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Recession warning

UN chief warns Hormuz disruptions could deepen global economic pain

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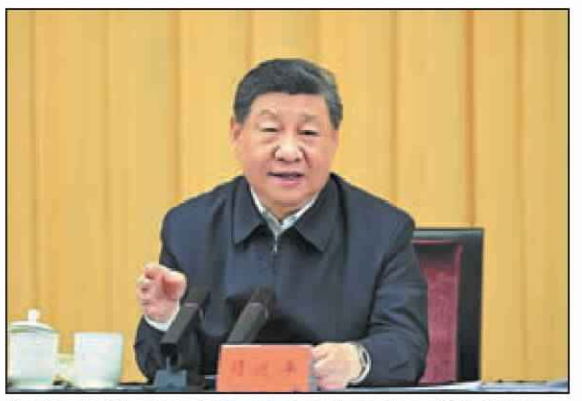
Lighting up runways

Shenyang airport team stands firm at their posts to ensure flight safety

IMAGE, PAGE 8

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 FRIDAY, MAY 1, 2026



President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, addresses a symposium on strengthening basic research in Shanghai on Thursday. XIE HUANCHI / XINHUA

Xi urges more efforts to boost basic research

Realizing sci-tech strength through groundbreaking innovations stressed

By **CAO DESHENG**
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President Xi Jinping has called for greater efforts and more solid measures to strengthen basic research, enhance China's capacity for original innovation, and further solidify the foundation for building the nation's strength in science and technology.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks on Thursday in Shanghai when attending a symposium on strengthening basic research.

A new round of sci-tech revolution and industrial transformation is rapidly evolving and global technological competition is increasingly focusing on fundamental cutting-edge fields, he said, adding that the importance of developing original and groundbreaking innovations is becoming more prominent.

Xi emphasized the need to seize opportunities, rise to the challenges, prioritize basic research and make consistent efforts to make new achievements.

The symposium took place as China has been paying greater attention to boosting basic research in recent years, in order to realize the nation's scientific and technological self-reliance and strength amid intensifying global competition.

By optimizing research layout, increasing investment and innovating institutional framework, China has significantly improved its basic research. The new whole-nation innovation model has paid dividends, enabling the country to funnel vast resources into key sectors such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and semiconductors.

While addressing the symposium, Xi underlined the need for coordinated planning and top-level design to optimize the systematic layout of basic research, and to further identify the main directions and key areas of basic research.

It is important to strengthen the leading role of national research institutions and high-level research universities as well as encourage and regulate the development of new type of research and development institutions, he said.

Xi highlighted the importance of promoting the deep integration of industry and academia, led by enterprises, thereby linking the innovation chain — from basic research to application development — until research achievements are fully transformed into industrial applications.

It is essential to strengthen the construction of basic disciplines and promote the coordinated development of applied and basic disciplines, he said.

While emphasizing the need to strengthen support for basic research, Xi said that the nation will allocate a greater proportion of its science and technology expenditures toward basic research and also shape a diversified investment pattern.

It is also necessary to plan and build major sci-tech infrastructure in a systematic way, he said, calling for building intelligent research platforms.

This year's Government Work Report, which was adopted at the annual session of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, in March, indicates a strategic shift in funding allocation for basic research, which aligns with the nation's long-term goals of becoming a global leader in science and technology.

According to data from the Ministry of Science and Technology, China's total R&D investment exceeded 3.92 trillion yuan ($574 billion) in 2025, accounting for 2.8 percent of its GDP. Basic research funding last year hit nearly 280 billion yuan, accounting for 7.08 percent of total R&D spending, making it the first time the funding surpassed the 7 percent threshold.

Government officials noted that investing in basic research is vital for addressing both current and future challenges, particularly in fields such as renewable energy, AI, biotechnology and materials science.

Analysts said this strategic shift underscores a commitment to building a robust research ecosystem that supports not only academic research, but also promotes collaboration between universities, research institutions and the private sector.

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Book acts as window on China's governance philosophy

By **MO JINGXI**
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"A book holds a house of gold," said Johari Abdul, speaker of Malaysia's House of Representatives, quoting an old Chinese saying at a readers' forum on Thursday in Kuala Lumpur, where the book under discussion was the English edition of the fifth volume of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*.

For Johari and other Malaysian attendees at the event, the saying pointed to the broader value of the book, which offers readers a window on China's governance philosophy, development priorities and approach to international cooperation.

Against the backdrop of an evolving geopolitical landscape and profound changes in the global governance system, deeper exchanges between China and Malaysia on governance experience are of great significance to deepening bilateral friendship, mutual trust and win-win cooperation, they said.

Published in both Chinese and English last year, the fifth volume of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* contains 91 spoken and written works of Xi from May 27, 2022, to Dec 20, 2024. Thursday's forum brought together about 200 participants from publishing, media and other sectors in China and Malaysia.

Johari said that all the five volumes of the book represent an effort to articulate a governance philosophy — one that explains how a nation understands its development priorities and role in the world.

Engaging with such a book, Johari said, allows readers to better understand the thinking behind China's policy directions. For Malaysia, this is important not simply as an observer, but also as a long-standing partner that seeks to engage with China thoughtfully and constructively, he added.

Anwar Ridhwan, chairman of the board of directors of the Institute of Language and Literature of Malaysia, said the book represents more than a translation of language — it is also "a translation of ideas, perspectives and aspirations across cultures".

In an increasingly interconnected world, understanding one another is not a luxury but a necessity, Anwar said, adding that the book is expected to help Malaysian readers gain a clearer view of China's development goals, governance philosophy and its place in the global community.

Malaysian Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook said the book's discussions on the Belt and Road Initiative, new quality productive forces, green and coordinated development, scientific and technological innovation, and the integration of the digital and real economies respond to key issues in global development.

These ideas also provide inspiration for Malaysia as it considers its own modernization path, he said, noting that Malaysia's Madani vision — a national development framework introduced by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim — and China's governance philosophy share highly consistent development aspirations.

Ngeow Chow Bing, director of the Institute of China Studies at Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, said that China's development journey over the past several decades represents one of the most remarkable transformations in modern history.

