effectiveness and human fulfillment.

It is clear that China is a leader in advanced technologies such as AI, clean technologies, computer science and bioscience. Characterizations of China as a low-cost manufacturing center are now obsolete.

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INSIDE

Power points

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Robots in traditional costumes walk the runway on Saturday during an ethnic fashion show at a terraced rice field in Congjiang, Southwest China's Guizhou province. WU DEJUN / XINHUA

## PAGE TWO

# Hoarders: Emotional toll unveiled by reality

From page 1

What started as a minor annoyance — a messy kitchen or a living room filled with unused items — gradually escalated into a full-blown crisis that threatened not only the family's harmony, but also the woman's mental and physical health.

## Tipping point

His mother-in-law's hoarding tendencies became more pronounced after her husband passed away in 2016. "She lost her emotional anchor, and she stopped going out and poured all her energy into shopping and accumulating things," he recalled.

Living alone in a 90-square-meter apartment, his mother-in-law, aged in her 50s, filled every corner with items — some useful, many not.

"At first, it was just a few extra kitchen gadgets or clothes," Jin recalled. "But over time, it became overwhelming. She spent her entire pension on things she didn't need, and the clutter took over her life."

The tipping point came when the hoarding began to affect her health and endanger Jin's baby daughter. "She was just learning to walk and may have tripped over things or have things fall on her," he said.

In late February, Jin and his wife decided to tackle the problem head-on. They started with the kitchen, which was filled with unused pots, expired food, and piles of plastic bags.

"We threw out a lot, but we made sure to involve her in the process," Jin said. "At first, she was happy to see the kitchen clean, but when we moved to the living room, she started to resist."

The two women often became locked in fierce arguments. To avoid conflict, the couple used a mix of persuasion and subtle tactics, distracting the mother-in-law by asking her to look after their daughter while stealthily removing items she didn't need.

Jin believes his mother-in-law's hoarding is rooted in deeper emotional struggles.

"She's lonely and bored," he said. "Shopping gives her a sense of purpose, but it's also a way to fill the void left by my father-in-law's passing."

When Jin posted the cleaning process on social media platforms Douyin and Xiaohongshu, he got more than 7 million hits. Some left comments suggesting that he sought professional help for his mother-in-law, but Jin said she was not open to seeing a psychologist.

"We're trying to address the issue step by step, approaching her with empathy and patience," he said, adding that he and his wife constantly reminded themselves that she is not being difficult intentionally.

Despite the challenges, the clean-up has brought positive changes.

"She's starting to cut back on the shopping and thinks twice about whether she will really use the things she has an impulse to buy. Otherwise, she worries we are going to throw them out later," he said.

However, Jin knows the journey is far from over.

"We've only cleared about a third of the apartment so far," he said. "But we're committed to helping her regain control of her life."

For now, the family is taking it one step at a time. "It's not just about cleaning her home — it's about helping her find peace and purpose. We're trying to show her that life can be fulfilling without all the clutter," Jin said.

The family has also made plans to renovate her apartment after all the mess is gone, in the hope a fresh environment will encourage her to keep it in order.

"We want to help her move forward, not just physically but emotionally," Jin explained.

The couple are planning to take her on trips and encourage her to join programs at a seniors' university. "She needs something to focus on besides shopping," he said.

## Shopping 'therapy'

Elderly individuals, often grappling with loneliness and a lack of social support, are increasingly prone to developing psychological issues such as hoarding disorders, according to experts.

“I’ve learned that less is more. Having too much becomes a burden, not a joy.”

Ting Ting, a hoarder from Chengdu, Sichuan province

Zhou Ying, a specialist with the Shanghai-based Huangpu district mental health center, said many retirees feel isolated, helpless, and anxious due to distant relationships with their children, loss of loved ones, or shrinking social circles. This emotional void drives them to seek security, control, and a sense of accomplishment through hoarding.

Physiological factors also play a significant role. With cognitive decline, the elderly are likely to have difficulties managing their belongings effectively, exacerbating hoarding behaviors, Zhou said, adding that understanding and support from family members, and lifestyle adjustments can help address the issue.

Rising incomes, the convenience of online shopping, and fast-paced work have also given rise to young people impulse shopping, according to a white paper on China's tidying and organization industry launched by social media platform Sina.

For Ting Ting from Chengdu, Sichuan province, the thrill of buying was once an irresistible escape. From designer clothes to crystals and ceramics, her purchases filled her 280-square-meter rented home to the brim.

Her hoarding habits took root in 2013 when she started to deal in clothes. "I convinced myself that buying clothes was part of the business," she said.

But during the pandemic, her shopping escalated, and she started buying crystals, then stands for them, along with pottery and bronze vessels. "Before I knew it, my home was overflowing," she said.

By 2023, the clutter had become unbearable.

"Every surface was covered, even the floors," Ting said. "I felt this constant pressure, like the walls were closing in."

Realizing she had a problem, she opened a store to sell her excess items. But the venture, which closed in February, only added to her stress. Although it helped her get rid of half her pottery and bronze vessels, she found it taxing to run a shop.

Ting traces her hoarding tendencies to her childhood. "I never had much growing up. When I finally had money, I wanted to make up for all those years and be my own master and to spend money," she said.

Her shopping habits became a way to assert control and find comfort. At the peak of her buying mania, she received 20 to 30 packages a day.

"Buying gave me a rush, but the happiness never lasted. Once I opened the packages, the excitement faded," she said.

Her journey to decluttering began in earnest when she moved from her spacious loft to a 100-square-meter apartment, and later to a 70-square-meter home.

"Moving forced me to confront the chaos. And I realized I needed to make space for myself, not just my possessions," she said.

She has established strict criteria for her decluttering process. "If many people wanted to buy something I owned, but I didn't want to part with it, that's how I knew it was worth keeping," she explained. "From there, I narrowed it down further to only the items that truly brought me joy or served a practical purpose."

Today, Ting's home is a far cry from its former state. Her crystals, once scattered across every surface, now fill just three cabinets in her living room. Her pottery collection, once numbering in the thousands, has been neatly stashed into dozens of labeled boxes.

"I've learned that less is more," she said. "Having too much becomes a burden, not a joy."

## Order from chaos

Xie Feng, from Shenyang, Liaoning province, has helped more than

6,000 families with hoarding problems since he stumbled into a growing demand for decluttering services in 2021.

He worked in the private tutoring and training sector before switching careers. "Young people were too busy to clean, and the wealthy were obsessed with online shopping. I figured there was a need for someone to step in and bring order to the chaos," the 30-year-old added.

Xie and his partner founded Lixiangjia (Ideal Home) cleaning business, targeting affluent clients who valued a pristine home environment.

He started out getting five to six job orders a month, each paying 4,000 to 5,000 yuan (\$555-\$694).

But as word spread, his client base expanded to include a broader demographic. "I started getting calls from young professionals and elderly couples whose homes were overrun with possessions," he said.

His business has grown exponentially since its inception. He now handles over 300 orders a month, with a team of 60 organizers. "In 2023, we started offering group discounts on platforms like Douyin, which boosted our client base significantly," he said.

While most homes can be organized in a day, some projects, like a sprawling villa, take up to six days.

"The goal is always the same: to help my clients reclaim their homes by creating a space that's functional, orderly, and peaceful," Xie said.

He has noticed distinct patterns among his clients. For younger hoarders, the issue often stems from a desire to compensate for having less in their childhood.

"Many of them grew up unable to afford the things they wanted," he explained. "Now, with stable incomes, they're buying clothes, gadgets, and more — often leaving tags on items they never use."

Older clients, however, lived through times of material scarcity, so they hold onto everything, even expired food or broken appliances.

In one extreme case, a client who couldn't let go of a bottle of vinegar that had expired 7 years ago insisted it was "better with age."

Another memorable encounter involved a client whose floor was covered in mountains of black garbage bags stuffed with clothes. "The client had bought outfits for every stage of her life, almost as if she was trying to reclaim the childhood she never had," he said.

Xie believes the root cause of hoarding often lies in emotional needs. "For young people, it's about self-reward after a stressful day. For the elderly, it's a fear of scarcity," he said.

To help clients let go of their belongings, Xie uses a mix of practicality and empathy.

"I remind them that 1 square meter of their home costs tens of thousands of yuan, while the item they're clinging to might be worth just a little money. It's just not worth letting those items that no longer serve them stand in the way," he said.

Xie takes pride in the transformation of his clients' homes, which often has a profound emotional impact on them.

"Many people are shocked to see how much they've accumulated," he says. "One client realized she had spent over 200,000 yuan on clothes she never wore. It was a wake-up call," he said.

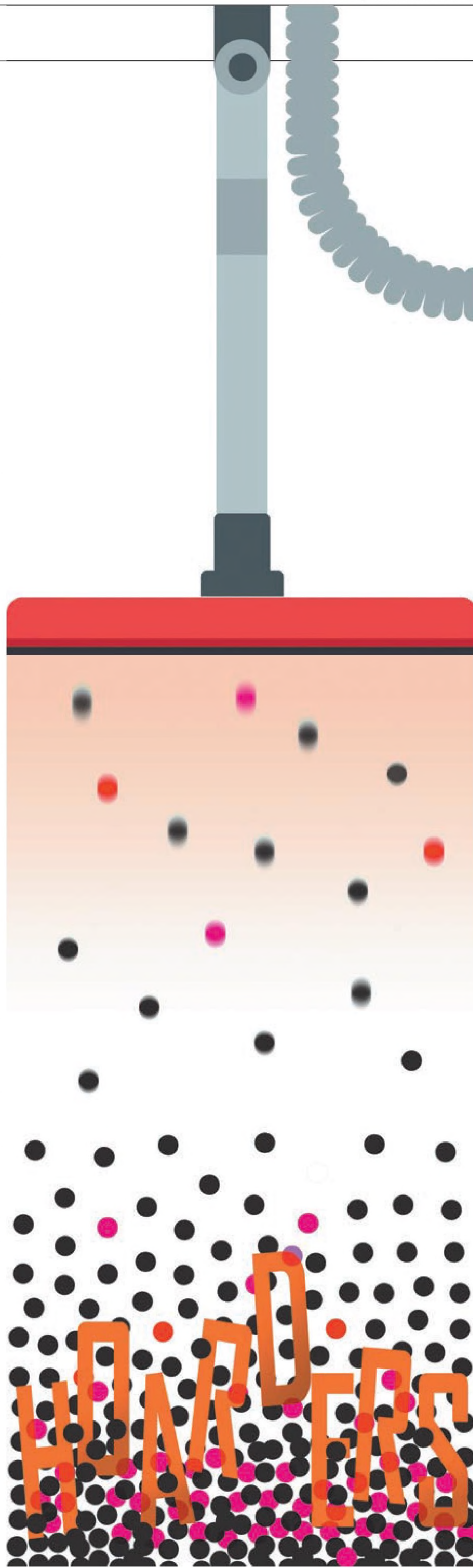
"With the rise of e-commerce and fast manufacturing, it's easier than ever to buy things. People tend to spend without thinking, and the clutter piles up," he said.

Xie hopes to raise awareness about the problem and encourage more people to seek help. "Whether your home is big or small, it has a limited capacity," he said. "The key is to make sure your possessions serve you, not the other way around," he said.

Looking ahead, he plans to expand his services to include education.

"We want to teach people how to use their storage space effectively and maintain order in their homes," he said.

"It's about empowering them to take control of their lives."



LU PING / CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (third from left), Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Murat Nurtleu (center), Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Jeenbek Kulubaev (second from left), Tajik Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhridin (second from right), Uzbek Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov (third from right), Turkmenistan's Ambassador to China Parahat Durdoyev (right) and Secretary-General of the Secretariat of the China-Central Asia Mechanism Sun Weidong (left) pose for a group photo at the sixth China-Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on Saturday. LI RENZI / XINHUA

## Nations vow to uphold multilateralism

Foreign ministers' meeting in Almaty sends strong message of renewed unity

By ZHANG YUNBI

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China and all five of its Central Asian neighbors have reached fresh consensus and made productive action plans for shoring up free trade, building up connectivity and upholding multilateralism, as their senior diplomats met on Saturday in Almaty, Kazakhstan, for the sixth China-Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

The senior diplomats engaged in in-depth discussions on advancing China-Central Asia cooperation in various aspects. The meeting was expected to pave the way for the second China-Central Asia Summit, which will be held in Astana, Kazakhstan, in June.

The gathering sent a strong message of renewed unity among the six nations to jointly reject unilateralism and protectionism amid lingering tariff wars and trade wars initiated by Washington, officials said.

The China-Central Asia mechanism was launched in 2020, and

the first China-Central Asia Summit was held in 2023 in Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

All members of the mechanism exchanged views on documents to be signed at the upcoming summit, and they vowed further coordination to make the summit a great success, according to a joint statement about the Saturday meeting released by China's Foreign Ministry.

While addressing the meeting, Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Murat Nurtleu said, "The upcoming meeting of leaders will open a new milestone of eternal friendship and prosperity."

The six countries are "creating all conditions" for the China-Central Asia mechanism to "become a flagship among the mechanisms of (Central Asia Plus)," the newspaper Astana Times quoted Nurtleu as saying.

China is Central Asia's top trading partner and a major source of investment.

At the meeting, Foreign Minister

Wang Yi said that China will unwaveringly advance high-level cooperation within the framework of the mechanism, expand industrial cooperation, ensure the stability of production and supply chains, and enhance efficiency," the joint statement said.

China has stepped forward and taken necessary countermeasures "not only to defend its own legitimate rights and interests, but also to safeguard international rules and order as well as international fairness and justice," Wang said.

Regarding trade and production, the meeting's joint statement said that "the (attending) parties reaffirm their support for multilateralism and the rules of international trade, do not approve of the practice of unilateral protectionism, and will strengthen coordination and form a united position in this regard in order to safeguard their legitimate rights and interests."

The six nations welcomed the holding of import and export exhibitions as well as the rolling out of business and investment activities among them.

In addition, they underlined the necessity to "strengthen investment cooperation within the framework of the mechanism, expand industrial cooperation, ensure the stability of production and supply chains, and enhance efficiency," the joint statement said.

According to China's General Administration of Customs, China's total trade with the five Central Asian countries reached \$77.132 billion in the first 10 months of last year.

In the first quarter of this year, China's total trade with the five countries increased 6.9 percent year-on-year, Xinhua News Agency reported on April 18.

Han Chunlin, China's ambassador to Kazakhstan, noted recently that China has signed cooperation documents with all five Central Asian countries on co-building the Belt and Road, "setting a benchmark in the global arena."

Regarding the joint building of a community with a shared future, Han wrote in an article this month in People's Daily that "China and Central Asian countries respect one another's path of development of independent choice, firmly support one another in core interests relat-

ed to national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and resolutely oppose interference from outside."

On behalf of Beijing, Foreign Minister Wang put forward a five-point proposal at the meeting on Saturday for deepening China-Central Asia cooperation. It calls for being firm in upholding good faith and fostering harmony; sticking to mutually beneficial cooperation; further advancing institutional development; adhering to fairness and justice; and being firm in friendship for generations.

"All attending parties agreed that China serves as a stabilizing force in a turbulent world and has demonstrated leadership in supporting multilateralism," China's Foreign Ministry said in a news release on Saturday.

The five Central Asian countries said they are ready to strengthen the synergy between their national development strategies and the Belt and Road Initiative.

The five nations are also ready to further jointly combat the "three evil forces" of terrorism, extremism and separatism, and transnational crime in order to maintain regional peace and stability, according to the nations' diplomats.

## Macro approach drives growth in profits

By OUYANG SHIJIA, LIU ZHIHUA and MA SI

Profits at China's major industrial companies returned to growth in the first quarter, underpinned by the strengthening of high-tech sectors and pointing to strong economic resilience amid trade tensions with the United States, official data showed on Sunday.

Although external headwinds are poised to weigh on China's exports and the broader economy in the second quarter, economists said the country has ample policy tools and space to address internal and external challenges. As the latest tone-setting Party leadership meeting suggests, policymakers are taking a forward-looking, effective and targeted macro approach to stabilize the overall economy.

Economists expect to see a U-shaped recovery this year, with the overall economy gradually stabilizing in the second half amid strong fiscal stimulus and increased support for enterprises.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Sunday that China's industrial enterprises above designated size — with annual revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.7 million) — saw total profits increase 0.8 percent year-on-year to reach 1.5 trillion yuan in the first quarter, following a 3.3 percent fall last year.

In March, profits of industrial enterprises above designated size jumped 2.6 percent year-on-year, reversing a 0.3 percent decline in the first two months.

Yu Weining, a statistician at the NBS, said the rebound in industrial profits was mainly driven by the robust performance of high-tech

manufacturing, aided by stimulus packages including incentives for large-scale equipment upgrades and trade-in deals for consumer goods.

"Incremental and existing policies have worked in tandem, driving a strong start for the industrial economy," Yu said in a statement.

Duan Yaohui, senior vice-president of Oppo, said the Chinese smartphone vendor has witnessed strong growth in premium smartphones, close on the heels of China's favorable policies to promote sales of consumer electronic devices.

Despite the continued recovery in industrial profits, Yu, from the NBS, noted that the external environment is becoming increasingly complex and challenging amid rising instability and uncertainties, and called for more efforts to better implement the announced policy measures and fully unleash the policy potential.

On Friday, a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee emphasized the need to coordinate domestic economic work and endeavors in the international economic and trade field, with efforts focused on stabilizing employment, enterprises, markets and expectations.

Justin Yifu Lin, dean of the Institute of New Structural Economics at Peking University, said that amid the US' volatile tariff policy, China needs to make full use of its policy space, and it could introduce more fiscal and monetary policy measures to address lackluster demand.

Lin said it is a wise choice for the government to introduce fiscal stimulus to promote household consumption and support more new infrastructure projects.

On the monetary policy front, he said that reserve requirement ratio and interest rate cuts would help maintain ample liquidity, while using structural monetary tools to channel more lending to emerging sectors would help boost investment and support consumption.

"China, as a large economy, has far greater fiscal and monetary policy space compared with many other countries," Lin said during an exclusive interview with China Daily. "As long as we fully utilize this policy space ... we can expect stability and continued progress this year and beyond."

Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said that China's economy has made a strong start this year, maintaining its recovery momentum, with financial markets performing steadily.

Looking ahead, the PBOC will implement an appropriately accommodative monetary policy to support the high-quality development of the economy, Pan said while attending the Second Meeting of the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors last week.

Zhang Jun, chief economist at China Galaxy Securities, said the central bank is expected to employ a combination of both quantitative and structural policy tools, including cutting RRR and interest rates.

The government is also expected to introduce a range of structural monetary policies, Zhang added.

Zhou Lanxun and Liu Yukun contributed to this story.

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## Refund: Visa-free policy expands inbound travel

From page 1

In the first quarter of 2025, customs authorities at Beijing Capital International Airport and Beijing Daxing International Airport collectively verified 4,801 departure tax refund applications submitted by overseas travelers, a year-on-year increase of more than 122 percent, while the total refund amount came to 240 million yuan, up 82 percent year-on-year, according to statistics from Beijing Customs.

Zhao Zhao, deputy head of customs at the Daxing airport, said that China's 240-hour visa-free transit policy, available to ordinary passport holders of more than 50 countries, has significantly boosted

the number of foreign visitors and their spending amounts in China.

Data from the National Immigration Administration shows that foreign nationals made 9.22 million entries into China through various ports in the first quarter, a year-on-year increase of 40.2 percent, indicating that inbound travel is continuing to gain momentum.

Tsimber Maksim, a Russian tourist, said he bought many items in Shanghai last week, including clothes for his children, sneakers and household goods.

Maksim received an 11 percent refund after he submitted an application, listing all the purchased items and their corresponding prices and taxes, at the customs declaration counter at the Daxing airport.

## Fitness and grace



Local tai chi enthusiasts perform on Saturday to celebrate World Tai Chi Day, which is usually observed on the last Saturday of April, in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. GAYAN SAMEERA / XINHUA

## Technology: Creativity advances industrial progress

From page 1

China and its people are bringing creativity, new knowledge, innovation and leadership in areas with enormous potential for scientific and industrial development.

I have worked in China and with Chinese people in academia, business and education for decades. When I first visited China, it was a very different place in terms of infrastructure and economic positioning than it is today.

In my early days in China, Deng's vision, policies and leadership generated a momentum which gathered pace in subsequent decades, leading to the China today — a world leader in many spheres. Since that great reform and opening-up drive heralded by Deng, China has lifted about 800 million people out of poverty.

The West has been reluctant to acknowledge the achievements and successes of China. For many decades, the United States has been "No 1 in the world." It has been hard for the US and its people to contemplate not being the leader. In my view, the West has found it hard to understand and accept that "Western democracy" might not be an attractive approach to a nation of 1.4 billion Chinese people, the inheritors of a rich culture with ancient origins.

In recognizing the reality of China as a leader in science and technology, a major economy on a growth trajectory despite cyclical fluctuations, and a respected world leader, many in the West are seriously and sensibly reassessing.

Promoting connectedness

The geopolitical situation worldwide is not positive. Politicians have failed to bring about global togetherness and success.

My own work — connected with many Chinese organizations and groups focused on international education and cross-border relationship — has been enormously encouraging.

In the United Kingdom I perceive there is a strong countervailing mindset and movement that sees more in pursuit of global connectedness, common purpose and understanding.

This may not be a vocal lobby, but it is active and powerful and making positive things happen. There are visionaries and leaders, with deep knowledge and experience of building global businesses, now devoting their energies to promoting positive concepts of partnership, universality, and collective and connected human endeavor, and optimizing the potential in technology to make the world a better place for all.

The leadership toward togetherness, which is possible, will not be the brash leadership of politics — but inspiration and encouragement toward human connectedness enhanced and enabled by the near magic of evolving digital technology.

Citizens and leaders of the world can make positive things happen across barriers and borders in daily work of connectedness and relationship-building between people.

In my work with large numbers of young people — high school students and university undergraduates from different countries, many from China, I find great encouragement in how so many display and even radiate, hope and expectancy about the future. My generation owes it to the next to work hard to nurture this spirit and do all we can to make our world a place in which it can flourish.

The author is director of the China Future Creative Class Cambridge Academy. He is also honorary doctoral fellow at Anglia Ruskin University, the United Kingdom, and visiting professor at Liaoning University in Shenyang, Liaoning province. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China.

## CHINA

# Green draft to be scrutinized by legislators

Environmental code, when adopted, will help improve ecological protection

By HOU LIQIANG  
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A draft environmental code, poised to become China's second formal statutory code once adopted, has been submitted to an ongoing session of the country's top legislature for a first reading.

The draft code includes 10 existing laws related to ecological and environmental protection, such as the Environmental Protection Law, the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment and the Law on Atmospheric Pollution Prevention and Control, Shen Chunyao, head of the Legislative Affairs Commission of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, said on Sunday.

Key principles from current laws on river basin management, natural resources and biodiversity protection have also been incorporated or reflected in the draft code, Shen said in a report to the session, which opened on Sunday and will run through Wednesday.

Although China has yet to enact dedicated laws on tackling climate change, peaking carbon dioxide emissions, achieving carbon neutrality and promoting low-carbon development, the draft code includes directive provisions on these issues, he said. These provisions aim to establish basic principles and lay a foundation for future legislation.

The draft stipulates that the national government should strengthen monitoring of greenhouse gases and the climate system, and establish a system for releasing related monitoring information.

Before the environmental code, China's national legislature adopted the Civil Code in 2020.

"The new code is not simply a legal compilation, nor is it entirely new legislation," Shen said.

Rather, it is a systematic integration, compilation, revision and enhancement of China's existing laws, institutions, rules and norms for ecological and environmental protection, Shen said. It also involves institutional innovation to meet new demands and improve the systemic, holistic, coordinated and timely nature of the country's legal framework for environmental protection.

The draft stresses the integrated protection of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands and deserts, considering eco-environmental elements such as the atmosphere, water and soil, Shen said.

It also aims to solve prominent problems in the environmental sector that hinder high-quality development and protection efforts, he added.

"The new code is not simply a legal compilation, nor is it entirely new legislation."

Shen Chunyao, head of the Legislative Affairs Commission of the Standing Committee of the NPC

Shen said compiling the code is an essential requirement of China's people-centered development philosophy. As the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved into the gap between unbalanced, inadequate development and people's growing needs for a better life, the public's demand for a sound ecological environment has become a significant part of this contradiction, he said.

Despite significant achievements in promoting ecological civilization, China still faces a challenging ecological and environmental situation, with a range of emerging issues, he said.

Compiling the code is a proactive step to adapt to new circumstances and enhance legal protections for addressing pressing environmental concerns voiced by the public, Shen said.

The draft code has a solid foundation, said Huang Haihua, spokesperson for the Legislative Affairs Commission, at a news briefing on Friday.

Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization has provided fundamental guidance for compiling the code, Huang said, while China's achievements in promoting ecological civilization have offered valuable experiences.

He said the concept that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" has become deeply rooted in people's hearts, driving demands for stringent systems and robust legal frameworks to safeguard the ecological environment.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, China's legal system for ecological and environmental protection has advanced with the times, providing a systematic foundation for compiling the code, Huang said.

According to the committee, China has established a comprehensive legislative framework for ecological and environmental protection, encompassing more than 30 national laws, over 100 national administrative regulations, and more than 1,000 regional regulations.

## Happy to learn



Foreign tourists line up to try their hand at pouring tea with a long-spout teapot at a spring market stall outside Xingtu station of Nantong Metro Line 2 in Jiangsu province, on Saturday. The event featured nearly 30 stalls for cultural experiences and international exchanges, attracting both locals and international friends. XU CONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Fewer young people tying the knot as perceptions of marriage change

China recorded 1.81 million marriage registrations in the first quarter of this year, marking an 8 percent drop from the same period last year, according to data from the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

After nine consecutive years of decline, China's marriage registration numbers saw a brief rebound in 2023. However, the downward trend resumed in 2024, with registrations falling to their lowest level since 1980.

Experts attribute this general drop to a shrinking population of people in the age range suitable for marriage, changing perceptions of marriage and financial concerns associated with getting married.

"In the 1980s, more than 20 million people were born each year in China, but since 2000, that number has dropped to just over 10 million annually. So naturally, the base number for marriage registrations is much lower now," said Jiang Quanbao, a professor at the institute for population and development studies at Xi'an Jiaotong University in Northwest China's Shaanxi province.

Li Ting, a population expert at Renmin University of China in Beijing, noted that higher levels of education and a growing sense of individualism have combined to significantly challenge traditional views on marriage.

"Nowadays, master's students are already 25 or 26 by the time they graduate, and PhD graduates are usually close to 30 — even older if they spend a few years working first," said Tan Kejia, a researcher at the Shanxi Academy

of Social Sciences in North China. "In the past, young people often got married around the time they graduated or started working, but now many won't consider marriage until they're planning to have children," Li added.

Also, for some young people, staying single is a conscious choice.

As one user on microblogging platform Weibo put it: "If I were married, there's no way I'd enjoy the kind of freedom I have now." Another commented: "If I can't find the right person, I'd rather stay single than settle."

Others active on Weibo pointed to life pressures, noting that raising a child can be exhausting and often requires the whole family including their parents to be involved.

Sociologist Li Yinhe believes the growing number of single individuals is closely tied to China's ongoing urbanization and modernization processes.

"In the past, women who didn't marry often had no means of supporting themselves. But today, women are fully capable of earning a living on their own and no longer need to rely on men. As a result, the desire to marry has dropped significantly compared to earlier times," she said.

While Chinese society has grown more accepting of people living alone, the drop in marriage rates has also led to falling birth rates — a trend that is sparking increasing concern.

### Wedding incentives

In response to these changes, authorities across China have introduced various incentives to

foster a newlywed-friendly society.

Earlier this month, the government revised its marriage registration rules, reducing paperwork and giving couples more flexibility to choose where to register their union. The new regulations will take effect on May 10 this year.

Some areas have already begun offering incentives to encourage marriage. In one village in Guangzhou, South China's Guangdong province, newlywed couples can apply for a bonus of up to 40,000 yuan (\$5,490), while the city of Luyluang in North China's Shanxi province offers 1,500 yuan to women who marry at or under the age of 35. In addition, eastern Zhejiang province has extended its paid marriage leave from three to 13 days.

China is also offering increasing comfort and convenience to single young adults — as a "singles economy" quietly takes shape.

Restaurants are introducing single-serving meals, the market for single-person apartments is booming, and compact home appliances and kitchenware are gaining increasing popularity.

There's even growing demand for services like customized solo travel and one-person wedding photo shoots.

Li Ting noted that over the past three decades, the rate of people choosing to remain single for life in countries like South Korea and Japan has steadily increased, a trend that may well reflect the future of marriage in China.

XINHUA

## Q1 intl air travel soars to new heights

By LUO WANGSHU  
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China's international air transport sector saw a sustained recovery in the first quarter, with flight numbers and passenger volumes continuing to climb, the Civil Aviation Administration of China said on Sunday.

During the period, Chinese and foreign airlines operated an average of 6,395 international passenger flights per week, representing 83.9 percent of the level recorded in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the Spring Festival travel rush, weekly flights peaked at 6,960, reaching 91.3 percent of pre-pandemic levels, said Shang Kejia, deputy director of the administration's transport department, at a news conference in Beijing.

Flights between China and 35 countries, including Japan, the United Kingdom and Italy, have already exceeded 2019 levels. Flights between China and countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative have recovered to 94.5 percent of pre-pandemic levels, outpacing the overall average.

### 18.93 million

international passenger trips traveled on Chinese airlines in the first quarter of this year.

Passenger volume also showed strong growth. Chinese airlines transported 18.93 million international traveler trips in the first quarter, up 34 percent year-on-year and 4.5 percent higher than the same period in 2019. Passenger traffic to Northeast Asia rose by 20 percent while West Asia, Central Asia, Europe and Africa by 91 percent, 233 percent, 71 percent and 241 percent, respectively, compared with 2019 figures.

A total of 28 Chinese airlines and 100 foreign airlines are operating international routes linking China with 78 countries — four more than before the pandemic. The network of air routes connecting China with traditional markets in Asia and Europe has continued to improve, while links with Latin America, the South Pacific and Africa have expanded, enhancing international air connectivity.

Shang said China will continue to promote the expansion of international passenger flights. Efforts will focus on optimizing the structure and quality of civil aviation services to traditional markets, such as encouraging airlines to offer differentiated services to better compete, while actively expanding route networks in emerging markets to better serve the BRI.

Passenger and flight volumes are expected to reach a new peak during the upcoming five-day May Day holiday, which begins on Thursday. Travel demand will mainly center on popular destinations such as Japan, South Korea, and countries and regions in Southeast Asia, Shang said.

Improvements in visa facilitation policies and the broader rollout of services such as instant tax refunds for overseas visitors are expected to boost inbound travel, supporting a steady increase in foreign airlines' operations in China.

In response to rising demand, Air China, the country's flagship carrier, recently announced major updates to its international flight network. The airline will launch new routes from Beijing to Cairo and Toronto during the summer and autumn seasons, while also opening services to Vladivostok and Irkutsk.

A new route between Beijing Daxing International Airport and Seoul will begin operations, along with the resumption of flights from Chengdu in Sichuan province to Tokyo and Paris.

To strengthen connectivity with Central Asia, Air China will introduce several new routes in June and July, including Beijing to Tashkent, Urumqi in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to Tashkent, and Beijing to Almaty. These new services are expected to bolster China's BRI and promote broader international cooperation.

## Elite bikers



Motorcyclists participate in the second national city elite motorcycle parade in Huaibei, Anhui province, on Saturday. Around 400 motorcycles and 600 riders from 50 cities in the country, displaying different brands and models, paraded through the city, with checkpoints set up along the route for the riders to interact with tourists. WANG WEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

By XU NUO

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Chinese mainland students accounted for 10.9 percent of the international student body in Irish higher education last year, making China the third-largest source country for foreign students in Ireland behind India and the United States, according to the 2025 Report on Studying in Ireland.

The report, jointly released by Chinese education consultancy EIC Education, Education in Ireland and University College Dublin at the Irish embassy in Beijing on Wednesday, provides insights into application trends for studying in Ireland, as well as popular programs, scholarships and employment opportunities.

"Its aim is to offer comprehensive guidance and support for Chinese students planning to study in Ireland," said Sunny Sun, director of UK & Ireland Program Management at EIC.

According to data from the Irish visa office, the number of visas issued to Chinese students for studying in Ireland reached 3,560 last year, the highest in a decade and a 10.52 percent increase compared to 2023.

The number of Chinese students pursuing higher education in Ireland steadily increased from 2015 to 2019, declined from 2020 to 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic, and began rising again in 2023, the report said.

Data from EIC Education showed that over the past six years, the most popular majors among applicants from the Chinese mainland have been electronic and computer engineering, accounting for 14.35 percent of applications, followed by business-related majors such as finance (8.72 percent), marketing (7.46 percent), management (5.77 percent), and accounting (5.53 percent).

The strong demand for electronic and computer engineering programs is due to Ireland's highly

developed information industry.

The report also explored the reasons why Chinese students choose Ireland as a study destination. It found that 59.1 percent of respondents cited the international recognition of Irish university diplomas. Meanwhile, 55.7 percent were attracted by favorable work visa policies and local job opportunities, and 42.6 percent considered the cost of studying in Ireland relatively low.

One former student, who gave his name as Eason, attended Trinity College Dublin in Ireland for his master's from 2019 to 2020. He said the primary reason he chose to study in Ireland was that it is a highly cost-effective destination for overseas studies and offers generous scholarships.

"I only spent a little over 200,000 yuan (\$27,443) in total for the year, including tuition and living expenses," he said.

He added that Chinese companies such as Huawei and Tencent have set up branches in Ireland.

*Editor's note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.*

# Living in peace with pangolins



Population of protected species on the rise after years of conservation efforts

By **YAN DONGJIE** and **LI WENDING** in Huizhou, Guangdong

In the lush forests of Huidong county, Guangdong province, a quiet revolution is unfolding.

Once teetering on the brink of extinction, Chinese pangolins — scaly, ant-eating mammals — are slowly increasing in number here, thanks to a decadelong grassroots conservation effort that blends science, community engagement and ecological restoration.

The Huidong Wuqinzhong pangolin reserve, a 120-square-kilometer sanctuary bordering the Pearl River Delta, has become a lifeline for the species. Li Cheng, project director of the Xizi River Conservation Center, said that infrared camera monitoring shows pangolin activity has expanded from deep in the wilds to closer to villages, with even roadside burrows spotted.

"Their estimated population here now exceeds 100 — a fragile but critical recovery," said Li, who recently witnessed a mother pangolin and her pangopup at a burrow entrance, their tails entwined. "These 'forest architects' are reclaiming their role in the ecosystem."

Decades of poaching and habitat loss had reduced China's wild pangolin numbers to below those of giant pandas. But since 2018, coordinated anti-poaching patrols and village education campaigns have slashed illegal hunting.

Xu Zhuduo, a reformed former hunter turned ranger, patrols daily to document pangolin burrows. "I used

to trap them. Now, villagers call us when they spot pangolins," he said, recalling his awe at discovering a burrow with newborn pups last spring.

The conservation model here emphasizes coexistence. Zuokeng village in the reserve has transitioned to eco-tourism and pesticide-free rice farming, with pangolins becoming an unlikely mascot for sustainable development.

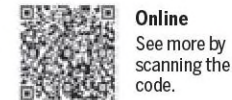
Education has been the driving force behind the cultural shift. Sixth-grader Xu Yiqin confidently explained: "Pangolins are national first-class protected animals. They eat termites, saving forests." Her classmate Xu Zhifeng added, "Saving water protects their homes."

Critical infrastructure adaptations have also aided the efforts. An experimental wildlife corridor bridges a hydropower canal that once fragmented habitats. Infrared footage confirms pangolins, leopard cats and boars now traverse the structure. "It's about balancing development and conservation," Li said.

As dusk falls over the reserve, the rustle of pangolins digging echoes through valleys — a testament to a community rewriting its relationship with nature.

*Wang Demin contributed to this story.*

Contact the writers at [yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn)



## PANGOLIN SPECIES



**EXTINCTION RISK**

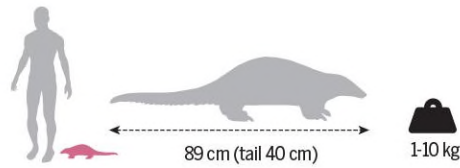
← Less risk → More risk →

LC NT VU EN **CR** EW EX

Least concern Critically Endangered Extinct

Listed as a national Level I protected wildlife species in China

**3 subspecies of Chinese pangolin:** South China subspecies (south of Yangtze River), Nominotypical subspecies (Taiwan), Hainan subspecies (Hainan Island)

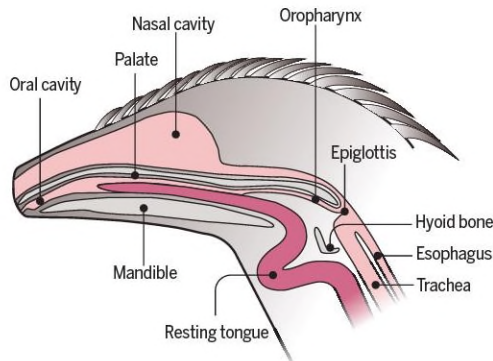


**UNIQUE FEATURES**

Streamlined body, curved foreclaws, toothless with a 40 cm sticky tongue, large ear flaps, small eyes with dark irises

**HEAD**

Pangolins' narrow mouths and throats are perfect for their specialized diets.

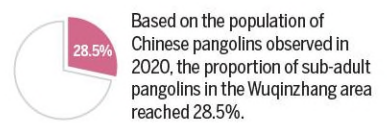


When the tongue is relaxed, a portion folds in on itself within the neck.

**RELAXED**

The internal tongue coils inward along the abdominal wall toward the right kidney.