China's approach, he said, is not purely economic in a narrow sense, but multidimensional, integrating industrial upgrading, infrastructure development, technological innovation and social improvement.

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Spectacular show



A journalist takes a photo on Thursday with performers from Cebu, the Philippines, which will host the 7th Asian Beach Games, before the closing ceremony of the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan province. The games in Sanya, which started on April 22, won great applause from athletes and officials for the coastal city's competition venues and organizational capability. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY **See story, page 2**

Chinese, US officials exchange views on ties

By **ZHAO JIA** and **ZHANG CHENXU**

Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged the United States on Thursday to work with China to prepare for key high-level engagement, broaden cooperation and keep differences under control.

He made the remarks in a phone conversation with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Head-of-state diplomacy has always served as the anchor of China-US relations, Wang said, noting that under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump, bilateral relations have remained generally stable.

Such stability serves the fundamental interests of both peoples and meets the broad expectations of the international community, Wang added.

He called on the two sides to safeguard the hard-won stability in bilateral ties and explore building a relationship that is strategic, constructive and stable, in order to realize mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

Regarding the Taiwan question, Wang emphasized that it concerns China's core interests and remains the biggest risk in China-US relations. Washington should honor its commitments, make the right choices, open up new space for China-US cooperation and make due efforts to achieve world peace, he said.

Rubio told Wang that the US-China relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world, and that head-of-state diplomacy lies at the core of this relationship.

Both sides should maintain communication and coordination, respect each other, properly manage differences, build up outcomes for high-level engagement and seek strategic stability in bilateral ties, Rubio added.

Also on Thursday, He Lifeng, China's vice-premier and lead for China-US economic and trade affairs, held a video call with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

The Chinese side expressed serious concerns over the recent US economic and trade restrictive measures against China. Both sides agreed to continue to make good use of the China-US economic and trade consultation mechanism, build consensus, manage differences and strengthen cooperation, in order to promote the healthy, stable and sustainable development of China-US ties.

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President sends festive greetings to working people

By **ZHAO JIA**
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President Xi Jinping has extended festive greetings and best wishes to the country's working people ahead of the International Workers' Day, which falls on Friday.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, sent the greetings on behalf of the CPC Central Committee.

This year marks the 105th anniversary of the founding of the CPC and the first year of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, Xi said, praising the important contributions made by the working people to the cause of the Party and the country.

He expressed hope that working people across the country will vigorously carry forward the spirit of model workers, the working spirit and craftsmanship, work diligently, dedicate themselves to their posts, and demonstrate their role as the main force and their sense of ownership in promoting high-quality economic and social development.

Xi asked Party committees and governments at all levels to earnestly safeguard the lawful rights and interests of workers, make greater efforts to address their most pressing concerns, and encourage them to strive unremittingly for the country's grand goals.

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE INSTILLS STEEL, EMPATHY IN STUDENTS

Enthusiastic response to labor-intensive programs teaching respect, value of physical work

By **ZOU SHUO**
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On a crisp autumn afternoon, Chen Yijie, a 20-year-old finance major at Renmin University of China, found herself in a baking class learning how to make a chiffon cake. On three consecutive Wednesdays, with each session lasting two to three hours, she measured flour, whipped egg whites and watched the oven with anticipation.

"It was really fun," Chen said. "I personally enjoy baking, so I chose this course. We worked in groups of three, helping each other — one stirring, one preparing ingredients. It really developed team cooperation."

When the cake came out of the oven, the sense of achievement was immediate. Chen and her group shared their creation with their peers. "It was a very happy experience," she said.

Chen is among a growing number of Chinese university students now required to complete labor education credits before graduation. Under a national guideline issued in 2020 by the Ministry of Education, undergraduate students must complete at least 32 class hours of labor education as a compulsory requirement. The policy aims to integrate labor into the broader framework of moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education, alongside traditional academic subjects.

The ministry has since called for universities to build systematic labor education curricula, emphasizing hands-on experience, teamwork and respect for workers.

Across campuses, that mandate has given rise to a remarkable range of courses: baking cakes, fixing leaky faucets, pruning trees, and harvesting bamboo fungus. And students are lining up for spots.

At Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Zhao Xiaoye, deputy Party secretary of the university's logistics department, has witnessed the enthusiasm firsthand.

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Vol.8 — No. 1818

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

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:38 PM

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NATION

Manufacturing defies Mideast energy shock

Chinese factories continue growth spurt for second consecutive month

By **ZHANG CHENXU**
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China's manufacturing sector maintained its expansion streak for a second month in April, signaling sustained growth momentum despite a global energy shock triggered by tensions in the Middle East.

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The official manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index was 50.3 in April, according to National Bureau of Statistics data released on Thursday. While a marginal 0.1-point dip from March, the figure remains above the critical 50-point threshold that separates expansion from contraction.

The data revealed a substantial recovery for the backbone of the country's private sector. The PMI for small and medium-sized enterprises stood at 50.1 and 50.5, respectively, up 0.8 and 1.5 percentage points from March, with both returning to expansion territory, the NBS said.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Orient Golden Credit Rating International, attributed the rebound to the continued application of supportive macro policies targeting the real economy.

"The improvement was likely supported by a package of structural monetary and fiscal policy measures introduced earlier this year to strengthen financing support for private SMEs," Wang said.

The rapid development of "new quality productive forces", Wang said, is playing an increasingly stronger role in supporting overall macroeconomic growth.

Notably, high-tech manufacturing posted a PMI of 52.2 in April, up 0.1 percentage point from March, while equipment manufacturing recorded a PMI of 51.8, up 0.3 percentage points from the previous month.

Despite the escalation of tensions in the Middle East threatening global supply chains, analysts suggest China is uniquely buffered.

"Although Middle East tensions continue to disrupt global supply chains, China has maintained strong competitiveness in foreign trade markets," said Wen Tao, an analyst at China Logistics Information Center.

Jeremy Zook, lead analyst for China at Fitch Ratings, added that the country is relatively well positioned to withstand the energy shock, thanks to its sizable oil reserves, strong refining capacity and current energy mix.