**Diet:** Ants in summer, termites in winter (~300g daily)



**ACTIVE**

The tongue straightens out when extended. It stretches and is held using muscle force.



**TONGUE**

They have no teeth and rely solely on their sticky tongues to extract ants and termites. The tongue can measure up to 40cm in length.

Chinese pangolins are strong diggers and can dig burrows as deep as 2 to 3 meters, where they feed on termites. Termites chew on tree roots, causing the trees to die. By feeding on termites, pangolins protect the forest and are thus known as the guardians of the forest.

**XIPHISTERNAL BONES**

The muscles are attached to two long, flexible bones at the end of the sternum that move during tongue extension.

**SCALES**

Their bodies are covered in protective keratin scales, which are formed from the same protein that makes up a human's nails. They not only provide an effective armor but also encompass 20 to 25% of their body weight.



Pangolins line their burrows with dead leaves, but instead of carrying the leaves in their mouths they use their front claws. Once their burrow is ready, they stand on their hind legs, using their tail as a 'fifth leg', and walk backwards into their burrow.



Pangolins have a unique defense mechanism. They curl into a tight ball when danger approaches. This posture keeps their vulnerable underbelly safe and protects their delicate body parts, including their heads.



They spend winter in deep burrows beside a termite nest for a food source. Females bear a single offspring per litter, which is reared during winter in the burrow, coming out with its mother in spring. When outside the burrow, a young pangopup is carried on its mother's tail.



**SURVIVAL ABILITIES**

**Burrowing speed:** 3 meters per hour  
**Sensory traits:** Highly developed senses but poor vision

Source: Xizi River Conservation Center, knowyourmammals.com

TEXT BY YAN DONGJIE; GRAPHICS BY MUKESH MOHANAN & TIAN CHI/CHINA DAILY; ILLUSTRATION BY LIU YIJUN FOR CHINA DAILY

# WORLD

## Sea of orange



Herengracht canal was jam-packed with boats as people celebrated King's Day in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on Saturday. King's Day is an annual national holiday in the Netherlands in honor of the Dutch King, Willem-Alexander. The tradition started way back in 1891. PETER DEJONG / AP

### Briefly

#### CANADA 9 dead as car plows into festival crowd

At least nine people were killed when a man drove into a crowd at a heritage festival in the Canadian city of Vancouver, and an unknown number were injured, police said on Sunday. The vehicle entered the street at 8:14 pm on Saturday and struck people attending the Lapu Lapu Day festival, the Vancouver Police Department said in a social media post. Several other people were injured but the exact number of casualties was not immediately available. A 30-year-old Vancouver man was arrested at the scene and the department's Major Crime Section is overseeing the investigation, police said. "At this time, we are confident that this incident was not an act of terrorism," the police department posted early on Sunday.

#### SOUTH KOREA Lee Jae-myung wins party primary

South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party on Sunday named Lee Jae-myung, the party's ex-leader, as its candidate for the snap presidential election slated for June 3. Lee won 89.77 percent of all votes cast in the party's primary, marking the highest ever recorded in the Democratic Party-affiliated primaries since the country's democratization in 1987. The human rights lawyer-turned-politician was followed by Kim Dong-yeon, Gyeonggi Province governor, with 6.87 percent, and Kim Kyung-soo, former governor of South Gyeong-sang Province, with 3.36 percent. Last year, Lee survived a knife attack in the southern city of Busan while touring the site of a proposed new airport and speaking to journalists and supporters.

#### UNITED KINGDOM Titanic survivor's letter fetches \$400,000

A lettercard penned by one of the *Titanic*'s most well-known survivors from onboard the ship, days before it sank, has sold for 300,000 pounds (\$399,000) at auction. In the note, written to the seller's great-uncle on April 10, 1912, first-class passenger Archibald Gracie wrote of the ill-fated steamship: "It is a fine ship but I shall await my journeys end before I pass judgment on her." The letter was sold to a private collector from the United States on Saturday, according to auction house Henry Aldridge & Son in Wiltshire, England. The *Titanic* sank off Newfoundland on April 15, 1912, after hitting an iceberg, killing about 1,500 people on its maiden voyage.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

# G20 faces toughest test amid US stance

### Doubts over Washington's commitment could impact global cooperation: Experts

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
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Leading policymakers and experts warned in Washington that rising uncertainty about US commitment to multilateralism and tensions between major countries could pose challenges to global economic and climate cooperation, even as pressing development needs, especially in Africa, demand urgent attention through forums like the G20.

The G20 remains the "premier forum for international cooperation" but faces perhaps its "greatest test" in forcing collective action in an increasingly divided world, said Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly, vice-president of Global Economy and Development at Brookings Institution, opening the panel on Tuesday titled "Strengthening global economic cooperation for a changing world: The unique role of the G20".

Caroline Atkinson, a former US deputy national security adviser for international economics, expressed her worry about the US' disengagement and its potential impact on G20. "The US is essentially walking away from international cooperation, really, in my view, weakens the G20," said Atkinson. She suggested future cooperation "may be, sadly, from my point of view, going around the US in some way now rather than relying on the US to be a supportive partner".

An event on the same day hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies echoed this uncertainty in the climate sphere. During the event, titled "The Post-Paris World: Evaluating Options for Global Climate", the

panelists highlighted concerns that the US' potential second withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, under Donald Trump's second term as the US president, could destabilize global climate efforts, though perhaps with less shock than the first exit, said Joseph Majkut, director of CSIS' Energy Security and Climate Change Program.

The excerpts pointed out that adding to the complexity is the strained relationship between the world's two largest economies.

Duncan Pieterse, the director-general of South Africa's National Treasury and co-chair of the G20 Finance and Central Bank Deputies, said that despite these headwinds, the G20, under South Africa's current presidency, is pushing forward, particularly focusing on development issues critical to the Global South. He described the G20 process as a "relay event", emphasizing continuity.

"Our presidency comes after a few emerging markets have had the G20 presidency," Pieterse said at the Brookings event, which took place on the sidelines of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund 2025 spring meetings last week.

#### Key areas

"There's a lot of that agenda that resonates with our priorities," he said, mentioning that the key areas include reforming multilateral development banks to be "bigger, better, more effective" to enhance debt sustainability through mechanisms like the common framework, mobilize capital for infrastructure, and strengthen domestic resource mobilization.

Pieterse highlighted that South

Africa has introduced a new work-stream specifically targeting "growth and development challenges on the African continent", focusing on macroeconomic vulnerabilities, infrastructure, the cost of capital, and institutional weaknesses. "Interestingly, it has received very wide support across the G20... this is one area where I think a lot of countries have rallied around," he said.

Success, Pieterse added, involves institutionalizing this Africa focus beyond South Africa's term.

China's role within this complex dynamic was referenced multiple times. Atkinson mentioned the Euro crisis, where "China and some other countries were interested in talking to the US about what could the US do to help", demonstrating past constructive engagement within the G20 on global stability.

Looking forward, Paola Subacchi, a professor at Sciences Po, Paris, said that the nations need a broader discussion on international development models, mentioning "rethinking, for example, the role of China, how China is moving to the development space and why that's important and how we can engage with that".

Subacchi described the G20's role as coordinating the delivery of global public goods, including financial stability, climate action, and health, a task complicated by managing an economy that is simultaneously "integrated but also fragmented".

The experts at the Brookings event also discussed the challenges faced by developing nations regarding climate change, focusing on how the G20 could support a "just energy transition" in Africa that respects development rights while building climate resilience. They acknowledged the view that "energy transition is at odds with development aims".

**ifaw**  
国际爱护动物基金会

**Cwca**

雪豹  
Snow leopard

Between heaven and earth,  
together with other sentient beings, I live.  
—Zhuangzi, philosopher, late fourth century BC

天地与我并生，而万物与我为一  
——《庄子·齐物论》

AG

## WORLD

## Hamas open to long truce but rules out disarming

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE  
cuihaipei@chinadaily.com.cn

A high-level Hamas delegation's proposal in Cairo to release all Israeli hostages in exchange for a five-year truce, along with calls by the Palestine Liberation Organization for a domestic dialogue of all parties, has renewed hope among Gazans struggling with food shortages — and for broader efforts to rebuild Palestinian statehood.

"The idea of a truce or its duration is not rejected by us, and we are ready to discuss it within the framework of negotiations," said Taher Al-Nono, media adviser to the Hamas leadership, in the first clear signal that the group was open to a longer-term truce. "We are open to any serious proposals to end the war."

He also ruled out a core Israeli demand that Hamas lay down its arms. "The weapon of resistance is not negotiable and will remain in our hands as long as the occupation exists," he said.

An Egyptian security source described the green light by the Hamas delegation on Saturday as "very important" for advancing efforts to end the conflict.

Indirect negotiations between Hamas and Israel, brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, have been continuing for weeks.

Egypt's Al-Qahera News TV channel earlier reported the Hamas delegation would also discuss a comprehensive deal that ensures the full withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Gaza, and securing the delivery of humanitarian aid to the enclave. Talks are expected to include the formation of a committee to manage Gaza's administration.

"This time we will insist on guarantees regarding the end of the war," said Mahmoud Mardawi, a senior Hamas official. "The occupation can return to war after any partial deal, but it cannot do so with a comprehensive deal and international guarantees."

So far, Israel has not formally responded to any of the proposals, but has given the green light for negotiations to continue regarding the release of hostages.

However, an Israeli official told The Jerusalem Post on Sunday that the report that Hamas would be willing to accept a five-year ceasefire deal is not new and has not been conveyed recently by mediators to Israel.

### Leadership update

In Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, the Palestine Liberation Organization, or PLO, approved on Saturday the appointment of Hussein al-Sheikh as vice-president of its executive committee and the State of Palestine.

The appointment of Sheikh came during a meeting chaired by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, according to the PLO Executive Committee. It marked the first time such a position has been established since the organization's founding.

During the meeting, Abbas stressed the initiation of a comprehensive national dialogue led by a joint committee appointed by the PLO Executive Committee and the Fatah Central Committee, with all factions to achieve reconciliation and strengthen national unity within the framework of the PLO.

Across Gaza, Israeli forces killed about 40 Palestinians on Saturday alone, Al-Jazeera cited local medics as saying, as aid officials sound the alarm over "full-scale famine conditions" amid Israel's aid blockade.

The World Food Programme said on Friday that its hot meal kitchens in Gaza "are expected to fully run out of food in the coming days."

Northern Gaza resident Wael Odeh said, "There is no food in the free kitchen, there is no food in the markets... There is no flour or bread."

Hamish Falconer, the United Kingdom's minister for the Middle East and North Africa, has expressed concern over the WFP's announcement that its food stocks in Gaza have run out.

"Israel's devastating aid block is putting civilians, including 1 million children, at risk of starvation," he wrote on X. "The UK, France and Germany are clear — it must end."

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (right) talks with United States President Donald Trump in Vatican on Saturday. UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL PRESS OFFICE VIA AP

## Russia ready for talks without preconditions

Peace in progress as US envoy meets Putin, Trump discusses with Zelensky

MOSCOW/ROME — Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed his country's readiness to negotiate with Ukraine without preconditions during his talks with US President Donald Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff, the Kremlin said on Saturday.

"During yesterday's talks with Trump's envoy Witkoff, Vladimir Putin reiterated that Russia is ready to resume negotiations with Ukraine without any preconditions," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, adding Putin has spoken about it repeatedly.

Witkoff met Putin for three hours in Moscow on Friday to discuss the US plan to end the conflict in Ukraine.

Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov, who took part in the meeting, described it as constructive and very useful.

"This conversation allowed Russia and the United States to further bring their positions closer together, not only on Ukraine but also on a number of other international issues," he told reporters.

"As for the Ukrainian crisis itself, the discussion focused in particular on the possibility of resuming direct negotiations between representatives of the Russian Federation and Ukraine."

Russia and Ukraine have not held direct talks since the early weeks of the conflict, which broke out in February 2022.

According to texts seen by Reuters, the peace proposal Witkoff has presented calls for formal US recognition of Crimea as part of Russia, plus de facto recognition of Russia's hold on areas near southern and eastern Ukraine that its forces control.

Witkoff's meeting took place just hours after a car bomb killed a senior Russian military officer near Moscow. Russia's FSB security service said on Saturday that it had detained a suspect.

The Kremlin blamed Ukraine for the killing of 59-year-old Yaroslav Moskalik, deputy head of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces.

There was no official comment from Kyiv on Moskalik's death.

The FSB named the suspect as Ignat Kuzin, saying he was "an agent of the Ukrainian special services."

### Major points

After Witkoff's meeting concluded, Trump said it was a good day of talks and called for a high-level meeting between Kyiv and Moscow to close a deal.

"Most of the major points are agreed to," Trump said in a social media post after landing in Rome for the funeral of Pope Francis on Saturday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was also in Rome for the funeral. He met Trump one-on-one in a Vatican basilica on Saturday to try to revive the faltering peace efforts.

Zelensky said the meeting could prove historic if it delivers the kind of peace he is hoping for, and a White House spokesperson called it "very productive."

The two leaders, leaning in close to each other with no aides around them while seated in St. Peter's Basilica, spoke for about 15 minutes, according to Zelensky's office, and images of the meeting released by Kyiv and Washington.

The meeting at the Vatican was their first since an angry encounter in the Oval Office in Washington in February.

In a post on Telegram, Zelensky wrote: "Good meeting. One-on-one, we managed to discuss a lot. We hope for a result from all the things that were spoken about."

He said those topics included: "The protection of the lives of our people. A complete and unconditional ceasefire. A reliable and lasting peace that will prevent a recurrence of war."

Zelensky added: "It was a very symbolic meeting that has the potential to become historic if we achieve joint results. Thank you, President Donald Trump!"

In another development, Putin hailed on Saturday what he said was the complete failure of an offensive by Ukrainian forces in Russia's Kursk region after Moscow said they had been expelled from the last village they had been holding.

However, Kyiv denied its forces had been expelled from Kursk and said they were also still operating in Belgorod, another Russian region bordering Ukraine.

"The Kyiv regime's adventure has completely failed," Putin said in a video footage released by the Kremlin that showed him receiving a report from the head of Russia's general staff, Valery Gerasimov.

"The full defeat of the enemy in the Kursk border region creates conditions for further successful actions by our forces on other important parts of the front," Putin said.

The state RIA news agency reported on Sunday that a Russian military commander has told Putin "the scattered remnants" of the Ukrainian army remaining in Kursk will soon be destroyed.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## 28 killed, 800 injured in Iran's port explosion

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE

Iran has declared a state of emergency in the city of Bandar Abbas after a huge blast at the country's biggest port killed at least 28 people and injured more than 800, state media reported on Sunday.

The explosion on Saturday sent a huge plume of thick, gray smoke from the Shahid Rajaei section of the port complex, with media saying the blast was likely linked to chemicals being stored. Helicopters and aircraft dumped water from the air on the raging fire through the night into Sunday morning.

China's Consulate General in Bandar Abbas said three Chinese citizens sustained minor injuries in the explosion. They are now in good condition after receiving medical treatment.

The blast was so powerful that it was felt and heard about 50 kilometers away, according to semi-official Fars news agency. An aerial shot showed fires burning at multiple locations, with authorities later warning about air pollution from chemicals such as ammonia, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide in the air. Schools and offices in Bandar Abbas were closed on Sunday.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian has ordered an investigation and sent Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni to the site. The president urged "a comprehensive assessment of the causes of the incident" as soon as possible to prevent "the recurrence of such incidents in the future."

Speaking on Sunday at the scene, Momeni said the situation has stabilized in the main areas of the port, adding that six people remain missing as firefighters continue to work to fully extinguish the blaze.

The incident prompted authorities to declare a state of emergency in the city to safeguard citizens amid a "significant rise in air pollution". The governor of Hormozgan has declared three days of public mourning in the province.

Countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates,

Iraq and Pakistan have extended condolences to Iran over the losses caused by the explosion.

Located near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, Shahid Rajaei is Iran's biggest container hub, covering 2,400 hectares and handling 70 million metric tons of cargo annually, including oil and general shipping. It has nearly 500,000 square meters of warehouses and 35 shipping berths.

No cause has been given for the explosion. Government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said it would take some time to establish the cause, "but so far what has been determined is that containers were stored in a corner of the port that likely contained chemicals which exploded."

### Nuclear negotiations

Also on Saturday, Iran held a third round of hours-long nuclear talks with the United States in Oman, with a promise for more talks and perhaps another high-level meeting next weekend. The two delegations were headed by Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi and US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff.

Araghchi said the parties exchanged written points throughout the day in "very serious and work-focused" discussions.

"The atmosphere is good and both sides have seriousness. ... However, whether an agreement can be reached or not, I am certainly hopeful but very cautiously."

A senior anonymous US official told The Times of Israel that the talks were "positive and productive". "This latest round of direct and indirect discussions lasted over four hours," the official said. "There is still much to do, but further progress was made on getting to a deal."

Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, who has mediated the previous two rounds of talks, offered a positive note at the end of Saturday's negotiations.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

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## US politics spark surge in Canadian university interest

By YANG GAO in Toronto  
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US President Donald Trump's pressure on universities is leading more American students to consider studying in Canada, as experts say the trend reflects growing concerns over academic freedom.

Stephen Sireci, a professor and the director of the center for educational assessment at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, said Trump's proposals have raised concerns among domestic and international students.

"The message is that universities should get in line and follow everything Trump wants to do, but there's been a lot of rejection of that message," Sireci told China Daily.

Trump enacted executive orders on April 23 to overhaul the university accreditation process, criticizing accreditors for promoting left-leaning ideologies and diversity initiatives over academic performance.

The administration also has targeted Ivy League institutions like Harvard and Columbia, freezing hundreds of millions in federal funding and demanding policy changes.

Sireci said that while the United States has long been seen as a safe and welcoming destination for international students, that perception is changing.

"What the international students are saying now is the exact opposite," he said. "The notion that the United States is a safe place for international students to study and to be supported has changed."

Sireci said the financial implications of suspending federal funds may have broader consequences.

"Federal funding has supported research and science at American universities for a long time, so if that is actually pulled, it will have serious ramifications," he said.

He said that policies discouraging international talent from going to the US could eventually erode its universities' global standing.

"To keep up that level of excellence, we need to recruit and retain some of the best stars from across the globe," Sireci said. "Any policies that inhibit that are going to affect our global competitiveness."

Although he said he hope the shift in student flows might be temporary, Sireci acknowledged it may take years

to repair the damage done to America's academic reputation.

"There are a lot of lawsuits being filed now," he said. "I don't think it will last. The effects on America's reputation will take more time to recover."

Asked whether the movement of American students and faculty abroad could become a form of brain drain, Sireci said that risk is real.

"If there are policies to discourage people from applying or people who are accepted from coming, that's going to affect the number of scientists and intellectuals in the United States, for sure," he said.

Sireci also spoke of deeper societal implications.

"For the US higher education system to be strong, we need not just intellectuals and scholars in our country, but we need to collaborate with international scholars across the globe," he said.

"The recent political developments in the US, including ideological divisions and moves to restrict diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs — are shaping student decision-making," said Glen Jones, a professor of higher education at the University of Toronto.

"Those who see themselves as negatively impacted by the change in direction associated with the Trump government are more likely to look for new alternatives," Jones told China Daily.

Officials at the University of British Columbia's Vancouver campus said that as of March 1, the school reported a 27 percent jump in graduate applications from US citizens for programs starting in the 2025 academic year, compared with all of 2024.

Simon Fraser University also said its faculty of graduate studies also saw a 23 percent increase in applications from American citizens compared with last year.

"Canada has, at least to date, avoided the sort of extreme polarization that now defines US politics," Jones said. "There is a sense of greater stability in the Canadian academic environment."

"It will be some time before we know whether this is a national phenomenon and (of) the magnitude of change," he said.

Asked whether Canadian institutions are ready to accommodate a potential rise in American applicants, Jones said that the federal

government's cap on international student visas has already led to a decline in international student numbers across the board.

"Most universities would be pleased to receive additional applications from the United States because this might counterbalance some of the declining applications from some other countries," he said.

However, Jones said that Trump's recent actions, including challenges to academic freedom, research funding and DEI policies — could have cross-border implications.

He cited travel advisories issued by the Canadian Association of University Teachers and the Ottawa government.

"As Canadian university leaders look at what is happening in the US, they are clearly concerned about the erosion of academic freedom," he said.

"This reinforces the importance of protecting this freedom in Canada, and ensuring that our institutions continue to reinforce policies addressing issues of equity and inclusion," he said.

As for managing the moment, Jones said the current federal cap provides "an opportunity to ensure that Canadian higher education has supports and policies in place" to give international students the experiences they expect.

## BUSINESS

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## Enterprises eye China's huge consumer market

Thriving sectors such as low-altitude economy and new energy vehicles propelling industries to stand out on global stage, unlocking consumption possibilities

By LIU YUKUN  
and ZHU WENQIAN

By leveraging policy advantages and adopting innovative approaches, both Chinese as well as foreign businesses are expanding their reach across industries, propelling growth in China's vast consumption market.

In the just-concluded China International Consumer Products Expo 2025 in Hainan province, foreign giants like Burberry and CP Group have shown optimism and long-term commitment to the Chinese market.

Several foreign brands that are new to China, like Steelite, are also being enticed by its vast market potential, opting to debut their products and services in the country.

Some overseas enterprises have also selected China as their prime global launchpad for new products.

Faced with geopolitical conflicts and trade uncertainties, Chinese trade entities are also on the lookout for fresh domestic growth opportunities. Following the latest round of robust policies, they are expanding their domestic sales arenas.

"A stable and predictable international trade system, based on fair and transparent rules, is essential for sustained global prosperity. By expanding imports and facilitating two-way investment, China creates opportunities for countries around the world to share its growth," said Zhang Xiangchen, deputy director-general of the WTO, who delivered a speech via video link at the expo.

The expo, which concluded on April 18, attracted the participation of a record 1,767 companies and 4,209 consumer brands from 71 countries and regions this year, according to the local government of Hainan.

It led to 52 cooperation agreements, with a total value of around 92 billion yuan (\$12.6 billion).

Business executives and experts said that the Chinese market brims with potential. Thriving sectors such as the low-altitude economy and new energy vehicles are propelling related industries to stand out on the global stage, thereby further unlocking consumption possibilities.

British luxury brand Burberry, a five-time participant at the consumer expo, said China is one of the most important and dynamic markets globally, and the country's high-level opening-up has enabled the world to share the potential and opportunities of its market.

"China boasts the advantage of a super large-scale consumption market. Chinese consumers' demand for high-quality products and services has driven the upgrading and development of the consumption markets in the country and globally," said Josie Zhang, president of Burberry Greater China.

"The growth of the Chinese market comes from different types of consumers, with the rise of emerging consumer groups. In the long run, China is expected to continuously play an important role in driving global high-end consumption," Zhang said.

Lily Yang, associate brand director of OSIM China, a Singapore-based health products provider, highlighted the expo as a national-level platform that has incentivized



over 150 international brands to establish their first stores in Hainan through measures like "first-store economy" incentives and "tax-free + consumption upgrade" policies.

As a high-end massage chair brand that has participated in the expo for five consecutive years, OSIM is among those benefiting from these policies.

"The Ministry of Commerce, in conjunction with the National Health Commission, has issued a special action plan to boost consumption in the healthcare sector and introduce various measures around healthy eating, fitness, elderly care services and more, to further integrate the health and wellness industry with consumer markets.

"This has presented opportunities for many international brands. OSIM will continue to follow China's health trends, focusing on the key health aspect of 'sleep' and unveil products like massage chairs," said Yang.

Waleed Abumazen, founder and CEO of Singapore-based company Orient Crown which specializes in

**Top:** Visitors get to know the "deep sleep cabin" from Air Nutri Solution Inc, a Vancouver, Canada-based non-medicinal sleep solutions provider, during the China International Consumer Products Expo 2025 in Haikou, Hainan province, in April. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

**Above left:** Visitors line up to experience a passenger-carrying pilotless aircraft during CICPE 2025 on April 13. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

**Above right:** Staff members from CP Group set up its exhibition area for CICPE 2025 on April 9. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

watch winders and customized safe boxes, expressed his intent to explore more market opportunities and potential partnerships in China.

"There's still significant consumer demand here in China and ongoing opportunities in the country. I particularly recommend mid-sized businesses to consider expanding into the Chinese market," he said.

Zhang Beier, China wholesale manager of British tea brand Whitard of Chelsea that has entered numerous high-end supermarkets and which plans to enter duty-free channels this month, also expressed confidence in the Chinese market.

He praised the positive market environment in China and highlighted the brand's efforts at expansion in the market.

Sui Jiangkun, China regional manager for British ceramics brand Steelite, noted the high levels of consumer spending and acceptance of new products in China, expressing the brand's aspirations for further development in the country.

In the Government Work Report delivered in March, boosting con-

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

As part of the country's efforts to boost domestic demand, the Ministry of Commerce, together with five other departments, launched the "Shopping in China" campaign at the opening of the consumer expo to help stimulate domestic consumption, and various kinds of events are planned to be carried out nationwide.

The Ministry of Commerce is encouraging local governments to hold debut performances, exhibitions, and distinctive events in various forms and formats. For shopping, key pedestrian streets, commercial complexes, shopping malls, supermarkets and outlets have been encouraged to launch promotions and high-quality new products, according to a document on organizing the "Shopping in China" series of events.

In addition, various provinces and cities are being encouraged to hold activities such as food markets, culinary exchanges and expos of food ingredients, as well as launch

high-quality tourist routes and travel consumption guides, organize cultural performances, high-level sports events and museum exhibitions, the guideline said.

China's consumption market has seen steady growth.

In the first quarter, total retail sales of consumer goods in China reached 12.47 trillion yuan, up 4.6 percent year-on-year. The catering revenue came in at 1.4 trillion yuan, growing 4.7 percent on a yearly basis, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

Foreign companies are optimistic about the Chinese market, and domestic enterprises are strengthening their operations in China, tapping into new growth points within the vast domestic consumption market.

Sun Liye, vice-president of United Aircraft, emphasized the emergence of the low-altitude economy as a new growth point following the development of electric vehicles, with the potential of topping the globe in the coming years.

The low-altitude economy, which encompasses economic activities conducted below an airspace of 1,000 meters, including drone logistics, low-altitude tourism, aircraft manufacturing and flight training has been included in top-level policy designs in recent years.

The promotion of the low-altitude economy policies has further ignited enthusiasm for low-altitude flights, propelling rapid growth across the entire industry chain. The Civil Aviation Administration of China has previously forecast that the market size of the nation's low-altitude economy could reach 3.5 trillion yuan by 2035.

Sun said the industry's rapid development has also driven advancements in logistics, emergency rescue, agriculture, and other industries, catering to rapidly varying consumer demand.

Wang Zhao, COO of EHang, said the company's customers mainly consist of government bodies and companies in the cultural and tourism sectors.

"But personal ownership of aircraft or taking eVTOLs (electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft) as 'air-taxis' is not far off. It is important to establish hubs for automatic recharging, maintenance and storage of aircraft, facilitating wider coverage of aircraft operations," he said.

While some enterprises face challenges due to the so-called "reciprocal tariffs" imposed by the United States, Chinese trading firms are actively exploring the potential of the domestic market to alleviate business pressures.

Vice-Minister of Commerce Sheng Qipeng emphasized during the expo the increasing complexity and uncertainty of the external environment, which has impacted industrial chains and exerted pressure on foreign trade.

Sheng said China has been the world's largest goods trading nation for eight consecutive years. He added that measures will be rolled out soon to aid trading companies to tap the domestic market to withstand external trade pressures.

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## AI tech set to reshape consumer experience

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Liu Yukun

The boundaries between technology and daily life fade visibly at a rapid pace as I strolled through the exhibition halls of the China International Consumer Products Expo 2025.

From the "air taxis" in the low-altitude economy zone to the "tech powered deep sleep cabins" at the health tech pavilion, from AI facial diagnosis robots to smart bionic hands, this global showcase of consumer excellence is not only a visu-

al feast, but also a profound preview of future living.

As a journalist, I navigated between booths, witnessing how AI technology is reshaping every aspect of human life, from health management and transportation to industrial economics.

At the low-altitude economy zone, unmanned drones and flying cars hovered in midair, resembling scenes from a sci-fi movie. The low-altitude economy, by the way, refers to economic activities conducted within an airspace below 1,000 meters.

Among the products that were exhibited, the EH216-L unmanned aerial vehicle by EHang took the spotlight. It's a fully certified eVTOL (electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft) that can vertically take off and land without a runway,

carrying up to two passengers with a range of tens of kilometers — one that is designed for short trips in urban areas.

EHang COO Wang Zhao mentioned its applications in tourism, emergency medical transport, and potentially as a solution for urban traffic congestion, dubbed the "air taxis" of the future.

"While the low-altitude economy is in its initial phases with a primary focus on tourist attractions, its future potential lies in urban and intercity transportation. Aircraft could eventually access urban locales such as rooftops, residential areas, bus depots, schools and factories, requiring minimal takeoff space," Wang said.

At the United Aircraft booth, the TD550 unmanned helicopter

attracted logistics companies with its long endurance and high payload capacity. Staff members revealed that this model can be widely used in logistics distribution in remote areas, agricultural and forestry protection, and emergency rescue operations.

The rise of the low-altitude economy symbolizes not only technological breakthroughs, but also a glimpse of the new quality productive forces that will further drive economic transformation.

At the health consumer zone, the fusion of technology and wellness was truly awe-inspiring. The line for NutriSleep 6s, a tech-embedded sleep aid device developed by Air Nutri, stretched long. Participants lay inside a cabin to experience a state of deep relaxation within just 15 minutes.

The tentacles of AI health management extend to every detail of daily life. OSIM's massage chair interactive area captivated visitors, offering a chance to experience AI stress-monitoring technology, showcasing the charm of health technology, from stress management to deep sleep.

On the other side, the AI facial diagnosis robot integrates traditional Chinese face reading theory with machine vision and AI big data technology, scanning over 300 facial images in 15 seconds, combining pulse diagnosis data to generate a comprehensive health report, leaving viewers in awe of its accuracy.

In the face of the challenges posed by an aging society, AI's application in elder care is particularly heartwarming.

China Mobile's quadruped robot dog roamed the exhibition area, equipped with AI visual algorithms to monitor activities of elderly individuals living alone. In case of

anomalies like falls, it triggers alerts and contacts family members, creating a safety net for home-based elderly care.

Keenon's service robot has already made its way into the catering and medical fields, with its humanoid robot capable of autonomously carrying out tasks like meal delivery and guidance. One of the exhibitors in the robotic area said: "Our goal is to use technology to fill the void of companionship."

As the sun set, casting a warm glow over the dome of the exhibition center, I felt that this expo is not just a tech showcase, but also a prism reflecting the future.

When AI evolves from a tool to a "companion", and concepts like air taxis and service robots become part of our daily lives, we will witness not only a transformation in consumer habits, but the emergence of a more inclusive and innovative economic ecosystem. The future is already here.

# BUSINESS



A visitor (right) experiences a helicopter simulator from CITIC Offshore Helicopter Co Ltd during the China International Consumer Products Expo 2025 in Haikou, Hainan province, in April. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Hainan expanding reach of low-altitude economy

So far this year, 36 projects have been launched, covering the entire industry

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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China's low-altitude economy, a strategic emerging sector that is key to developing new quality productive forces, has captured the imagination of the country's tropical island of Hainan province, which is aiming to become a key base for the innovative development of the low-altitude sector.

Hainan, relying on its unique geographical environment, multiple application scenarios of low-altitude aircraft and the advantages of Hainan Free Trade Port, plans to comprehensively promote the low-altitude economy by introducing more enterprises and expanding application scenarios and business formats, the local government said.

So far this year, the province has launched 36 projects, with a total investment value of 29.4 billion yuan (\$4.02 billion), covering the entire industry chain, including aircraft research and development, smart logistics and high-end cultural tourism.

"The local government has issued a three-year development

plan from 2024 to 2026 to boost the growth of the low-altitude economy, and it is preparing a series of other documents to help promote the growth of the sector," said Jiang Hong, deputy director of the Hainan Provincial Development and Reform Commission.

During the China International Consumer Products Expo 2025 that concluded on April 18 in Haikou, eight cooperation projects related to the low-altitude sector were signed, and they involved manufacturing, technological research and development, and applications.

The projects include the building of a heavy-duty unmanned helicopter assembly production line in Wenchang, and the building of a marine drone maintenance and support base in Ledong.

The sector's growth has been closely intertwined with the support of favorable policies. Late last year, the National Development and Reform Commission set up a low-altitude department and its responsibilities include formulating and organizing the implementation of low-altitude economic

growth strategies, and making medium and long-term development plans.

Zheng Shanjie, head of the NDRC, recently hosted a special meeting on promoting the development of the sector and said the government will formulate relevant plans for the development of the low-altitude economy during the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-30). He also clarified the need to coordinate the relationship between development and security, government and market, and current and long-term aspects.

The market size of China's low-altitude economy is expected to total 1.5 trillion yuan this year, and is estimated to reach 3.5 trillion yuan by 2035, according to a projection by the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

CITIC Offshore Helicopter Co Ltd, a general aviation service operator, has continued to make investments in the sector. The company primarily operates offshore oil-related helicopter flight services, and also operates multiple passenger flights, including the route connecting the two high-speed rail stations of Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, and Haikou.

Last year, the company completed test flights on the cross-border helicopter route between

Shenzhen, Guangdong, and Hong Kong, which only takes 15 minutes, significantly reducing the travel time for residents and tourists. The same journey would normally take two hours by car and one hour by sea.

"We plan to launch more helicopter transportation routes in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Pearl River Delta and the Bohai-Rim region," said Lei Lei, vice-president of the low-altitude department at CITIC Offshore Helicopter Co Ltd.

"We have also launched some innovative projects. For instance, we transported skiers to ski resorts by helicopters in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and used drones to carry out emergency support, freight inspection and other businesses," Lei said.

Lei added that helicopters boast strong operational capabilities under extreme weather conditions. Especially in island areas, maritime traffic often stops under extreme weather conditions such as cold waves and typhoons.

Compared with passenger ships, helicopters usually have stronger wind resistance capability, and modified helicopters can even fly in high wind speeds of level 10 to 11, ensuring smooth traffic between islands, according to the company.

## Taizhou's power grid inspections go high-tech

By HAN JINGYAN  
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In the prefecture-level city of Taizhou in Jiangsu province, power worker Dai Yongdong is jubilant about the rapid advancements in technology that have ushered in a variety of possibilities for his work: ensuring electricity safety and power grid stability in the region.

As director of the smart operation and maintenance center under State Grid Taizhou Power Supply Co, he has witnessed the installation of 207 next-generation DJI fixed-wing drone airports across its service territory.

The installation, completed at the end of March, marked the official launch of Jiangsu's first low-altitude smart inspection network. Covering transmission, substation, and distribution facilities of all voltage levels, the network is a milestone as it is China's first prefecture-level drone operating center under the State Grid system.

"We intend to establish a leading standardized low-altitude smart service platform in the country," Dai said.

This year's Government Work Report, delivered during the annual two sessions in Beijing, has called for the development of new-generation intelligent terminals and smart manufacturing equipment.

Yang Yi, Dai's colleague, said embodying State Grid's digital transformation strategy, the automated drone inspection ecosystem can cover the entire 5,700-square-kilometer jurisdiction in Taizhou, which administers three county-level cities and three districts.

Yang said they have integrated into their fleet drones with advanced technologies, such as high-definition video transmission, infrared thermography, and laser scanning systems.

In a demonstration flight on April 14, the No 001 drone departed from Mazhou Island in the county-level city of Jingjiang and returned safely, beaming the inspection data back to the terminal within five minutes.

"This system fundamentally redef-

ined the grid inspection workflows," said Dai, claiming that drones can autonomously complete takeoff, mission execution, return, recharging and data transmission.

Meanwhile, integrated AI diagnostics also enable real-time defect identification, reducing on-site manpower by 85 percent, he said.

Currently, the network can oversee 6,434 kilometers of electricity transmission lines, 19,037 km of distribution lines, and 181 substations.

"With the new facilities, we have increased our equipment inspections from once a quarter to four times each month, and raised the checking frequency on substations to once every three days, thus achieving round-the-clock multidimensional status monitoring," Dai stressed.

The State Grid Taizhou Power Supply Co began pioneering an "Aerial Digital Inspection System" in March 2023, breaking traditional inspection limitations, said Yang.

Following pilot trials of 21 drone bases in urban districts, the power company optimized its strategic placement and autonomous flight path planning under a coverage framework of 3 km in urban areas, 5 km in suburbs, and 7 km in rural zones, and the full-scale deployment started in October 2024.

These "aerial sentinels" conduct thorough inspections of power facilities, while AI image recognition enables real-time fault analysis and precise defect localization.

In addition, 3D models generated via laser scanning provide navigational precision for fault remediation, thus ushering in a new era of grid inspection efficiency, Yang added.

Qian Ping, Yang's colleague, claimed that the system has employed an innovative "Task Work Order + Autonomous Decision-Making" operational model.

With the 207 drone bases executing over 2,484 daily sorties, each unit can achieve 12-15 hours of effective operation — tripling the inspection efficiency compared to manual methods, she said.



State Grid Taizhou Power Supply Co operates its UAV full-service management and control platform to oversee the operations of 207 next-generation DJI fixed-wing drone airports in Taizhou in Jiangsu province. CHEN JINGJING / FOR CHINA DAILY

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Biodiversity is the key, so we can live in harmony.

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## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Tariff response injects stability in global trade

EAGLE EYE

By Zhou Mi

On April 2, United States President Donald Trump declared a so-called "Liberation Day" for the country, brandishing tariffs as weapons and launching surprise attacks across global trade. Trump claimed these measures were necessary to reclaim "economic sovereignty", revive US manufacturing and reduce trade deficit. His arbitrary tariffs sent shock waves through the global trading system, forcing many countries to urgently reassess potential losses and seek coping countermeasures.