Near-term risks of energy shortages remain limited, Zook said, adding that China's export outlook is expected to stay resilient, though growth may moderate over the coming year.

Despite the overall expansion in manufacturing, nonmanufacturing activity softened in April, with the construction sector remaining under pressure.

The construction PMI came in at 48.0, down 1.3 percentage points from March and staying in contraction territory, according to the NBS.

Wang, the analyst, said the weaker reading reflected the continued drag from the ongoing adjustment in the real estate market, and pointed to the need to further strengthen investment momentum.

Wang said there remains ample policy room to further stabilize the real estate market and to better cope with external uncertainties.

Greeting the future



Maxime Prevot, Belgium's deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, waves to greet a humanoid robot during his visit to Deep Robotics Co in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Wednesday. Prevot is on a five-day visit to China that started on Monday. WANG GANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Sanya praised for sports venues, hospitality

By **SUN XIAOCHEN**
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As the flame of the 6th Asian Beach Games flickered out on Thursday in Sanya, etching memories in the hearts and minds of athletes and officials, the tropical tourism paradise in South China's Hainan province added a feather in its cap as a fitting stage for international sporting events.

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A grand closing ceremony capped off 10 days of intense competition in 15 disciplines across sand and sea, which recorded the participation of more than 1,700 athletes from 45 countries and regions. Host China dominated the final tally with 14 gold medals, as well as two new world records in speed climbing, to cement the nation's status as a sporting power in Asia.

The games, which showcased some niche disciplines such as beach kabaddi, teqball and dragon boat race, stole the international spotlight not only for Sanya's breathtaking landscapes and vibrant culture, but also for the quality and organization of its competition venues.

The sun-drenched coastal city tested and honed the skills of emerging young talent for the 20th Asian Games scheduled to take place in Nagoya, Japan, in the fall.

The beach games highlighted Sanya's capability to integrate sports, tourism, culture and lifestyle activities into the development of the Hainan Free Trade Port, with a visa-free policy applicable for 86 countries further facilitating the city's opening-up.

> "The people are very warm and friendly — all very welcoming. ... I would love to come back with my family to Sanya."
>
> **Saphna Ravichandran,** legal counsel for the Asian Football Confederation

Athletes and officials gave the thumbs-up for Sanya's warm hospitality and great organizational capability, expressing the hope to be able to visit again.

"The games have been very well organized, and I'm thankful for the chance to compete here," said Cherif Samba, a beach volleyball player from Qatar, who along with partner Ahmed Janko retained the men's title on Wednesday with a straight-sets win over an Iranian pair.

"I haven't had the time to explore Sanya properly yet, because we've spent most of our time in the athletes' village. But I've seen many interesting spots, and maybe one day I will come back for a visit," he added.

Saphna Ravichandran, a legal counsel for the Asian Football Confederation from Malaysia, said the Sanya event has helped many people, including her, to see the true picture of China.

Noting that this is her first visit to the country, Ravichandran said China is very different than what "the outside world" makes it to be. "Coming to Sanya has really changed my perspective of ... what China really is," she said.

"The people are very warm and friendly — all very welcoming. In Malaysia, we do have similar areas, like beaches and stuff, but it's always different to go out to another country to see what they can offer. So yes, I would love to come back with my family to Sanya," she added.

Raven Faith Alcoseba, a triathlete from the Philippines, praised Sanya for its easy accessibility, modern infrastructure and laid-back vibe, calling the city a must-visit destination.

"The visa-free policy made my trip so smooth. I could just arrive with my passport and then focus entirely on the competition," she said. "After the race, I even had time to go shopping at a duty-free mall, which is a wonderful bonus of being here."

Already popular for its 264 kilometers of pristine coastline and wide sandy beaches, Sanya has now earned the confidence of top officials and further established itself as an ideal host for future international sporting events.

Thomas Bach, former chief of the International Olympic Committee, hailed the beach games as a compelling example of the unifying power of sports and lauded Sanya as a competent host following his visit to the city.

"Hainan, I think, has the intention to attract even more international sports events," said Bach, who is now IOC honorary president for life.

Xing Wen in Sanya contributed to this story.

Buffalo tide



A herd of buffaloes swims across the Jialing River to reach the lush shores of Taiyang Island in Peng'an county, Sichuan province, as onlookers gather to witness the spectacle on Thursday. This unique ecological phenomenon began in the 1990s following the construction of the Mahui Hydropower Station. As water levels rose, the local buffaloes adapted, evolving from waders into skilled swimmers to reach the rich forage on the island. JIANG HONGJING / XINHUA

Forum: Nations aligned on many key issues, says expert

From page 1

"Such a holistic approach resonates with many developing countries, including Malaysia, which also prioritize balanced and inclusive growth," Bing said.

Neo Chee Hua, CEO of the Southeast Asia Research Centre for Humanities, said the fifth volume of the book focuses on high-quality development, high-level opening-up, win-win cooperation and building a community with a shared future for humanity.

Many of the important concepts in the book are reflected in China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), while the 13th Malaysia Plan also emphasizes economic resilience, supply chain security and structural reform in response to a more uncertain global environment, he noted.

The two countries are therefore highly aligned on many key issues, which lays an important foundation for deeper and more substantive Malaysia-China cooperation, he added.

Dato' Abdul Majid Ahmad Khan, president of the Malaysia-China Friendship Association and former Malaysian ambassador to China, said the forum provided an important opportunity for intellectual exchange and mutual understanding, particularly in appreciating China's governance philosophy and its broader vision for global cooperation.

Revision to Prison Law helps protect inmate rights, improve rehabilitation

By **CAO YIN**
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China's top legislature has adopted a significant revision to the nation's Prison Law, guaranteeing better protection of prisoners' rights and more professional measures aimed at rehabilitation.

The revision to the law, comprising 121 articles across eight chapters, was adopted by the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress in a session that concluded on Thursday. The updated law will take effect on Nov 1.

The NPC Standing Committee's Legislative Affairs Commission said the amended law places greater emphasis on safeguarding inmates' rights, noting that respect for and protection of human rights were introduced as a general principle in the first chapter.