As the world's largest goods trading nation, China has borne the brunt of these anti-globalization headwinds and has inevitably been affected. Yet, instead of backing down in the face of US unilateralism and protectionism, China has taken a clear and firm stance, directly countering and refuting the flawed logic and bullying behavior of the US.

China has voiced its position and taken action across multilateral platforms such as the WTO, bilateral frameworks like free trade agreements, and multilateral mechanisms. These efforts underscore China's commitment to upholding international rules and order while highlighting the global harm of the US' actions. China's response has resonated with many of its trade partners, contributing to greater international coordination and offering much-needed stability for global supply chains.

As the world's top manufacturing nation, China's industrial performance holds significant weight for its economic trajectory. In the first quarter, China's value-added industrial output above designated size grew by 6.5 percent year-on-year, an increase of 0.7 percentage point compared with the full-year growth rate of the previous year, marking a notable acceleration. Among the three major sectors, the mining industry grew 6.2 percent year-on-year, manufacturing by 7.1 percent, and the production and supply of electricity, heat, gas and water by 1.9 percent. The value-added output of the equipment manufacturing sector rose 10.9 percent year-on-year, accelerating by 3.2 percentage points from the previous year. High-tech manufacturing grew 9.7 percent, an acceleration of 0.8 percentage point. Of the 41 major industrial categories, 36 registered growth in added value, with notable gains in railway, ship, aerospace and other transport equipment manufacturing (up 20.8 percent), electrical machinery and



apparatus (up 12 percent), and computers, communication and other electronic equipment (up 10.6 percent). These products not only support China's high-quality development, but also create favorable conditions for global economic growth. In many of China's trade relationships, mechanical and electrical products represent a significant share, providing reliable and cost-effective intermediate goods that support industrialization around the world.

China's consumer market has also maintained a steady recovery in recent years. As consumer demand shifts toward higher-quality products, global producers of consumer goods are vying for a share of the Chinese market. In the first quarter,

China's total retail sales of consumer goods reached 12.4671 trillion yuan (\$1.7 trillion), up 4.6 percent year-on-year, an acceleration of 1.1 percentage points compared to the full-year growth of the previous year. The country's online retail sales totaled 3.6242 trillion yuan, an increase of 7.9 percent year-on-year. Of this, online retail sales of physical goods reached 2.9948 trillion yuan, up 5.7 percent, accounting for 24 percent of total retail sales of consumer goods.

E-commerce has expanded consumer choice, particularly in rural areas where consumption growth outpaced urban markets. Amid export pressure, companies like JD.com have pledged to help export-oriented firms sell their would-be

exports at home, and Hema has opened its platform to foreign trade enterprises. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Commerce, retail giants like Yonghui, CR Vanguard, and Lianhua have launched support programs to help exporters expand internally. These initiatives are not reactive moves triggered by reciprocal tariffs, but rather a continuation of efforts to integrate domestic and foreign trade. By narrowing the gap between internal and external markets, China is advancing its dual circulation strategy and improving resource efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability.

In the face of tariff shocks, New York Federal Reserve President John Williams, a voting member of the FOMC, expects a significant

slowdown in US GDP growth, possibly falling below 1 percent in 2025, down from 2.8 percent in 2024. He predicts the unemployment rate will rise from 4.2 percent to 4.5-5.0 percent by year-end, while inflation could climb to 3.5-4 percent. University of Michigan's April consumer sentiment index dropped 11 percent from the previous month and 30 percent since December. Inflation expectations surged to their highest level since 1981. Fearing rising prices, many US consumers rushed to buy essential items, anticipating further price hikes. This panic buying triggered a herd effect, exacerbating shortages and increasing reliance on foreign imports for restocking. Trump believes the trade deficit reflects a loss, but in

reality, by printing dollars that can no longer buy goods, many US consumers have been deprived of the very "loss" they once had the option to choose.

The widely accepted notion that "no one wins in a trade war" should not be undermined by the unchecked rise of unilateralism. US tariffs directly harm export businesses and consumers, while eroding trust in international trade norms and in the US itself. Faced with US threats and implementation of various unilateral tariffs, including reciprocal duties, China, the EU, Canada and others have responded swiftly and firmly. China's countermeasures were notable for their speed and volume, including targeted tariff increases on US imports. Yet China deliberately refrained from further escalation after hitting a certain threshold, refusing to play the US' "numbers game". These actions, grounded in China's Foreign Trade Law and other legal frameworks, represent a firm stand against economic coercion and echo the concerns of many developing nations.

It is important to recognize that US tariffs are mere tools to pressure other countries into concessions. Yet in responding, nations may inadvertently undermine the existing multilateral framework. During a video call with WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao emphasized that WTO members must jointly defend an open, rules-based multilateral trade system. Okonjo-Iweala stressed that any outcomes of consultations with the US should adhere to the WTO's most-favored-nation principle — meaning that any tariff reductions granted to the US should also apply equally to all other WTO members.

Although the current era of globalization is evolving, the underlying trends of reduced communication costs and greater interconnectivity, driven by technology and innovation, remain irreversible. In the digital economy, the global flow of resources is becoming faster and more efficient, spurring industrial cooperation and innovation. Driven by global consensus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, competition and collaboration between China and the US in this field have accelerated innovation. As technology and market demand expand, EVs have emerged as a star of global manufacturing, catalyzing commercialization in related sectors like autonomous driving, batteries and vehicle networking.

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## Nation remains key business partner for Australia

MAIN STREET

By Vaughn Barber

After the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025 finished recently, its theme of rebuilding confidence in China for foreign businesses resonated deeply. For Australian firms, China remains not just a market of scale, but an important partner in a rapidly evolving global economy. As chair of AustCham China, I see growing confidence among our members. This optimism, tempered by real challenges, reflects a pivotal moment — China's market reforms and policy initiatives are opening new doors, and Australian businesses are poised to walk through them.

The Australia-China economic relationship has weathered storms, yet its resilience shines through in the numbers. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade reported A\$212.7 billion (\$134.13 billion) in goods and services exports to China in 2023-24, part of a A\$325 billion two-way trade total that grew 2.6 percent year-on-year despite global headwinds. This strength isn't just about resources

and commodities. Services exports surged 42.3 percent over the same period, led by education and tourism, with Chinese student enrollments rebounding strongly in 2024.

This trade backbone underpins confidence, fuelled by the bilateral thaw — wine tariffs were lifted in March 2024, and the removal of all impediments on Australian beef exports and live rock lobsters occurred in late 2024 — which restored A\$20 billion in previously restricted exports through pragmatic diplomacy. Yet, this confidence rests on steady bilateral relations, not wishful thinking. Our survey shows 76.3 percent of members see stable bilateral ties shaping long-term strategies, with 76 percent noting easier business conditions and 22 percent reporting export gains. These shifts drive investment decisions and unlock opportunities, though success hinges on sustained momentum.

China's 2025 Government Work Report and other actions signal a clear intent to rebuild foreign investor trust, shifting to high-quality development — innovation, sustainability and consumer needs — over low-cost growth. For Australian businesses, this offers "different, not fewer" opportunities. The following areas of the Government Work Report are of particular interest.

Boosting domestic demand including through e-commerce is

favorable for Australian exporters seeking to tap new demand.

Technology and innovation represent China's focus on new quality productive forces. It presents opportunities for Australia to collaborate in the development and deployment of technologies, which are important to each other's economic resilience and future prosperity.

The green and low carbon economy is often emphasized by China's leadership in the development of cost-effective clean technologies, which make it a key partner for Australia in its transition to net zero.

Continued commitment to opening-up is a welcome sign, reinforcing China's role as a significant contributor to global economic growth.

Support for investment from the private sector has been seen in recent affirmations of support for the role of the private sector in driving economic development, and technological innovation is welcome.

China's comprehensive push to stimulate domestic consumption through increased incomes, upgraded services and consumer incentives represent a timely opportunity for Australian exporters and businesses. Those who strategically position themselves to leverage these policy shifts — by focusing on premium quality, consumer experience, targeted demographic seg-

ments and local partnerships — will stand to gain substantially in this evolving landscape.

With predictability of China's regulatory environment a key concern for foreign investors, execution is key. We look forward to implementation and consistent enforcement of announced reforms to turn intent into impact.

China and Australia are deepening economic engagement across a range of sectors as bilateral relationship has stabilized and trade impediments have been removed. Both countries are leveraging their complementary strengths — Australia's resources and expertise and China's leading technologies and cost advantages — to identify new growth areas beyond the traditional iron ore trade.

Despite global uncertainties — US tariffs and geopolitical tensions — China's market offers robust prospects. Australian firms see strong opportunities by aligning with China's evolving economic priorities, across four key areas.

In terms of exports to China — resources, agriculture and services still lead the way.

While resource exports remain dominant, Australian businesses see growing demand for premium foodstuffs, education, critical minerals and clean energy technologies as China's economy shifts toward high-value industries.

China's more than \$3 trillion retail e-commerce ecosystem in 2024, a Government Work Report highlight, is a game-changer. For exporters, 18.8 percent see "Brand Australia" as an edge here, with China's leading digital trade, e-commerce and logistics ecosystem offering a fast, efficient and scalable route to market for Australian companies.

Investment in China is seeing expanding growth industries.

Australian businesses are finding new ways to participate in China's economic transformation by investing directly in key growth industries such as agribusiness, eldercare, healthcare services, and clean energy technologies — and by expanding education partnerships through services delivery and collaboration.

Imports from China see evolving opportunities in tech and consumer markets.

While Chinese imports already play a major role in Australia's economy, there is growing potential for these imports to provide cost-effective solutions for Australia's energy transition and industrial modernization, particularly in sectors like electric vehicles, battery storage and renewable energy hardware.

Beyond these capital-intensive sectors, Australia's fast-growing e-commerce market — though a late starter — offers another dimension of this evolving trade relationship. Platforms like Temu, active in Australia since early 2025, are enabling Chinese exporters to tap into the Australian market, delivering a

diverse range of cost-effective retail products, from household essentials to lifestyle goods, directly to Australian consumers.

Looking ahead, Australian businesses see strong potential in China over the coming five years. Our survey shows 57.3 percent are optimistic about market opportunities, driven by China's 5 percent GDP growth in 2025 — adding around \$1 trillion, over half of Australia's \$1.6 trillion economy.

For Australian businesses, China isn't just a market — it's a partner. Its scale and innovation offer unmatched potential in many areas, which are important to Australia's future prosperity. The bilateral thaw opens doors, though Australia's FIRB uncertainty challenges inbound Chinese investment — a two-way dynamic we must refine. AustCham China stands ready to guide members toward a resilient future, bridging policy and practice.

China remains an important partner because it's where opportunity meets capability. Rooted in complementary economies, rebuilding confidence isn't about erasing risks — it's about navigating them smarter. As I've said, China's not just a market to sell into — it's one to grow with. For Australian businesses willing to partner deeply, the best days lie ahead.

*The writer is chair of AustCham China. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## US must change its approach if it really wants to reach a deal rather than showboat

In yet another example of the White House flip-flopping on tariffs, US President Donald Trump said on the weekend that the United States will not drop the hefty duties it has imposed on China without getting concessions from Beijing.

"I'm not going to drop 'em unless they give us something that's, you know, substantial," he told reporters aboard Air Force One on his way to Rome to attend the Pope's funeral, vaguely defining what he would consider "substantial" to achieve a deal as China opening its markets to US businesses and goods.

Yet with China unwaveringly committed to opening-up at a higher-level and continually introducing concrete measures to this effect, his overture only adds to the knot of perplexing and often contradictory messages that his administration has got itself entangled in regarding the tariffs it has imposed on China. It also serves to highlight the degree to which it has become immersed in the medium as the message — a display of power for power's sake.

To help the US administration extricate itself from its messy messaging, China has underscored that no consultations or negotiations have taken place between the two nations concerning the tariffs, let alone any accord being reached, as a spokesperson of the Chinese embassy in the US confirmed on Friday. Which has served to put the spotlight on the need for the White House to change its course. It should realize by now that any worthwhile outcome, never mind "substantial", requires it to abandon its coercive tactics. The bully-boy approach may work in the boardrooms of America, but it won't cut the ice with Beijing.

For any genuine resolution to the trade tensions between the two countries, dialogue and negotiation are the only option, and that requires the White House to rectify its approach. Claiming to want talks with China while simultaneously trying to exert maximum pressure is a flawed strategy that will not have the desired effect. The path to a harmonious agreement is a shared journey, not one in which one side tries to commit highway robbery. The US side needs to dispel the notion that the barrel of its tariff gun will elicit what it wants. Especially as the gun has a tendency to backfire every time it fires a warning shot.

The US side must recognize that coercion and diplomacy are incompatible bedfellows, and recalibrate its approach accordingly — to one that prioritizes cooperation over confrontation and dialogue over coercion.

The current tariff discord serves as a poignant reminder of the trust deficit that has become such a prominent feature of the times. Yet looked at from another perspective, the current altercation between Washington and Beijing, as well as its underlying causes, offers the opportunity for the two sides to engage in discussions to significantly reduce that deficit if the willingness is there.

It is time the US ceased its theatrics and worked with China for a meaningful readjustment of relations grounded in the principles of respect, cooperation, and dialogue. If the US administration keeps exerting maximum pressure on China on the one hand, while speaking of de-escalating tensions through negotiations on the other, it is not going to get anywhere.

If the US administration genuinely seeks to resolve the issue through dialogue and negotiation, it must correct its mistakes, abandon its coercive tactics, and remove all unilateral tariff measures against China, as the spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in the US said.

The ongoing tariff war was forced upon China unilaterally by the US, thus China insists whoever caused the trouble should be the one that takes the initiative to end it. It would be unrealistic for the US to expect China to wave a white flag at the expense of its own interests. After all, what has happened over the past weeks has shown the country can and is ready to endure the US pressure.

For any meaningful interaction to happen, the US administration must cease its attempted coercion as a signal that it is willing to talk in good faith.

## Protest nails Lai's true colors to the mast

Amid the growing accusations of regressive actions by Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te and his Democratic Progressive Party authorities, a groundswell of opposition has emerged across Taiwan island, decrying their authoritarian tendencies and their eroding of democratic principles.

An event in Taipei on Saturday served as a platform for this chorus of dissent to gain volume, as several civic groups united to protest against the Lai authorities and their actions, and warn of their deliberate undermining of the fragile cross-strait peace.

Despite the drizzling rain in the afternoon that day, more than 200,000 people gathered around Lai's office building, demonstrating against the "green authoritarianism" of the DPP leader — the main color of the DPP flag being green — and calling for "Lai Ching-te out".

The protest stripped bare the "democracy" fiction that Lai has painstakingly created since he took office on May 20 as a lie. Speakers at the event issued a stark warning about the perils of the DPP, decrying its erosion of democratic principles, its deliberate provocations of the Chinese mainland and blind reliance on external forces, cautioning that such actions could extinguish any hope for tranquility on the island and across the Taiwan Strait.

Despite Lai's assertions that he is serving the interests of the Taiwan people, the secessionist-minded DPP leader has been colluding with external forces to put the DPP's "secessionist cause" above the future well-being of the island, and the party's narrow interest above the overall interests of the island's 23 million residents.

To buy the United States' support for his cause, the island, under his authorities, has paid tremendous amounts of money for earlier-generation US arms and sacrificed its backbone industries and star enterprises to help the US administration in its efforts to hold back the tide of the Chinese mainland's development. By disrupting cross-strait trade and subjecting industrial goods to punitive US tariffs, Lai has inflicted hardships on the island's farmers, workers and small businesses. The resultant economic strain, coupled with stagnant wages and escalating living costs, paints a grim picture of the toll exacted on the populace by the DPP's shortsighted political maneuvers.

In the face of the strong pushback on the island against these moves, the Lai authorities unveiled a series of tough measures in March to purge dissent. Claiming the island to be "a sovereign democratic state", the DPP authorities empowered themselves to "clean" anyone questioning their policy as a threat to "democracy" or an accomplice of the Chinese mainland — which Lai called a "hostile foreign force" — and vowed to build "non-red" supply chains.

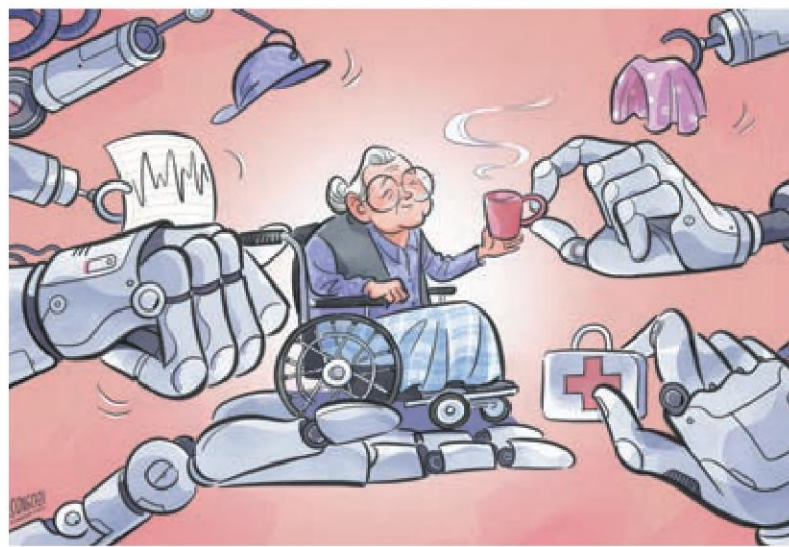
The haste with which the Lai authorities have tried to blame the protest on the opposition Kuomintang party and suggest that the protesters should go to Beijing to air their views only serves to expose that it is the Lai authorities' surrendering of Taiwan's economic interests to the US and their strangling of the island's society that has prompted Taiwan residents to take to the street.

That Lai claimed in a speech on the same day of the protest that Taiwan has the power and willingness to help the US revitalize its manufacturing industry in some sectors to play its due part to help "Make America Great Again" further exposes his true colors as a US puppet.

Born in a miner's family and growing up along with the island's fast rise as a vibrant economy from the 1960s to the 1990s, Lai should be well aware that the prosperity of Taiwan lies in its close connections with the mainland, which is its leading market and trading partner.

In a pertinent conclusion to the gathering, the protesters called for a steadfast defense of democracy and the rule of law on the island in the face of the DPP's encroaching authoritarianism, warning of the potential for widespread victimization by the DPP authorities of those that truly work for the future of Taiwan if unchecked. As a leader of the protest said, Lai is the biggest crisis facing Taiwan's democracy. In their eagerness to sever the island's connections with its motherland, the Lai authorities are treading a dangerous and dead-end path.

## Song Chen



## Opinion Line

## Asia's security its own business, no external party should interfere

In 2012, two American scholars published "A Tale of Two Asias" in Foreign Policy magazine, arguing that Asia was caught in a structural dilemma: growing economic integration on one side, and rising security tensions on the other. They argued that while Asian countries were becoming increasingly tied to China economically, they were relying more on the United States for security.