The revised law emphasizes that inmates' personal dignity, life, health and physical safety must remain inviolable. It also clearly stipulates that their rights to defense and to receive legal assistance while serving sentences should be protected.

Prisons are allowed to reasonably schedule the frequency and duration of inmates' phone calls and family in-person visits, based on rehabilitation needs, security classifications and custody levels. Video calls can also be arranged if necessary.

The amended law focuses on enhancing the quality of inmate education and rehabilitation, requiring innovative measures to help them reintegrate into society.

The law encourages legal, education, psychology and social work professionals to support inmate rehabilitation, while prison management staff are urged to strengthen communication and collaboration with various sectors, including government agencies, social organizations, military authorities and enterprises, to create opportunities and provide support for former inmates returning to normal life.

While maintaining prison security as a fundamental priority, the revised law also mandates stronger oversight by procuratorial agencies over the execution of prison sentences. Specialized attention is also directed toward juvenile offenders, with mandates for tailored facilities and professional personnel to support their physical and mental health.

Justice Minister He Rong said the update — the first comprehensive revision since 1994 — is a necessary response to public demand for fairness, justice and security.

She added that improvements in law enforcement institutions and mechanisms have created new circumstances and higher demands placed on prison work. Therefore, it is necessary to revise the law to incorporate the experiences, practices and mechanisms developed over the past 30 years, ensuring that prison work progresses in an orderly manner under the rule of law.

Originally enacted in 1994, the current Prison Law underwent some updates in 2012. In 2023, a comprehensive revision to the law was added to the legislative agenda of the 14th NPC Standing Committee.

Research: Country set to hike R&D spending

From page 1

China estimates an annual average increase of at least 7 percent in nationwide R&D spending during the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, and Chinese companies and entrepreneurs are becoming increasingly important for the nation's research system.

During the symposium, Xi pointed out the importance of actively integrating into the global innovation network, deepening international exchanges and cooperation in basic research, jointly tackling major scientific issues such as climate change, energy, environment, life science and health, and actively participating in global science and technology governance.

While emphasizing the need to advance talent development in the field of science and technology, he called for improving the working and living conditions of professionals who engage in basic research and fostering an open, inclusive and failure-tolerant innovation environment.

Briefly

Appointment of new ministers approved

The top legislature on Thursday approved the appointment of two new ministers.

At a session of the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress, lawmakers voted to appoint Zhang Zhu as minister of agriculture and rural affairs and Zhang Chengzhong as minister of emergency management.

Zhang Zhu, born in February 1968, previously served as deputy Party secretary of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and Party secretary of its capital, Urumqi, according to public information.

Zhang Chengzhong, born in October 1970, previously served as a member of the Standing Committee of the CPC Hebei Provincial Committee and Party secretary of Tangshan.

Senior official expelled from CPC, public office

Yi Huiman, a member of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, has been expelled from the CPC and dismissed from public office over serious violations of discipline and laws, China's top anti-graft agency announced on Thursday.

Yi previously served as deputy director of the Committee of Economy of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and as chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission.

Major carrier orders 137 Airbus A320neos

China Southern Airlines and its subsidiary, Xiamen Airlines, have signed agreements to purchase 137 Airbus A320neo family aircraft. The deal is valued at approximately $21.4 billion at list prices, though substantial discounts are expected. Deliveries are scheduled between 2028 and 2032.

The carrier said late on Wednesday that it and Xiamen Airlines had signed separate agreements with Airbus to purchase 102 and 35 A320neo jets, respectively.

This order aims to accelerate fleet renewal and meet rising travel demand.

Seven killed, 12 injured in traffic accident

Seven people were killed and 12 others injured in a traffic accident on Thursday in Yunnan province, local public security bureau said.

The accident occurred on Thursday morning in Yuanyang county, when a vehicle carrying 19 people overturned.

An investigation into the cause of the accident is underway.

XINHUA—CHINA DAILY

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:38 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:38 PM

COVER

Courses: Fulfillment, relaxation behind popularity

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"Every time we announce our cooking micro-classroom spots disappear within seconds," she said. "Just recently, we offered a *qingtuan* (sweet green rice ball) class for 70 students. They (places) were gone in less than three minutes."

But the cooking classes are about more than just food.

Zhao explained that before students start mixing ingredients, she teaches the cultural story behind the Cold Food Festival, which is traditionally observed the day before Qingming Festival, where no fire is lit and only cold food is eaten.

Many students have never had the chance to cook at home, she said. Through this process, they not only learn to make a dish but also experience the joy of labor, the inheritance of Chinese culture, and develop empathy for kitchen staff.

That empathy, Zhao stressed, is a crucial outcome.

"When a student finds a hair in their cafeteria food, they get very angry. But after they've gone through the entire process of making a dish themselves — even if they find two hairs in their own cooking — their reaction is completely different. They understand how much work goes into each dish."

Zhao believes labor education also addresses deeper needs, including mental well-being.

Science and engineering students, for example, have very tight schedules and their course loads are heavy.

Labor education helps them decompress. When they're stuck on a research problem or feeling down, getting their hands dirty outdoors can open their minds and lift their spirits, she said.

Zhao pointed to a recent outdoor labor session where students were asked to clear stones from a field before planting flowers and vegetables. Within five minutes, over 100 students had signed up.

"They're curious, they want to learn, and they also get labor hours and credits. It's a win-win," she said.

For Zhao, the old slogan "labor is the most glorious" only truly takes root through experience. The university has a persimmon harvest festival on campus every year, she said.

The fruit grows high on the trees and is not easy to pick. But when students work hard to harvest them themselves, they find the persimmons beautiful, sweet and fragrant. They show them off to friends and say they picked them. If a persimmon simply fell to the ground, they might not even pick it up, she said.

"That self-directed growth and personal experience — that's what makes them truly feel the glory of labor."



Students from Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications learn to identify meat patterns during a culinary class on campus in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "I used to think labor was far away from me. Now I feel it's right beside me. I learned not just to cherish food, but to respect every person who lives by their own hands."
>
> **Li Junjie,** student at Beijing International Studies University



Students from Renmin University of China take part in a carpentry class in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Connecting to the land

On a spring morning in Handan, Hebei province, Zhi Ying, a first-year law student at Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, knelt in the freshly tilled soil of a cornfield.

Under the guidance of agricultural experts, Zhi and her classmates learned to open furrows, sow seeds and cover them with earth. Weeks later, when the mature corn was harvested and sent back to campus, she tasted the fruit of her own labor.

"The sweetness lingered not just on my tongue but also brought a complete sense of achievement, from sowing to harvest," she said. "I went from being a bystander of agricultural production to someone who truly got their hands dirty."

Wang Xinyi, a second-year undergraduate majoring in artificial intelligence at BUPT participated in a spring pomegranate tree planting event on campus as part of labor classes, working alongside university leaders and fellow students.

"We dug soil, watered, and carefully planted the saplings," she said. Afterward, those who toiled sat together and listened to classmates share their stories.

Wang said labor education helped her "connect more deeply with the land and real life". She added: "As young people in the new era, we not only need to master skills like coding and technology — we also need to grow into well-rounded individuals with responsibility, teamwork skills, and an understanding of life."

"Planting a tree and waiting for it to grow teaches you patience and helps fight the anxiety of today's fast-paced world. Making food by hand shows you that technology should serve life, not the other way around. And clearing snow in winter toughens your will and deepens your respect for every ordinary worker," she said.

Zhi, who planted corn in Handan, found that the experience reshaped her understanding of time and reward.

Most of our daily learning gives immediate feedback, she said. But farming follows the unchangeable rhythm of nature — after spring planting, you have to wait through a long growing season before you can harvest in autumn, she said.

"Now, when I have three meals a day, I carry a deep sense of awe and gratitude. That kind of conservation mindset, born from firsthand experience, is something classroom lectures alone can never give."

She also noted the different mental state.

"Classroom learning is all about rational thinking and abstract knowledge — a mental drain," Zhi said. "Working in the fields is immersive: the feel of soil under your feet, the shape of seeds in your hand, the warmth of sunlight on your face. Away from complex theories, your mind actually relaxes, and you find a rare sense of peace."

Reviving 'Red memories'

Miao Hanzhe, a master's student in integrated circuit science and engineering at BUPT, led a team deep into the Jinggangshan revolutionary area in Jiangxi province for a labor practice project.

There, he identified a problem: outdated exhibition boards and monotonous explanations were failing to engage young people with the region's revolutionary heritage.

So Miao and his team designed an NFC chip-based "Red memory trigger device". Visitors can tap their phones against the device to instantly play micro-lectures and revolutionary stories, bringing static exhibits to life.

They also developed a digital study tour mini-program, putting Jinggangshan's historical sites and stories in the cloud.

The experience helped Miao see that true learning means rooting professional knowledge in the needs of the country and society. He is about to graduate and join a tech company focused on communications and chips, and is determined to tackle key technological bottlenecks and serve the nation through science.

At Beijing International Studies University, labor education is taking students into rural villages.

Zhao Mingzhuang, an undergraduate student majoring in international economics and trade, recalled spending over two hours bent over, sowing seeds in a village in Beijing's Yanqing district.

"By the time I straightened up, my back ached so much I could barely stand. That's when I truly understood what 'labor' means," she said. At lunch that day, she finished every grain of rice in her bowl. "Not a single grain left. I've learned to cherish things."

Li Junjie, a Japanese major at BISU, took part in corn-threshing. Watching the farmers, it looked easy. But when he tried, his hands hurt and his back ached within minutes, he said.

"Thanks to the local farmers who taught us their techniques, we got through it. I used to think labor was far away from me. Now I feel it's right beside me. I learned not just to cherish food, but to respect every person who lives by their own hands."

RUC has made labor education a one-credit compulsory course totaling 32 hours — eight hours of theory and 24 hours of practical work. In 2025 alone, the university offered 20 campus-wide courses, from coffee-making and traditional printing to auto repair and plumbing maintenance, plus 55 college-level courses. A Song Dynasty (960-1279) brocade accessory-making workshop attracted over 200 students within one minute of registration.

RUC English major Zhuang Zhanwang took a plumbing course. Over two days, he learned to install faucets and fix leaks, then shadowed maintenance staff on actual campus repair calls.

"I learned basic skills that will be really helpful for independent living," he said. "But equally important, I got to understand the work that maintenance staff does every day. I have a lot more respect for them now."

He also spent a full day at RUC's Tongzhou campus woodland, building insect enclosures, pruning branches, turning soil and planting vegetables.

"It was a bit tiring, but I was very happy," he said. "Seeing everyone work together and seeing the finished products — it felt very rewarding."

Exertion, sweat give students 'real rewards'

By **ZOU SHUO**

As China's universities place greater emphasis on holistic development, Beijing International Studies University has embedded labor education as a compulsory component of its undergraduate curriculum to foster respect for labor and enhance students' sense of social responsibility.

According to Zhang Xihua, head of the university's academic affairs office, the labor education program includes no fewer than 32 class hours, consisting of eight hours of theoretical instruction and 24 hours of practical work.

Practical activities take students beyond campus cleaning or routine volunteering. In Beijing's Yanqing district, for example, students work alongside agricultural technicians to clear old seedlings and plow fields in autumn. In a forest farm in Shunyi district, they learn about and harvest bamboo fungus. Other popular activities include tea-picking, tea-making, and community gardening.

"We want students to truly work, exert themselves, sweat, and gain real rewards," Zhang said.

These hands-on activities not only build practical skills but also teach students to respect labor and value its fruits, she said.

Working in the fields, they realize that farm work is far from easy and come to understand that "every grain comes from hard work". They also develop a stronger belief that labor creates a better future, she said.

Meanwhile, labor education strengthens teamwork and problem-solving abilities and also boosts physical and mental health, she added.



Students from Beijing International Studies University learn to plant trees in Beijing's Yanqing district. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Students have responded positively.

Qiu Sijing, a first-year French major at the university, said the most memorable session was cutting down dried eggplant stalks in the university's labor education base in Yanqing. Those dry stalks were hard and tough.