But this narrative does not reflect the reality, as the past decade has only made clearer. What it overlooks is a simple but essential fact: Asia's security tensions are not naturally occurring or beyond the region's control. They have been stirred up and manipulated by external powers — most notably, the US.

Under the pretext of "freedom of navigation", Washington has repeatedly intervened in the South China Sea, stirring up tensions in sensitive areas such as Ren'ai Reef. Meanwhile, the US has been accelerating the formation of exclusive military and security blocs through mechanisms such as the US-Japan-Philippines trilateral partnership, AUKUS, and the Quad, all aimed at reviving Cold War-style confrontations in the region. These moves are part of its broader "Indo-Pacific strategy" to reshape the regional security architecture to contain China.

On the Taiwan question, external forces have repeatedly challenged the one-China principle, complicating and destabilizing the situation. Some Western narratives go further, blaming Asia's security challenges on "historical grudges" or "nationalist impulses", while downplaying the disruptive role of outside interference.

— SONG PING, CHINA DAILY.

China's actions in promoting regional integration, stability, and development speak for themselves. The Belt and Road Initiative has helped transform Asia's economic landscape. Once landlocked and isolated, Laos is now better connected regionally thanks to the China-Laos Railway. The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project has improved connectivity in Indonesia. For years, China has remained the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' largest trading partner, offering economic certainty amid global uncertainty.

In Central Asia, China's cooperation with five countries spans security, trade, and cultural exchanges. From joint anti-terrorism efforts to infrastructure development through the China-Europe Railway Express, and education partnerships through institutional platforms, China has become a key partner in the region's progress.

Institutionally, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership — the world's largest free trade agreement covering one-third of the global economy — demonstrates Asia's preference for cooperation over confrontation. Even with the unresolved historical disputes and security sensitivities, Asian countries are choosing dialogue and rules-making over division.

All of this reflects China's long-standing push for building an "Asian community with a shared future". Countries such as

Laos and Cambodia have even integrated this vision into their national development plans. This shows a deepening regional understanding — one in which security and development go hand in hand, built through mutual respect.

If Asia can come together to sign the RCEP, it certainly has the capacity to shape its own security future. The obstacle does not lie within the region, but in the persistent interference of external powers.

In fact, Asia has long demonstrated its desire and capacity to shape a peaceful future. As early as 1955, the Bandung Conference brought together 29 Asian and African countries to call for peaceful coexistence, mutual respect for sovereignty and noninterference in internal affairs.

China's Global Security Initiative offers a clear pathway to this. Practical guidance for implementing the spirit of Bandung, its success is not just theoretical — in March 2023, China facilitated the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Beijing, proving that peaceful relations can be achieved through dialogue and mutual respect.

Asia's future will not be dictated by external powers nor confined by outdated narratives. It will be built on regional ownership, peaceful coexistence, and shared prosperity. China is committed to working with its neighbors to realize this vision — not just through words, but through concrete actions that foster stability, cooperation and trust.

— SONG PING, CHINA DAILY.

## What They Say

## Index to help coordinate key economic belt's development

How to assess the level of the coordinated development of a region has long been a headache-maker for central policymakers who largely rely on the reports submitted by local governments to make and adjust their policies.

The defects of this policymaking model are evident as local authorities tend to overstate the industrial strengths of their respective jurisdictions, or problems in some cases, in a bid to grab more financial and policy support from the higher authorities.

In practice, the squeaky-wheel-gets-oiled approach sometimes works contrary to its intended objective of bridging regional development gaps.

As such, an index system that can be applied to evaluate the coordinated balanced development level of a region that a think tank released in Beijing on Friday is undoubtedly a breakthrough.

The index has been created by researchers at the Jiangsu Yangtze River Economic Belt Research Institute, who based their studies on the Yangtze River Economic Belt's development over the past seven years. They have proposed a three-level index system, with balance, coordination and integration the top-level indexes.

Under the balance index are three subindexes on people's livelihoods, public services and public facilities. Under the coordination index are four subindexes on industry, urban development, society and nature; and under the integration index are five subindexes on ecology, transportation, economy, market and institutions. And under all the subindexes in the three fields there are 10 third-level indexes.

According to Cheng Changchun,

director of the think tank, the design of the index system is based on the State Council's directives and the relevant instructions of the central authorities on the coordinated balanced development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, a regional development strategy the central government launched in 2016.

The Yangtze River Economic Belt covers an area of 2.05 million square kilometers, six times the size of Germany, and is home to a population of 608 million, 43 percent of the national total, contributing about 46 percent of China's GDP. It consists of 11 provincial-level regions including developed megacities such as Shanghai and the less-developed inland Guizhou province. Its per capita disposable income varies from \$12,130 in Shanghai to \$3,924 in Guizhou.

Applying that index system, the researchers found the economic belt has made marked progress in promoting regional industrial relocation, green development, coordinated innovation and docking some institutions. They also found some knotty problems remain. For instance, the rise of some provincial capital cities, such as Wuhan, Changsha and Chengdu, has actually hollowed out their surrounding areas aggravating the development gap within the provinces.

Moreover, local protectionism now exists in more invisible forms particularly at the county and city level in less-developed regions, as local governors' priority remains the development of their own jurisdictions. So they tend to implement some beggar-thy-neighbor policies, which obstruct the interregional flow of production factors and divide the market. This problem is particularly prominent in the border regions between provinces.

Environmental pollution and ecologi-

cal degradation are other growing concerns. Although the better-off coastal provinces, such as Jiangsu and Zhejiang, have largely bid farewell to polluting industries, the relocating of these industries to the middle and upper reaches of the river turns the environmental threat from a problem of the river mouth region to the whole basin of the 6,300-km Yangtze. Worse, the upper reaches of the world's third-longest river have a delicate ecology that once damaged will be difficult to restore.

As Fan Hengshan, an economist with Wuhan University, noted at the launch of the report, although the better-off regions provide subsidies to their less-developed counterparts to discourage them to rely on polluting industries to boost growth, which works for cities in neighboring Zhejiang and Anhui, it's hard to be rolled out over such a large area as the Yangtze basin, which entails a complicated balance of interests.

Fan, who is also a former key member of the regional development policymaking circle of the central government, urged researchers to further improve their index system to enable it to reflect the dynamic situation more objectively and clearly.

Also as Fan noted, the index system should be problem/solution-oriented and people-focused. It needs to be a reliable framework to help identify the concrete problems of different provinces, as it is provincial authorities that play a crucial role in regional development, rather than the city governments the report looks to at the moment. That way it will be better able to prompt policymakers to concentrate on resolving the core issue — filling the development gaps and realizing social fairness and justice.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Holiday Consumption

**Editor's note:** Boosting domestic consumption is vital for Chinese economy amid tariff shocks. And the upcoming May Day holiday will once again display Chinese economic resilience. Experts share their views with China Daily.

Li Juncheng

## Emotional economy no passing fad

In an age of material abundance, a quiet consumer revolution is reshaping the shopping carts of China's younger generations. The rise of bizarrely popular items — from viral green plants named “ban banana greenness” (“banana green” sounds like “anxiety” in Chinese, a reminder to stay calm and not overthink) to “a bag of garbage” (a novelty stress relief toy), from the blind box craze to the widespread demand for *dazi* (a casual friendship offering scenario-based companionship, such as meal or studying) — signals a deeper trend: the steady ascent of the emotional economy. As utilitarian consumption gives way to emotional experience, a transformation driven by feelings is redefining the foundations of China's consumer market.

Traditionally, price-performance and utility defined the worth of a product. But for today's young consumers, shopping is no longer merely transactional — it's existential. Buying is as much about “who I am” as “what I need”.

T-shirts emblazoned with the “lying flat” slogan, quirky “ugly-cute” cultural products, and merchandise tied to virtual idols offer little practical function but immense emotional resonance. These objects speak not to utility, but to identity, validation and relief.

The late sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquid modernity helps explain this shift. In a society where traditional social bonds are eroding and life feels increasingly unstable, people seek lightweight emotional anchors. Objects such as blind boxes or stress-relief toys become affordable emotional surrogates — providing not only distraction, but a fleeting sense of control in an uncertain world. Even the humble Ban Banana Greenness plant, by playing on a pun, becomes an emotional talisman more than a botanical specimen.

In essence, emotional consumption marks a shift from owning to feeling. Young people are using consumer behavior to craft a personal emotional vocabulary.

Two key trends are shaping the emotional economy's frontier: healing consumption and function-based socializing, often dubbed social *dazi*.

The healing consumption provides direct emotional healing through goods and services, creating a controllable and predictable emotional haven for consum-



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ers. For example, immersive experience centers create virtual emotional scenes through technological means, allowing consumers to briefly escape from reality; The healing space utilizes techniques such as aromatherapy and sound therapy to provide a solution for physical and mental relaxation.

The rise of social *dazi* reflects the digitization of companionship. In contrast to traditional relationships, these connec-

tions are modular and purpose-driven: movie *dazi*, gym *dazi*, or dinner *dazi*. Think of them as plug-and-play social units — low-stakes, goal-oriented, and emotionally bounded.

While these trends differ in form, they share a common function: converting emotional needs into marketable experiences.

At its core, emotional consumption relies on the creation and transmission of symbols. Consider anime merchandise: a metal pin bearing a beloved character can sell hundreds of thousands of units — not because of the pin itself, but because of the emotional projection it enables. Museum gift shops, once stuffy and niche, now sell artifacts that let young people wear their cultural identity with playful pride.

On the other side, the emotional economy is driving cross-sector convergence. As feelings become a currency, industries from art and tech to mental health are fusing into new hybrids. Creative industries are developing emotionally intelligent digital art; mental wellness startups are launching AI-powered emotion trackers.

Still, the commercialization of emotion is not without peril. When emotional needs are overly packaged and monetized, there is a risk of alienation — of replacing real connection with consumer proxies.

Emotionally charged consumption reflects the profound cultural and psychological undercurrents in modern Chinese society. As products become symbols and experiences replace ownership, the consumer landscape is morphing into something far more personal, and far more symbolic.

This is a deep reflection of China's consumption upgrading — when material abundance meets emotional awakening, consumption is no longer a simple transactional behavior, but has become a medium for individuals to communicate with the world. Navigating this terrain will require balancing commercial innovation with human sensitivity.

After all, the most powerful economies are not just built on capital — but on connection.

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

Wang Qiyan

## Revamp time given to work, rest and play

Over the past few decades, China's rapid advances in science and technology have significantly boosted labor productivity and powered sustained medium-to-high economic growth.

As household incomes have risen, the demand for leisure-related consumption — including tourism, sports, and entertainment — has expanded.

Yet time remains a key constraint. More and more people are now asking: how much leisure time do we really have, and how can it be better structured? As a result, public interest in reforming China's public holiday system is reaching new heights.

How much time do we actually get off? Let's break down the current vacation structure. Every year has 365 or 366 days. Part of that is for work, part for rest. Broadly speaking, vacation time can be divided into three types: long leave (big breaks), public holidays (medium breaks), and weekends (short breaks).

Long leave refers to paid annual leave; medium breaks are the public holidays such as Spring Festival and National Day, as well as shorter holidays such as Qingming and Mid-Autumn Festival; and short breaks are the weekly Saturdays and Sundays.

In total, Chinese workers typically get: up to 15 days of paid leave on average, 13 days of public holidays, and 104 weekend days. Altogether, that's about 131 days of rest per year.

Where does China stand globally? In terms of total vacation time, China may have about 20 less days off compared with the developed countries such as France and Germany.

Notably, China's public holiday count is among the highest in the world, but it should guarantee and increase its paid leave.

Can vacation time be increased? Yes, and it should be. The ultimate driver of vacation time is labor productivity. As productivity improves, so should our ability to rest. Based on current productivity growth, China could reasonably increase its total days off to 151 by 2030.

There are three suggestions for public holiday reform. The first is to enforce paid leave. It's time to fully implement the paid leave system.

The government should lead by example: officials should not only work hard but also take their leave, and help ensure their staff do too. Paid leave enforcement should be part of performance evaluations. Tax breaks should be given to companies that meet paid leave standards. And businesses need support in boosting productivity through technology, education, and R&D so that giving leave doesn't come at the cost of competitiveness.

The second is to restore and extend key holidays. For example, restore the May Day “golden week”, extend the Spring Festival break to five full days, and add the Lantern Festival as a one-day national holiday. These adjustments would ease the current shortage of time for leisure consumption and better align with public expectations and cultural traditions.

The third could be to explore a four-day workweek by 2030. As productivity continues to rise, China could prepare to shift to a four-day (36-hour) workweek. Initially, this could be optional, allowing workers to choose flexible schedules based on personal needs.

Once paid leave is fully implemented and the four-day week becomes common practice, China can move away from the current “borrow-now-pay-later” system of holiday shifting.

Holiday reform is a complex and sensitive issue. And it requires careful planning and cannot be applied in a one-size-fits-all manner. For example, small and medium-sized enterprises with lower productivity may need phased implementation.

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Dan Steinbock

## Increased consumption can offset tariff disruption

The upcoming May Day holiday is poised to showcase China's economic resilience, much like during the Spring Festival and other holidays. This is crucial for China to bolster consumption in the face of global tariff shocks.

While China cannot avoid the impact of the United States' punitive tariffs, its economy remains on the recovery track. The same cannot be said of the US economy with concerns growing about its health.

Recently, these concerns have been escalating as a result of the US trade war.

In the fourth quarter of 2024, China's economic growth accelerated from 4.6 percent to 5.4 percent, with annualized growth of 5.0 percent last year. Before the US tariff war, China's economy showed increasing signs of stabilization. Hence, the International Monetary Fund's upgrade to its China's GDP growth forecast.

Despite substantial external headwinds, the Chinese government has set a 5 percent GDP growth target for 2025, signaling confidence in the economy's resilience to offset the tariff war. Concurrently, the fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratio has been raised to 4 percent as policymakers set a 2 percent consumer price index inflation target.

Here's the bottom line: The expansion of domestic demand is no longer just a cyclical effort. It is not simply a tool to



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respond to business cycles. It reflects the structural transformation of the Chinese economy away from exports and investment toward greater consumption and innovation.

Last year, consumer spending contributed nearly 45 percent of China's economic growth, surpassing investment and exports. The objective is to raise spending power by increasing earnings and reducing financial burdens. Hence, the aim to create 12 million new jobs and keep unemployment at 5.5 percent. Such goals are vital to the recovery of consumption that is premised on solid wage development and a steady property market. These initiatives have been coupled with special initiatives to boost consumption.

These efforts are on track. In the first quarter of the year, China's economy grew by 5.4 percent. Remarkably, the signs of progress were broad. Industrial production growth climbed to 6.5 percent year-to-year, fueled by both external

and domestic demand. Export growth accelerated to 5.8 percent, almost 2.5 times, although largely due to exporters front-loading shipments prior to the tariff penalties.

State-sector spending continued to drive fixed asset investment growth, particularly in automobiles and equipment. In property markets, contraction continued to narrow, with developers pushing for the completion of unfinished homes. The improvement of liquidity conditions suggests Chinese households are more willing to spend, while companies are increasingly investing.

China's broad push of “effective demand” is not just classic Keynesianism, however. There is another side to the story.

Technological innovation and emerging industries are critical to sustain the rising demand. This is why China is increasingly pushing for rapid progress in “new quality productive forces”, especially artificial intelligence.

For some time, the Chinese government has fostered “industries of the future”, including embodied AI, 6G, quantum technology and biomanufacturing. The dramatic rise of DeepSeek without US-style billions of dollars in subsidies reflects the rapidly-changing new realities. In 2024, TikTok, CapCut and Temu were already among the top-10 most popular apps worldwide.

In the past few quarters, the gains of the Chinese economy suggest that a virtuous circle of disruptive innovation and effective demand, with the government as the catalytic force, could be in the making. And that's precisely what the US' tariffs hope to undermine. The US administration's record-high 245 percent tariffs on some Chinese imports seek to disrupt, undermine and reverse the recovery of China's economy.

The “reciprocal tariffs”, which have been announced by the US administration, are unilateral, flawed and mistakenly calculated.

According to new data by the IMF, the US tariffs could downgrade US growth by a one-third to 1.8 percent, with a 40 percent probability of a recession. Europe's largest economies and Japan will suffer even more, with growth almost halved. Global growth could plunge to 2.8 percent, which would penalize particularly the most vulnerable economies in the Global South.

And yet, the US administration is flirting with even more tariffs, planning to use tariff negotiations to pressure US partners to limit their dealings with China.

Such a scenario could prove lethal to the ailing world economy.

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



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## GLOBAL VIEWS

DIMITRI DE BOER

## Climate leadership at a critical time

China's strong show of support is a boost to global climate action

At the Leaders Meeting on Climate and the Just Transition held recently, major countries from the Global North and the Global South came together to jointly establish that they're not giving up on climate action.



The virtual summit was organized by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and President Luiz

Ínacio Lula da Silva of Brazil. Important world leaders spoke, including President Xi Jinping of China, President Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission and leaders of countries most vulnerable to climate change.

The virtual summit couldn't have been more timely. The 30th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change will be held in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest later this year, marking 10 years since the adoption of the Paris Agreement. With the multilateral system buckling under unilateral actions and tariff shocks, all countries are actively reassessing their dependencies and priorities in the international order, as well as trade and investment relationships, and ways to ensure military and energy security.

With so many threats and competing priorities, it can be easy to lose faith in the global response to climate change. But future expectations around climate action are critical in how the world actually develops, as the planning and investment decisions made today could either lock in harmful emissions or support climate action. Certain investments in fossil fuel infrastructure may appear profitable today, but could easily become stranded assets if countries decide on the need to step up climate action, or if fossil technologies are outcompeted by renewables.

China's experience is showing that green sectors can be a huge business opportunity. UN Secretary-General Guterres underscored this point, saying renewable energy production is "the economic opportunity of the century", and "no group or government can stop the clean

energy revolution".

A few weeks from now, the European Union and China will celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations. Throughout the past decade, the joint commitment on climate action has been critical in global climate governance. Working for a European environmental NGO based in China, I have had the pleasure to witness firsthand the in-depth and fruitful cooperation on climate and environment between the two sides. The 50th anniversary will be an excellent time to reaffirm and further deepen EU-China climate relations.

Just as important for climate action are the relations among countries in the Global South, especially large emerging economies. These countries need to determine their economic development pathways, and have an opportunity to build up green industries and infrastructure, strategically positioning themselves for a low-carbon future. As climate change is warming the world faster than was previously anticipated, all countries must now also step up climate adaptation, to make their economies more resilient to a world characterized by frequent extreme weather events.

In the days before the virtual summit, André Corrêa do Lago, president-elect of COP30, visited Beijing. His visit underscores the importance Brazil attached to the virtual summit, and is a strong sign that Brazil and China, as two of the largest economies in the Global South, continue to attach great importance to global climate governance.

The speech President Xi gave at the virtual summit contains a lot of important substance. First of all, the Chinese president called on countries to adhere to multilateralism and an international order underpinned by international law. As events in the last months have shown, international law and justice cannot be taken for granted. Without this legal foundation, the UNFCCC, and even the UN system, would be meaningless, and therefore adherence to international law is absolutely key to global climate governance.