Cutting them with a sickle required the right angle and real effort, she said. After cutting, the students had to tie them into bundles and carry them away, and their hands were soon marked with red prints.

The experience taught her that farming is a full cycle. "It's not just sowing in spring and harvesting at the peak moment. The unnoticed cleanup work is just as essential," she said. "As a young person, I've come to appreciate the complete effort behind every achievement — including the repetitive, not so glamorous tasks."

Han Xinyu, a first-year trade economics student at the university, recalled an October labor course that took her class to a village history museum, a revolutionary memorial, and then into farm fields.

For the first time, she truly got her hands dirty from picking vegetables and shelling corn, she said. "I felt in my bones that every grain of rice comes from hard work. Labor taught me patience and groundedness, and helped me shed my previous restlessness."

Han also noted the benefits of working alongside classmates. "Unlike lectures that can make you drowsy, labor lessons — though physically tiring — lift your spirits. Working outdoors, talking and helping each other, we drew much closer as classmates."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:38 PM

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WORLD

UN chief warns of recession as Hormuz disruptions continue

By MINLU ZHANG
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UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday warned that ongoing restrictions to navigation in the Strait of Hormuz could tip the world into recession, stating that navigational rights and freedoms "must be restored immediately".

Speaking at a news conference hosted at UN headquarters in New York, the UN chief listed three scenarios tied to the duration of the Middle East crisis, which is entering its third month.

In the best case, if the restrictions are lifted today, global growth would still fall from 3.4 to 3.1 percent this year, with inflation rising to 4.4 percent, Guterres said.

If the crisis extends through midyear, 32 million people could be pushed into poverty and 45 million more could face extreme hunger, said Guterres. And if it persists through year-end, global growth could collapse to 2 percent and inflation surpass 6 percent, he said.

"These consequences are not cumulative. They are exponential," said Guterres, adding that developing countries will be hit the hardest.

The secretary-general called on all parties to comply with Security Council Resolution 2817. "Open the Strait. Let all ships pass," he said.

"Now is the time for dialogue, for solutions that pull us back from the brink, and for measures that can open a pathway to peace," Guterres said. "The world is waiting."

The warning comes amid escalating tensions following a breakdown in post-ceasefire talks between the United States and Iran earlier this month.

Two months into the US-Israeli war with Iran, the vital sea channel remains closed, choking off 20 percent of the world's oil and gas supplies. That has sent global energy prices surging and heightened concerns about the risks of an economic downturn, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Iran said on Thursday it would respond with "long and painful strikes" on US positions if Washington renewed attacks, and also restated its claim to the Strait of Hormuz, complicating US plans for a coalition to reopen the waterway.

US President Donald Trump was slated to receive a briefing on Thursday on plans for a series of fresh military strikes on Iran to compel it to negotiate an end to the conflict, a US official told Reuters.

Such options have long been part of US planning but reports of the proposed briefing, first issued by news site Axios late on Wednesday, initially spurred big gains in oil prices, with the benchmark Brent crude contract hitting more than $126 a barrel at one point. It later slipped back to around $114.

Negotiations held in Islamabad, Pakistan on April 11 and 12 failed to produce an agreement, after which Washington imposed a blockade on Iranian ports, while Iran threatened maritime traffic, preventing tankers from transiting through the Strait of Hormuz.

A ceasefire between Iran, the US and Israel took effect on April 8 after 40 days of fighting that began on Feb 28 with strikes on Tehran and other Iranian cities.

Iranian officials said the attacks killed senior leadership figures, including then-Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, as well as civilians. Iran responded with missile and drone strikes targeting Israel and US assets in the region and later moved to restrict traffic through the Strait.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Thursday said any attempt by the US to impose a naval blockade would be "doomed to failure," according to a statement published on his office's website, Xinhua reported.

In a statement marking Persian Gulf National Day, Pezeshkian said regional waterways should not be subject to "unilateral foreign will", and called instead for collective security based on mutual respect among coastal states.

Xinhua and Reuters contributed to the story.

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No.1565

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Fed holds rates steady amid high energy prices

The Federal Reserve kept interest rates unchanged on Wednesday, but in its most divided decision since 1992, noted rising concerns about inflation in a policy statement that drew three dissents from officials who no longer feel the US central bank should communicate a bias toward lowering borrowing costs. A fourth dissent at the meeting favored a quarter-percentage-point rate cut. "Inflation is elevated, in part reflecting the recent increase in global energy prices," the Fed said in its policy statement, a shift from previous language saying that inflation was just "somewhat" elevated. "Developments in the Middle East are contributing to a high level of uncertainty about the economic outlook," it said. "In support of its goals, the Committee decided to maintain the target range for the federal funds rate at 3-1/2 to 3-3/4 percent," the statement said.

LIBYA

17 killed, 7 rescued after week at sea

The Libyan Red Crescent said on Wednesday that a patrol boat recovered 17 bodies and rescued seven people during an operation to assist a stranded vessel off the North African country. The organization shared photos on its Facebook page showing aid workers hauling black body bags from a boat. It did not give information about the nationality of those killed or those rescued, but said it provided humanitarian assistance to survivors along with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which suggests they were migrants. "After eight days of distress, the *Almarqab* patrol boat, attached to the naval base, successfully rescued a stranded vessel. The operation resulted in the rescue of seven survivors and the recovery of 17 bodies," the Red Crescent said on Facebook.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Terror probe



Forensic officers comb a cordoned-off street in Golders Green, London, on Wednesday after two people were stabbed in what authorities have declared a terrorist attack. The neighborhood, home to a large Jewish community, has seen a series of targeted assaults. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he was "deeply concerned". KIN CHEUNG / AP

Japan condemned for rash advances in military agenda

Moves seen as stirring regional unease, trigger Beijing's call for global scrutiny

By ZHANG YUNBI
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China's diplomacy and defense authorities have spoken out to slam Japan's "dangerous" military, espionage and nuclear policy drives that have reminded other Asian countries of its atrocities over 80 years ago during World War II.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian warned on Thursday that Japan's neo-militarism is "becoming a serious concern" and "has posed a clear threat to world peace and stability".

Lin was responding to Japan's latest legislative drive to restore the military ranks used by the Imperial Japanese Army prior to the end of World War II.

According to Japanese media reports, the country has finalized a plan to revise the titles of Self-Defense Forces officers and plans to submit a draft amendment to the Japanese Diet within the year.

The reports also noted that senior government officials described the move as aimed at "creating a work environment that fosters a sense of honor" to attract and retain talent.

Lin said this "amounts to a breakthrough at both institutional and cognitive levels", and "is tantamount to rubbing salt into the wounds of the people of the victimized nations".

He noted that after World War II, Japan disbanded its military as a defeated country, and when the Japan Self-Defense Forces were established in 1954, the titles from the former military were abolished.

"The forces of justice in the international community, including the Chinese people, should remain highly vigilant about this, resolutely defend the outcomes of the victory in World War II, and ensure that the tragedies of history are not repeated," Lin said.

On Tuesday, the Japanese government revised the operational guidelines for the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology and scrapped a ban on lethal weapons exports.

Last week, the Japanese Diet passed a bill establishing the National Intelligence Council.

In response, China's National Defense Ministry spokesman Zhang Xiaogang said at a news conference on Thursday that Japan is "racing headlong" down the path of remilitarization.

"Japan's recent frequent dangerous and rash advances, testing and provocative moves in the military and security fields have directly debunked its self-proclaimed labels of a 'peace-loving nation' and a country committed to 'exclusive defense'," Zhang said.

The planned National Intelligence Council reminds people of the notorious Special Higher Police, Japan's brutal policing and espionage organization torturing people in the war, he said.

This "seriously offends the sentiments of the people of Asian countries", he added.

Retrograde actions

"All peace-loving people must remain highly vigilant against this, resolutely curb Japan's retrograde actions, and absolutely not allow it to undermine peace and wreak havoc on the world," Zhang said.

Also on Thursday, the Foreign Ministry released a working paper regarding Japan's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

In the document, China called on countries that have signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to "remain highly vigilant and firmly oppose Japan's possessing nuclear weapons".

The paper urged the countries to "carefully consider Japan's strong motivation to acquire nuclear weapons and other related developments, exercise caution in nuclear cooperation with Japan, and effectively safeguard the international nuclear nonproliferation regime".

In the document published on the Foreign Ministry's website, Beijing urged Tokyo not to seek nuclear weapons in any form, not to develop nuclear submarines, and not to seek to introduce or deploy nuclear weapons within Japan.

The document urged the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to attach great importance to Japan's dangerous tendency to seek nuclear weapons and its immediate and long-term negative effect on the treaty, and to treat this as a key issue for thorough discussion and consideration.

The document called on the International Atomic Energy Agency to specifically strengthen the scope, intensity and frequency of comprehensive safeguards and verification activities regarding Japan to ensure the timely detection of any non-peaceful nuclear activities conducted by Japan.

China urges restraint, dialogue to steady intl security

By MINLU ZHANG
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China on Wednesday urged all parties to exercise restraint and uphold international law, as military strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities raised global concern.

Addressing the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Sun Xiaobo, director-general of the Department of Arms Control of China's Foreign Ministry, said the world faces "increasing uncertainty and instability", with certain countries pursuing unilateral policies, imposing sanctions and provoking conflicts.

"They frequently impose sanctions and blockades on other countries, provoke conflicts and wars around the world, and arbitrarily trample on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of others, seriously threatening the national security and even the basic right to survival of small and medium-sized countries," Sun said.

Such actions severely undermine the international system with the United Nations at its core, the international order based on international law, and the basic norms governing international relations founded on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, he said.

Hegemonism, power politics and unilateralism pose real threats to the global nonproliferation policy, he said, warning that the pursuit of "absolute strategic advantage" and strengthened military alliances have fueled the risk of an arms race and eroded strategic stability.

"Military strikes against nuclear facilities under safeguards, without authorization from the UN Security Council, seriously violate international law," he said, adding that such actions, carried out under the pretext of nonproliferation, risk accelerating proliferation and destabilizing entire regions.

His remarks came as the situation surrounding Iran has intensified in recent weeks, with military actions reportedly targeting nuclear facilities under safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Sun called on all parties to resolve disputes through dialogue, saying preventing nuclear war and maintaining global strategic stability must remain the top priority.

China reiterated support for nuclear disarmament in a fair and orderly manner, urging states with the largest nuclear arsenals to take the lead. It called for early negotiations on a no-first-use treaty among nuclear-weapon states and a legal instrument providing security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon states.

Under safeguards

Regarding regional issues, Sun said China renewed its call for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and urged Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear-weapon state and place all its nuclear facilities under international safeguards.

Sun also warned against moves by certain countries to seek nuclear capabilities, and pointed to recent developments in Japan.

"Senior officials of certain countries have openly advocated pursuing nuclear weapons, seriously undermining the authority and credibility of the treaty," he said.

"As a country defeated in World War II, Japan refuses to acknowledge this status, is promoting revisions to its pacifist constitution and its Three Non-Nuclear Principles, expanding long-range strike capabilities, and seeking the deployment of nuclear weapons by allies on its territory."

The international community should prevent Japan from acquiring nuclear weapons, he added.

Responding to the United States delegation, the Chinese delegation on Wednesday rejected what it called "groundless smears", saying Washington was misrepresenting China's nuclear policy and shifting attention from its own disarmament responsibilities.

"The so-called 'multilateral nuclear arms control dialogue' proposed by the US is more political show than substantive engagement," the Chinese representative said, adding that it is based on "erroneous narratives" and distracts from US obligations as a major nuclear power.

China also criticized US withdrawals from key arms control agreements, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty, saying these developments have weakened the global arms control framework.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:38 PM

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READ





Left: A view of the production line is a highlight during a tour of China YTO, a leading agricultural and construction machinery manufacturer founded in 1955 in Henan province.
Right: Students enjoy a virtual reality experience at Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, Henan province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Immersive lessons taught by Luoyang

As study tours trend, new courses share extensive information and hands-on experiences, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

In the early 1950s, Peking Opera master Mei Lanfang stood before a niche on the southern wall of the Ten Thousand Buddhas Cave at the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, Henan province.