Second, he called for international cooperation, and for countries to "facilitate the free flow of quality green technologies and products, so that they can be

accessible, affordable and beneficial for all countries, especially the developing ones". In this sense, tariffs or other barriers would hamper trade in such technologies, and could disrupt their supply chains.

He also committed China to vigorously deepen South-South cooperation and continue to provide help for fellow developing countries to the best of its capability.

Finally, President Xi promised that China will announce its 2035 Nationally Determined Contributions "covering all economic sectors and all greenhouse gases", before COP30 in Belém, Brazil. This is very exciting news. Sector-specific targets will offer much greater predictability for businesses in each of those sectors, giving them a clear roadmap for their transition toward low-carbon technologies. Covering all greenhouse gases is important too — especially as methane emissions have been shown to contribute to more warming than was previously assumed.

On top of ensuring the free flow of green technologies, now is a critical time for China to maximize joint ventures for the manufacturing of green technologies in other emerging economies. To ensure speed and scale in the global climate transition, climate-friendly technologies should be produced all around the world. Sharing business opportunities, employment and technological capacities can also provide a boost to the political support for the climate transition in those countries, and reduce the likelihood of trade frictions.

In line with President Xi's emphasis on the rule of law, we propose that all countries, including China, should proceed to draft and adopt framework climate laws. Such a legal basis forms the foundation for achieving climate objectives in an orderly, rapid and fair manner, and benefits all sectors of society throughout the transition. China has remarkably powerful systems for environmental rule of law — it has already established specialized environmental courts at all levels, and even has thousands of public interest prosecutors bringing cases to protect the environment. Robust systems will be needed to ensure that newly built coal-fired power plants in China do not result in an increase in total emissions, and that emissions are brought down as soon as possible, providing a smooth and low-cost trajectory toward carbon neutrality before 2060.

Developed countries must not shy away from their responsibilities under the UNFCCC. They should take the lead in addressing climate change, step up their climate transition and create green jobs, and provide the required financial support to enable climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries.

The call from the UN, Brazil, China, the EU and vulnerable countries is clear: The world is gearing up for climate action, and countries and businesses around the world should prepare themselves for a future in which the low carbon economy rules.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

HANY BESADA

## Power points

China's innovation, industrial scale and capital are vital for the energy transition of the Global South

As the climate clock ticks, the Global South stands at a critical juncture: how to achieve sustainable development without repeating the high-carbon path that fueled industrialization in the North. For Africa, South Asia, and other Southern



regions, the challenge is not only to expand energy access but to do so equitably, without exacerbating environmental degradation or social inequality. In this unfolding energy transition, China's growing leadership in renewable energy and green infrastructure presents both opportunity and responsibility. Its investments and technology exports are increasingly shaping the energy future of the Global South.

Over the past two decades, China has emerged as a dominant force in the global renewable energy landscape. It is the world's largest producer, exporter and installer of solar panels, wind turbines and batteries. In 2023 alone, China accounted for over 60 percent of global solar photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing output and over 70 percent of global battery production. It has also become a major financier and builder of green infrastructure projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America through platforms such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund.

In Africa, Chinese companies have played a significant role in expanding access to solar energy in rural communities, where traditional grid expansion remains cost-prohibitive. From solar mini-grids in Kenya and Nigeria to hydropower and wind energy projects in Ethiopia and South Africa, China's presence is reshaping the continent's energy mix. The Garissa Solar Plant in Kenya, built by China Jiangxi International Economic and Technical Cooperation Co Ltd, is among the largest solar plants in East Africa and has been instrumental in improving grid stability. Similarly, in Vietnam develop large-scale solar and wind installations that contribute to energy diversification and resilience. The Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park in Pakistan, one of the largest in Asia, was constructed with Chinese financing and expertise and now contributes significantly to the country's power grid.

Yet the significance of China's role extends beyond hardware and finance. It is also influencing the structure of global energy governance. As Western investors and multilateral institutions often hesitate to back large-scale projects in fragile or low-income states due to risk or debt concerns, China is filling the gap — albeit with its own strategic calculus. By offering concessional loans,

blended finance and turnkey engineering solutions, China enables countries in the Global South to leapfrog into renewable energy without relying on fossil-intensive pathways. In doing so, it offers a model of development that sidesteps the fossil fuel dependency that once characterized industrial growth in the West, aligning more closely with climate imperatives outlined in the Paris Agreement.

However, for this partnership to support a truly just energy transition, several conditions must be met.

First, Chinese-financed renewable energy projects should be embedded in local development plans that prioritize job creation, technology transfer and environmental safeguards. A just transition requires more than decarbonization — it demands economic inclusion and empowerment. Joint ventures, skills training and local manufacturing of green technologies must become integral to China's energy engagements. Encouragingly, there are examples of progress: Chinese solar companies have partnered with local manufacturers in Egypt's Benban Solar Park to produce solar panels domestically, while in Ethiopia, the Aysha Wind Farm project included provisions for training local engineers. These models must be replicated and scaled to ensure broad-based benefits and sustainable ownership.

Second, transparency and debt sustainability are critical. While many African and Asian governments welcome Chinese finance for energy infrastructure, concerns remain about opaque loan terms and debt distress. A just transition cannot be built on an unsustainable financial foundation. Instruments such as the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatments could serve as a platform for constructive dialogue. Furthermore, building capacity in host governments to conduct robust cost-benefit analyses and environmental impact assessments is vital to ensure projects are not only viable but also socially and environmentally responsible.

Third, China's leadership in critical supply chains — particularly in solar panels and battery storage, could play a transformative role in democratizing access to green technologies. Currently, developing countries face barriers in accessing affordable and high-quality renewable energy components due to supply chain bottlenecks and trade restrictions. By expanding South-South technology partnerships, licensing agreements, and knowledge exchanges, China can help the Global South reduce its dependency on Northern technology monopolies and diversify the sources of clean energy innovation. China's establishment of renewable energy training centers and innovation hubs across Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa could accelerate the diffusion

of clean technologies, support regional manufacturing bases, and create ecosystems of innovation that are adapted to local conditions and climate risks.

Importantly, China's recent shift toward greening the Belt and Road — through initiatives such as the BRI International Green Development Coalition and its 2021 pledge to stop building new coal plants abroad — signals a positive turn. But implementation remains uneven. Some countries still see a mix of fossil and renewable investments, and many struggle to ensure environmental compliance. A just energy transition must be consistent and comprehensive. It cannot afford to be undermined by contradictory practices. Monitoring and accountability mechanisms — jointly developed with host countries and civil society actors — can ensure that green commitments are translated into practice. Strengthening environmental and social impact assessments and enhancing public participation in project design are essential steps toward greater legitimacy and trust in Chinese-supported green infrastructure.

As the world looks toward COP30 and other global climate milestones, the role of China in shaping a fair, inclusive and sustainable energy transition in the Global South will continue to grow. African and Asian countries, together with China, should strengthen collaborative efforts to co-design energy projects that align with local development priorities and global climate commitments. At the same time, international financial institutions and Western donors should recognize and complement these efforts, rather than compete or isolate. There is an urgent need to move from fragmented initiatives to coordinated and synergistic action — where Chinese, Western and multilateral actors work together to close the global energy access gap and support climate justice.

China's capabilities in renewable energy — its innovation, industrial scale and capital — can be transformative for the Global South. The future of global energy security depends not just on reducing carbon emissions, but on building systems that are resilient, inclusive and shared. In this, China has both the tools — and the responsibility — to lead.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

# LIFE



## Fostering dialogue with artful endeavor

Annual French cultural festival offers ambitious program to give audiences the opportunity to explore multiple disciplines, **Fang Aiqing** reports.



**Top:** French Ambassador to China Bertrand Lortholary addresses the opening ceremony of the 19th edition of Festival Croisements in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in April. PROVIDED BY THE FRENCH INSTITUTE OF BEIJING **Left:** French actress Isabelle Huppert (middle) plays Lyubov in theater production *The Cherry Orchard* that toured China. CHRISTOPHE RAYNAUD DE LAGE / FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON **Above:** A scene from the Chinese edition of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, a stage adaptation of Jules Verne's masterpiece. HUANG TINGKUANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Portraying the stories of the underwater world with puppetry, a stage adaptation of French author Jules Verne's sci-fi masterpiece *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* was held in Shenzhen on April 11-12, marking the opening of the 19th Festival Croisements.

Launched in 2006, the annual cultural festival organized by the French embassy in China and the French Institute of Beijing encourages and facilitates exchanges between artists and institutions from China and France.

From April to July, more than 300 events, including stage performances, art exhibitions and a French film panorama, will take place in 31 cities across China.

French Ambassador to China Bertrand Lortholary says that the 19th Festival Croisements will offer an ambitious program and explore multiple artistic disciplines to foster cultural dialogue between the two countries.

He adds that this year's festival resonates with the major environmental challenges facing the contemporary world. As France and Costa Rica co-host the third United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice, France, in June, the festival highlights the stage adaptation of the novel, inviting Chinese audiences to a poetic reflection on ocean preservation.

Verne's novel follows the adventures of Captain Nemo aboard the submarine *Nautilus* along with marine biologist Pierre Aronnax, who narrates the story, his servant Conseil, and harpooner Ned Land. Readers experience the mysterious, stunning yet thrilling undersea world through their eyes.

Directed by Christian Hecq, an actor and director from the French theater company Comedie-Francaise, and Valerie Lesort, a director, visual artist and actress, the adaptation features an immersive and visually captivating approach, adopting puppetry to present underwater life onstage. Hecq also portrayed Captain Nemo.

In 2016, the production won the Moliere Award for Visual Creation. The Moliere Awards are France's highest theater honor.

He says during the initial creation in 2015 they endeavored to

restore the artistry of puppetry, which was often mistakenly perceived as a minor art form intended for children.

The lightness and flexibility of the materials used allow the puppets to reproduce the expressive, gestural language of aquatic creatures. Each fish, manipulated by the performers, has its own character. Hecq adds that manual animations enabled them to fully exhibit the richness of the live performance.

Staged during the festival is a new edition joined by a Chinese production team and cast, including director Zha Wenyuan, playwright Tian Xiaowei and performers such as actor Bao Jianfeng, which will tour Beijing and Shanghai, Nanjing and Nantong in Jiangsu province, as well as Chengdu in Sichuan province.

According to Hecq, the Chinese edition is distinguished by some of its puppets, which have been reimagined by visual artist Kain Liu Kaiyin.

This new edition is coproduced by the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, the Hong Kong Arts Festival, and Tempest Projects, an international performing arts company based in London and Shanghai.

### An iconic guest

With a variety of performing arts shows taking center stage, Festival Croisements also includes theater production *The Cherry Orchard* this year, a classic play written by Russian author Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) at the beginning of the 20th century and directed by Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues. It was the opening play for the prestigious Avignon Festival in 2021.

As its name suggests, the play revolves around a family orchard to be sold due to debts. Set against the backdrop of the coming modernity, landowner Lyubov, an extravagant and elusive woman portrayed by the iconic French actress Isabelle Huppert, and Lopakhin, a wealthy businessman born to a family of serfs on the property, as well as a group of other characters, are torn between nostalgia and a mix of hope and unease about future.

Huppert is certain that Chinese audiences will feel the depth of Chekhov's humor and genius through this play, which has just



Bertrand Lortholary (left) and Chinese comedian and director Shen Teng at a news conference for the 19th edition of Festival Croisements in Beijing on April 8. Shen is the festival's ambassador this year. PROVIDED BY THE FRENCH INSTITUTE OF BEIJING

toured Shanghai, Nanjing and Beijing.

As Festival Croisements' guest artist this year, Huppert recalls that during her first stage experience in China — her reading of *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, Guangdong province in 2017 — she observed how well French culture is received in China. The enthusiasm was renewed during her visit in December with *The Glass Menagerie*.

She also hopes that *Berenice*, on which she works with director Romeo Castellucci, will make its way to China after its European tour.

Chinese comedian and director Shen Teng, who serves as the ambassador for this year's Festival Croisements, says that cinema, art and culture transcend borders and languages, enabling audiences to connect and resonate with each other.

The festival perfectly embodies this concept.

"We often forget that France is one of the birthplaces of comedy. From theater to cinema, French humor takes on various forms, yet it always touches the heart and offers a perspective on the world through laughter," Shen says.

He adds that he hopes cultural exchanges can allow audiences in both countries to discover more humorous, insightful works with a human touch while inspiring artists and fostering further collaborations between Chinese and French creators.

### Significant reflections

More than six years after its last visit to China, the National Orchestra of France will return to the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing in May as part of its Asian tour with a repertoire from

French composers Maurice Ravel and Georges Bizet, together with *Pictures at an Exhibition*, a suite by Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky and orchestrated by Ravel, as well as works by Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Conducted by Cristian Macelaru, the orchestra will be accompanied by Paris-born Chinese-Canadian pianist Bruce Xiaoyu Liu, who won the 18th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition in 2021.

Renowned art institutions including the Musee d'Orsay and Centre Pompidou in Paris are joining Festival Croisements this year to showcase the quintessence of Impressionism, modernism and French contemporary art scenes in China.

More than 100 paintings and sculptures from over 50 artists, such as Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet and Vincent Van Gogh, will be displayed in the exhibition *The Paths of Modernity: Masterpieces from the Musee d'Orsay, Paris* at Shanghai's Museum of Art Pudong from June to October.

Stephane Guegan, scientific adviser to the president of the Musee d'Orsay, says: "This project was born from the shared vision of the Musee d'Orsay and our Chinese partners to exhibit some of the Orsay's masterpieces without reducing their status."

"Even iconic works transcend their fame; they are part of a larger history. This history aligns with Orsay's ambitions at its opening: to offer visitors the opportunity to understand paintings and sculptures in their context of creation, linked to the political and social revolutions of the period from 1848 to 1914. The exhibition follows this logic and emphasizes the significance of the aesthetic and economic evolutions in the art world."

Seven masterpieces from the French museum's collection were exhibited at the 2010 Shanghai

World Expo. In 2020, Monet's iconic piece *Impression, Sunrise* was displayed in China for the first time.

Constance de Marliave, the museum's head of economic development, says that although the Orsay's presence in China is still modest, they have observed a growing interest in collaborative projects and the arrival of Chinese visitors. Since 2022, the number of Chinese visitors to the museum increased by over 5 percent.

She says this phenomenon reflects an expanding relationship that they're confident will continue to strengthen in the coming years, and they look forward to more partnerships and cultural projects to meet the growing demand.

From Tuesday to October 18, 2026, the West Bund Museum in Shanghai and the Centre Pompidou will co-present *The Reinvention of Landscape*, which explores the various ways of representing the natural or urban environment in which human societies evolve.

Featuring paintings, installations, cinema and new media works from the French institution's collection, which have been created since 1905, the exhibition covers many artistic styles, such as Fauvism, Cubism, surrealism and abstract art, to trace the transformations of landscape as an artistic theme that now carries significant reflections on societal and environmental issues.

According to Christian Briend, the exhibition's curator and head curator of the Modern Art Collection at the Centre Pompidou, the exhibition includes some of the center's recent acquisitions never shown in Paris, as well as its collection of pieces by Chinese-French painter Zao Wou-Ki, Chinese artists Cui Jie and Qiu Xiaofei, as well as Chuang Che, who was born in Beijing in 1934, raised in Taiwan and lives in New York.

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## UN celebrates Chinese Language Day with immersive experience

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations marked its 16th Chinese Language Day on April 15 at its New York headquarters, offering an immersive cultural experience that blended Chinese poetry and music.

This year's event Poetic China: Rhymes and Romance featured Chinese poetry readings, musical performances and an exhibition on Chinese characters. More than 400 UN diplomats, staff and international guests attended.

The event showcased a performance by UN singers who, dressed in traditional costumes, sang the iconic Chinese folk song *Jasmine*. Additionally,

UN staff and diplomats read excerpts from classic Chinese texts, including *Shijing* (Book of Songs) and *I Ching* (Book of Changes), and a poem by Chinese artificial intelligence company DeepSeek that explores the Chinese language's lyrical beauty.

Zach Danz, a UN staff member and one of the performers, began learning Chinese a decade ago while studying theater at a university in Shanghai. Though he acknowledges the challenges of mastering the language, Danz expresses how enriching exploring Chinese culture is.

During the opening ceremony, Fu Cong, China's permanent repre-



Zach Danz, a United Nations staff member from the United States, recites Chinese ancient classics during the UN's celebration of the 16th Chinese Language Day in New York. LI RUI / XINHUA

sentative to the UN, remarked that poetry is deeply embedded in the souls of Chinese people. He noted that classical Chinese poetry, which dates back over 3,000 years, marks the beginning of a rich literary tradition.

Fu highlighted that "Chinese is stepping ever more confidently onto the world stage, becoming a bridge that crosses cultures, fosters understanding, and helps forge a consensus."

He further emphasized that the event is "more than just one language" but "a celebration of dialogue among civilizations". It is something that is needed more

today than ever, he says.

The UN's Language Days were introduced in 2010 to promote multilingualism and cultural diversity and ensure the equal use of the six official UN languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

Chinese Language Day is designated on April 20, around Grain Rain (gu yu), the sixth of "24 solar terms" in the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar. This date honors Cangjie, the legendary figure believed to have invented Chinese characters.

XINHUA

## LIFE



Left: *The Amateur* stars actor Rami Malek as Charlie Heller, a Central Intelligence Agency cryptographer, and actress Rachel Brosnahan as the character's wife, Sarah. Center: The protagonist embarks on a vengeful journey. Right: A scene features Malek's role confronting a man involved in his wife's murder. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Oscar winner takes on covert operation

Hollywood actor's latest film gives an unconventional look into the world of CIA spies, **Xu Fan** reports.

When the topic of spy films comes up, what most often springs to mind are images of suave, highly skilled agents — such as James Bond with his famous Walther PPK pistol, or Ethan Hunt and the high-tech gadgets he uses to scale skyscrapers.

*The Amateur*, a new Hollywood spy thriller, presents a very different kind of Central Intelligence Agency agent — one who is sometimes clumsy, not even daring enough to pull the trigger.

The film, released on the Chinese mainland on April 11, is adapted from the 1981 novel of the same name by Robert Littell, an American writer who specializes in tales of espionage.

Featuring Oscar-winning actor Rami Malek as Charlie Heller, a talented CIA decoder and analyst with an intelligence quotient of over 170, the film begins with the tragic death of his wife Sarah, who is played by Rachel Brosnahan, in a London terrorist attack. After using his skills to swiftly uncover the perpetrators, Heller is frustrated to find that his superiors are refusing to act, forcing him to embark on a dangerous global manhunt to avenge her death.

Malek, who is most familiar to Chinese audiences for his role as singer Freddie Mercury in the 2018 biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody*, tells China Daily during an online interview on April 9 that he was in Irish capital Dublin when he received a call inquiring about his future acting plans.

Recalling his portrayal of a cybersecurity engineer and hacker in the American television drama series *Mr. Robot*, Malek says he hoped to flex his muscles again in this genre.

"I thought I'd like to see an action film featuring someone with both a very high IQ and high emotional intelligence as well. That's what drew me to the story and the role. You don't often see those two quali-



A scene from the Hollywood spy film *The Amateur* features actor Rami Malek as the unconventional hero Charlie Heller. Malek is familiar to Chinese audiences for his Oscar-winning role as singer Freddie Mercury in the 2018 biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

ties balanced in films, or even in real life," he explains.

In the film, it is intelligence, rather than physical prowess, that becomes Heller's main weapon. In one gripping scene, he confronts a man involved in his wife's murder. Instead of resorting to direct violence, Heller cleverly uses a remote device to shatter the glass of a suspended swimming pool — positioned 35 meters above the ground as a bridge

between two buildings — sending the villain, who is taking a night swim, plummeting to his death.

For director James Hawes, it was a challenge to make changes to the original novel, which is set more than 40 years ago.

"The nature of espionage has changed dramatically. The whole political landscape has shifted. One example is that in the novel, most of the action takes place in Prague in

today's Czech Republic, which was known as 'a city of spies' before the Iron Curtain came down. But that isn't the case anymore," Hawes tells China Daily.

Istanbul — a vibrant, historic city that straddles Europe and Asia — thus becomes the alternative setting for some of the most pivotal scenes.

"We wanted a city that feels more like it is on the edge of Europe ... Istanbul is not often seen on screen.

It's on the border between the East and West. It's just that bit more edgy, exotic and exciting," he says.

As an action-packed tentpole with a globe-trotting storyline, the film was also shot in London — the city's St. Pancras International train station features in the scene of Sarah's death — as well as in Paris and Marseille.

With scenes purportedly shot at the CIA headquarters in Langley, Vir-



A poster for the film *The Amateur*.

ginia — a location that has been featured numerous times in films and TV series — Hawes was careful with the details and employed security advisers throughout the production.

After learning that London has one of the highest densities of surveillance cameras per person in Europe — exemplified by data showing that the average person is photographed up to 300 times each day — Hawes says this fact makes one scene more credible. In it, the protagonist takes advantage of the extensive surveillance system by tampering with real-time footage, copying his face onto multiple individuals to create the illusion that he is in several locations at once.

When asked what he believes will be the film's most appealing element for Chinese cinemagoers, Hawes replies: "It's all about the power of the underdog. I think Rami did so well to show him (Heller) sometimes failing but always fighting back. I think audiences love an unexpected hero."

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To Yu Bo, a 41-year-old filmmaker from Beijing, death once felt like a distant concept — something dramatic, even cinematic.

He had spent years documenting life-or-death moments in ICUs, always from behind the camera. But everything shifted when Yu experienced three severe episodes of acute pancreatitis in a single year.

"It was all self-inflicted — alcohol, social events," Yu says. "But it made me realize that death is the one destination we all share. I wanted to understand it, to choose how I face it."

Last month, he signed a living will via an online platform, joining a growing number of people who are formally documenting their end-of-life wishes. He chose to forgo cardiopulmonary resuscitation, mechanical ventilation, and tube feeding should his condition be deemed irreversible.

As China develops, life expectancy has steadily risen — reaching an average of 79 years in 2024, among the highest in the developing world. Many older adults are now living longer, healthier lives, but the rise in chronic illness and end-of-life challenges is prompting deeper reflection on how to age — and die — with dignity.

In this shifting landscape, end-of-life planning is slowly entering public conversations. Once seen as taboo, living wills and advance directives are gaining ground, offering individuals greater control and families a clearer sense of their loved ones' final wishes.

Yu is part of a demographic driving this change: educated, urban,

tech-savvy adults aged 30 to 59. This age group accounts for two-thirds of the more than 60,000 people who have signed living wills with the Beijing Living Will Promotion Association — formerly known as the Choice and Dignity platform — since 2010.

"At our age, the most obvious sign is that you get fewer wedding invitations and more funeral notices," he says. "I've seen too many people suffer needlessly in their final days, like my grandfather, who was bedridden for eight years. That wasn't life. That was prolonged pain."

Nearly 70 percent of those who have signed living wills with the association hold a university degree, and most live in first-tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen of Guangdong province, where exposure and access to new ideas shape their attitudes.

Growth was initially rapid, peaking at about 15,000 a year six years ago, but this has since slowed. According to Wang Bo, secretary-general of the association, this isn't due to waning interest, but rather the emergence of more means for writing wills, such as hospitals, civic groups and notary offices.

"Public awareness has grown," Wang says. "When we first started, no one responded to the information we shared on WeChat. But now, even high school students have joined our volunteer team."



A therapist assists an elderly man in rehabilitation training in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, on Sept 5. XU YU / XINHUA

Still, progress clashes with tradition. In China, cultural norms surrounding death remain strong — discussing it is often avoided, as it's seen as inauspicious. Forgoing life-prolonging treatment, no matter how futile, can be seen as unfilial. Families often insist on aggressive intervention for emotional closure or fear of being judged.

Qin Yuan, a doctor at the palliative care center at Beijing Haidian Hospital, often sees this tension. "People believe that as long as their elderly relatives are alive, their family is whole," she explains. "They also worry about being judged for

'giving up' too early."

To navigate this, her team holds family meetings to align patient wishes with family expectations. "It's a daily negotiation," she says.

Now, policy is beginning to reflect shifting attitudes.

In 2023, Shenzhen became the first city in the country to legally recognize living wills, allowing residents to reject invasive treatment at the end of their lives.

The move sparked unexpected interest, with notary offices reporting rising numbers of people seeking to formalize their wishes.

"Young people and childless cou-

ples are increasingly seeking notarization," says Liu Suimei, a Shenzhen notary. "They care deeply about preserving dignity in their final moments."

As China's population ages — currently there are more than 310 million people aged 60 and above — the government aims to establish at least one palliative care ward in every pilot area, ensuring coverage across both urban and rural communities.

Momentum is building. In 2024, a national political adviser proposed the expansion of education and policy support. Advocates want advance directives linked to health IDs, ensuring that people's wishes follow them to the hospital.

This shift mirrors a global trend. The United States is moving from static living wills to ongoing advance care planning. China is adapting similar models.

Wang envisions advance care planning, which will be a key focus for her association in the future, as a tool to translate personal preferences into actionable medical plans.

She says the association plans to use big data to inform policy and expand outreach via video-sharing and streaming platforms like Douyin and Bilibili.

Still, cultural resistance lingers. "Some people just wave us off, as if talking about death will make it come sooner," says Xiang Qiaozhen, a palliative care nurse in Zhejiang province and a volunteer advocate. "But waiting until the very end often means missing the chance to have the conversation at all."

She has not signed a living will herself, but her daughter knows her wishes. "One day, she told me, 'If it ever comes to that, I'll make sure you go into palliative care,'" Xiang says. "That kind of quiet understanding is what we hope to build."

Yu, too, faced pushback. After sharing his decision to sign a living will on his WeChat account, friends flooded him with calls, assuming he was terminally ill. "They couldn't believe I'd made such a choice just to be prepared," he says.

"Our discomfort with death is almost in our cultural DNA," Yu reflects. "We fear it, avoid it, and rarely claim ownership of it. But choosing how we leave this world should be our right."

Despite this, he remains hopeful. "I believe more people will choose the same path," he says. "I want to tell their stories through film. Maybe then, we'll learn to talk about death — not to dwell on it, but to live more wisely because of it."

XINHUA

## SPORTS

## TRACK AND FIELD

## Host puts in a sparkling show



Zhang Mingkun won gold in the men's long jump on Saturday in Xiamen with a leap of 8.18 meters. XINHUA

## Diamond league gets off to dazzling start in Xiamen

By SUN XIAOCHEN  
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With an impressive campaign collectively celebrated on home soil, China's top track and field talent has stolen the show from the world's best at the Diamond League season opener in Xiamen.

No new world records, but the Diamond League's first meet of the year in East China's Fujian province has offered plenty to cheer, especially for local fans, as the host's squad racked up five medals, including one gold, on Saturday, with its blend of youth and experience tested against a strong international field.

The biggest surprise, or perhaps the most underrated performer, was young Chinese prospect Zhang Mingkun, who leaped to gold in the men's long jump. The 24-year-old sailed out to 8.18 meters on his fifth attempt to steal the win from the leader of the first four rounds, Liam Adcock of Australia, to bag his first medal of the league series at Xiamen's Egret Stadium.

His winning jump on Saturday also marked Zhang's personal best, only six centimeters shy of his overall PB of 8.24m, achieved at an indoor meet in Pombal, Portugal, in February.

Adcock — with 8.15m on his third jump — had to settle for silver, while American jumper Marquis Dendy, winner of last year's series leg in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, finished third with 8.10m.

Zhang's unexpected rise to the top step of the podium has helped maintain China's competitiveness in the men's event, after 2022 world championships winner Wang Jianan struggled to reclaim his prime form.

"It was my first time in Xiamen, and to compete in such a high-level event. I didn't jump well initially, but, luckily, I found my rhythm on the fifth attempt," said Zhang, who finished 7th at his Olympic debut in Paris last summer.

"I didn't disappoint the fans, at the end of the day. I will just keep working hard," said the Hunan province native.

In men's triple jump, Chinese vet-



Sixteen-year-old Chen Yujie marked her Diamond League debut with a PB and new Asian youth record of 22.99s in the 200m. XINHUA



Norwegian hurdler Karsten Warholm broke his own "world record" in the newly-added 300m discipline with a time of 33.05s. XINHUA

eran Zhu Yaming came up short of delivering another elite-level result, following his 17.33m silver-winning leap at the Nanjing indoor worlds last month, as he produced a sub-par performance by his standards, recording 17.03m to finish second after Jamaican winner Jordan Scott's PB of 17.27m.

Zhu, a silver medalist at Tokyo 2020, wasn't upset, though.

"It was a result that was just OK, just passed the lowest requirement of myself," said the 31-year-old, who's registered results of 17.30m-plus nine times, with his 17.57m podium finish in Tokyo still his PB.

"I feel I had a solid preparation from Nanjing to Xiamen, yet the result here showed we didn't do as well as we thought in training, meaning I still have room to improve."

On an electrifying night, cheered on by a passionate home crowd, the host squad also collected three

bronze medals.

In men's 110m hurdles, Liu Junxi delivered a PB of 13.24 seconds to grab one of them, women's shot put veteran Gong Lijiao's 19.62m effort delivered her a podium finish, and a 61.62m throw in women's javelin by youngster Su Lingdan saw her pocket her first career Diamond League medal.

Off the podium, without a medal, China's teen prodigy Chen Yujie still made her presence felt on her Diamond League debut, as the 16-year-old sprinted to fourth place in the women's 200m with a PB and new Asian youth record of 22.99s.

She missed out on the podium by a mere 0.02s in a race featuring a star-studded field that included Jamaica's two-time 200m world champion Shericka Jackson and two-time Olympic medalist Jenna Prandini of the United States.

"Oh my gosh, I was so excited," said an emotional Chen, who came

out flying in the far left first lane in the final to wow the Xiamen crowd.

"There were loads of Olympic and world champions in this race; athletes that I've looked up to. To be able to compete with them, and finish with such a good result, I feel all my hard work in training is paying off."

Leading a glittering cast of international winners in Xiamen was Norway's three-time 400m world champion hurdler Karsten Warholm, who broke his own world best in the newly-added 300m discipline on the Diamond series, showing no signs of rust since his last official meet at the Poland leg in August.

Warholm powered around three-quarters of the track, gliding over the barriers to win by almost a second ahead of runner-up Matheus Lima in 33.05s, shaving 0.21s on the previous world best he set in Oslo in 2021.

The time in Xiamen was considered an unofficial world record as the 300m, which is not included in the Olympics, is still not yet a world record event, despite World Athletics announcing recently that the discipline would become an official world record event "in due course".

"I was a little bit surprised by how easy my legs were feeling off the last bend," said Warholm. "Of course, you feel it a little bit in the end, but I managed to really push in the last 45 meters. This shows that the speed is there and the speed over the hurdles is there."

Warholm's run was one of eight meeting records established in Xiamen.

Earlier in the night, Kenyan female distance star Faith Kipyegon narrowly missed out on the 1,000m world record after she clocked 2:29.21, falling just 0.23s short of becoming the fastest woman over a kilometer.

"It was a very good start to my season," said Kipyegon.

As arguably the most popular foreign star in Xiamen, Sweden's pole vault superstar Armand Duplantis failed to deliver his best, yet still defended his title at the meet by clearing a height of 5.92m after three jumps.

"It was not the easiest day. We had a little bit of trouble with the wind, but overall it was a great fun," said the 25-year-old, who set a world record of 6.24m (that he has since exceeded) at the same event last year.

## SOCCER

## Treble chase begins for Barca after edging Madrid in Copa final



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal celebrates with the Copa del Rey after the Catalan club beat Real Madrid on Saturday. REUTERS

SEVILLE, Spain — Barcelona's bid for the treble is off the mark after the Catalan giant edged Real Madrid 3-2 in a thrilling Copa del Rey final through a Jules Kounde extra-time winner on Saturday.

Right-back Kounde pounced on a misplaced pass by Luka Modric and fired low into the corner of Thibaut Courtois' net for the 116th-minute decider.

Barcelona will carry the momentum from its record-extending 32nd Copa del Rey title into Wednesday's Champions League semifinal first leg against Inter Milan. It also leads La Liga, four points ahead of Madrid.

Pedri dictated the game for Barcelona from midfield, and scored from long range to take a 28th minute lead at La Cartuja Stadium in Seville.

Barcelona dominated and controlled possession in the first half, with its pressure defense quick to recover the ball.

The only semblance of a Madrid attack came when Jude Bellingham was able to spin away from his marker.

But, a Bellingham pass, intercepted by Pau Cubarsi, cued Barcelona's opener.

Pedri lobbed forward for Lamine Yamal, breaking down the flank. The 17-year-old phenom — sporting a new dyed-blond hairdo — threaded a pass back to the top of the box, where Pedri arrived to blast it home.

Madrid rallied with two second-half goals, with Kylian Mbappe coming off the bench at halftime and scoring from a freekick in the 70th minute, and midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni heading home in the 77th making it 2-1.

Mbappe started the game on the sideline after injuring his ankle last week. But, Carlo Ancelotti sent his striker on at halftime to replace Rodrigo. Modric and playmaker Arda Guler soon followed.

Ferran Torres gave Barca an 84th-minute lifeline with an equalizer to force extra time.

"I told Ronald (Araujo) that it doesn't matter if they score one goal, it doesn't matter if they score two goals. They can't hang with us," Yamal said after his two-assist performance. Turns out, he was right.

Yamal put a long ball in behind the defense, and Courtois mistimed his run out to intercept it, leaving Torres with an open net to tie it up.

Raphinha thought he deserved a penalty in the final minute of injury time after contact with Raul Asencio, but, the referee, who the day before the final denounced a campaign to discredit him by Real Madrid's official club television channel, waved off his initial decision after consulting the video.

With several players clearly exhausted in extra time, the game appeared destined to finish in a penalty shootout, but that was when Kounde became the hero, firing in the decisive goal.

## Invigorated

Barcelona has beaten Madrid in all three of this season's 'Clasicos' to date, including a 5-2 rout in the Spanish Super Cup final in January and winning 4-0 at Madrid in the league in October.

They will face each other again in La Liga on May 11.

"This was such a physically demanding game, but we showed that we are a great team that never gives up," said Torres, who filled in perfectly for the injured Robert Lewandowski.

The loss to its fierce rival was another blow to Madrid after it was knocked out of the Champions League quarterfinals by Arsenal three weeks ago.

This could have been its last tilt at a trophy with Ancelotti in charge.

The Italian coach said he will decide his future this summer amid speculation he is to take over the reins of the Brazil national side.

Ancelotti, when asked about his future, said: "As I have said, I can continue, I can stop, it will be a topic for the coming weeks."

While Ancelotti's second stint in Madrid appears to be coming to an end, Hansi Flick has only added to his superb first season at the helm of Barcelona.

The German coach has invigorated a group of players who seemed spent under Xavi Hernandez, and helped young players such as Yamal and Cubarsi continue to grow into stars.

"I have to say thanks to the team, because they had an unbelievable performance," Flick said.

"A huge win in the Copa final is great for everyone, and it gives us confidence for more."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## SOCCER

## Wrexham's Hollywood fairy tale continues with record 'three-peat'

WREXHAM, Wales — Wrexham earned promotion for a record third straight season with a 3-0 home win over Charlton Athletic in League One on Saturday, the latest chapter in a stunning rise under the ownership of Hollywood A-listers Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney.

Sam Smith struck twice after Ollie Rathbone opened the scoring to send the Red Dragons up to the second tier EFL Championship next season in front of a jubilant crowd that included Reynolds, McElhenney and club legend Mickey Thomas.

It is the first time ever to enjoy three successive promotions in the top five tiers of English soccer, and returns to the second tier of the country's soccer pyramid for the first time since its relegation from the old second division in 1982.

Phil Parkinson's side, which hails from North Wales, clinched second place with 89 points and one game

remaining in the season. Birmingham City, which tops the League One table with 102 points, had already sealed promotion as champion two weeks ago.

"When the big games come and you produce one of your best performances — we did it last week at Blackpool (5-1 win) and backed it up today with a really strong performance — that makes me very proud," a beer-drenched Parkinson told Sky Sports.

"I just want to savor it. Everyone's talked about the history, it can never be taken away from this group of players and the staff."

Wrexham dominated from the start, and Rathbone put the Reds ahead in the 15th minute when James McClean worked a short corner to the midfielder, who fired home from the edge of the box.

The home fans were still celebrating when Smith doubled the lead

with a spectacular strike three minutes later.

Matty James chipped a long pass over Charlton's backline that Smith volleyed in with his left foot.

Smith completed his brace in the 81st minute, when he latched onto Max Cleworth's cross and fired just over the head of Charlton keeper Will Mannion.

"Two goals, promoted, job done," said Smith.

"It's been an incredible few months and I signed for times like this. There's been a real calmness in the group since we have been here."

The final whistle sparked mayhem, as — in what is quickly becoming a tradition at the Stok Cae Ras stadium — thousands of fans poured onto the pitch.

Banners proclaiming "back to back to back" were raised, as were grinning players, who were hoisted on fans' shoulders amid clouds of

red smoke, while Parkinson cracked his first smile of the game.

"What a feeling, it's incredible," Wrexham forward Steven Fletcher said. "For this club to go back to back to back is amazing and something special, it gets better each time."

"We want to go again. It's a big ask, but we'll reset and the sky is the limit with this club."

As the Wrexham faithful were in dreamland, Saturday turned into a nightmare for some of their compatriots in South Wales, as Championship side Cardiff City found itself being leapfrogged by the newly promoted Red Dragons.

The Bluebirds' relegation to the third tier was finally confirmed following a limp 0-0 draw with West Bromwich Albion, putting Cardiff firmly in last place with a game left to play.

AGENCIES



Wrexham co-owner Ryan Reynolds (right) and striker Ollie Palmer pose with the League One runners-up trophy on Saturday. AP