For a long moment, he gazed at a statue of a bodhisattva whose face had long been destroyed. Yet, what he saw was not ruin, but a spirit of grace that reminded him of the line "Startled swan, roaming dragon" from Cao Zhi's (192-232) *Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River*.

That year, the statue inspired Mei's opera, *The Goddess of the Luo River*.

Today, more than seven decades later, groups of young students make their way to the grottoes site, where they wear virtual reality headsets and enter the cave where the statue stands. They see not only the fragmented beauty that moved Mei, but also a digital restoration of a face erased by time.

These experiences are just a glimpse of what awaits study tour participants at Longmen Grottoes, one of China's largest cave temple complexes and a UNESCO World Heritage site that represents "the pinnacle of Chinese stone carving art".

"We don't just bring cultural relics to life," says Ma Jialun, a representative of the cave site. "We want every participant to become a carrier of civilization."

Under professional guidance, visitors shape their own clay Buddha figures in art workshops and paint patterns from the grottoes' lotus-flower ceilings onto silk fans, brushstroke by brushstroke.

The programs at Longmen Grottoes are part of Luoyang's broader efforts to immerse visitors in a tangible experience of its history and culture hidden in its abundant museums and UNESCO World Heritage sites.

In late March in Beijing, Luoyang unveiled five study tours focused on archaeological exploration, Yellow River culture, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, aiming to appeal to travelers' cultural curiosity and enthusiasm.

"Beijing and Luoyang are both among the eight great ancient capitals of China," says Zhang Xu, an official from the Luoyang municipal bureau of culture, radio, television, and tourism.

Luoyang encourages travelers to explore the roots of Chinese civilization across the ruins of five ancient capital cities, explore 112 museums, and witness three UNESCO World Heritage sites.

"The city is a living museum of Chinese history," he notes.

Luoyang has established more than 100 study bases offering over 1,600 courses covering a wide range of topics, forming a comprehensive spectrum of information from the dawn of civilization to modern technology.

For the upcoming season, the city has prepared 900 tour routes tailored to meet the diverse needs of study travelers.

With multiple ancient emperors having paid homage here, the Longmen Grottoes have been systematically developing study tour activities since September 2021, transforming the weight of history into hands-on educational programs.







Top: At the Sui-Tang Dynasties Grand Canal Cultural Museum, visitors become part of the waterway in an immersive theater program where they are cast as merchants or boatmen traveling the artificial waterway that once connected Beijing to Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.
Left: A girl engages in an art project during her visit to Luoyang Museum. **Right:** Visitors learn about history at the Han-Wei Luoyang Ancient City Site Museum, in which the displays bear witness to the exchange and mutual learning between Eastern and Western civilizations along the ancient Silk Road.

For adults, the site invites scholars to lead participants into the caves for on-site academic exchanges alongside its own experts, while senior guides provide up-close art appreciation. "Visitors find it unforgettable and immersive when they watch experts engage in live scholarly debate," Ma notes.

For younger students, experience and creation are emphasized. Thirteen original courses cover areas including technology and intangible cultural heritage. One particularly inventive program uses 3D-printing technology to create 1:1 replicas of relief carvings and inscribed stelae, allowing students to experience traditional rubbing techniques firsthand.

"As students brush and press, they capture the details of the Longmen Grottoes' content," he explains.

If the Longmen Grottoes are a brilliant jewel in Luoyang's historical crown, the city's museums form a three-dimensional narrative of "what makes China".

At the Erlitou Site Museum of the Xia Capital, visitors can explore the origins of Chinese civilization through more than 30 courses.

A course on the path of technological innovation in Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC) handicrafts is offered for visitors to vicariously feel what it's like to be Xia artisans, as they try their hand at pottery, bronze casting, and turquoise inlay, recommends Yang Kexin, a representative from Luoyang's cultural and museum system.

"Visitors can gain an intuitive understanding of the innovative spirit that has been part of the Chinese nation since ancient times," Yang says.

At the Luoyang Museum, the summer Little Museum Specialist series turns students into docents, restorers, cultural creative designers, and curators.

"Through immersive, task-driven activities, they evolve from visitors into inheritors," Yang explains.

For those interested in ancient mystic sacrificial rituals, the Luoyang Museum of Ancient Tombs takes them underground, with courses on murals and brick carvings that reveal ancient views on life and death.

The relatively new Han-Wei Luoyang Ancient City Site Museum, which opened last year, allows students to walk the Silk Road through a specially designed study guide that evokes a time when Luoyang was a Silk Road's eastern terminus.

It leads them through the museum's galleries with a series of tasks: locating artifacts that traveled from distant lands, including a Byzantine gold coin, Persian silverware and Western glassware; tracing trade routes on a map; and imagining the crowded streets of Tongtuo (copper camel) Street, the city's main boulevard, where foreign merchants once gathered.

Inside the museum, a digital exhibition brings that lost world into view. Developed by Harvard University's CAMLab, the immersive installation uses holographic projection and 3D modeling to reconstruct the ancient capital. The museum also offers hands-on experiences beyond the screen. Participants can try their hand at simulated archaeological digs or piece together replica eave tiles.

Beyond these core venues, specialized museums offer their own experiences. At the Sui-Tang Dynasties Grand Canal Cultural Museum, visitors become part of the waterway in an immersive theater program where they are cast as merchants or boatmen traveling the artificial waterway that once connected Beijing to Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

Visitors can also try their hand at Tang Dynasty (618-907) three-color glazed pottery at the Luoyang Sancai Art Museum, where skilled craftsmen guide them through the entire production process.

"A museum is a great school," Yang says, encouraging visitors to measure history with their footsteps in Luoyang.

For those who want to understand not just how China's civilization was shaped but how its modern industry was built, there is China YTO. Founded in 1955, this leading agricultural and construction machinery manufacturer exposes visitors to a grittier side of the city's story.

"Young people can understand the struggle and pride of an era among gears and steel," says Guo Yushi, from the company's Dongfanghong industrial tourism program.

Stories about the first female tractor driver in China and the major pioneers who built the industry from nothing will be shared. A bus tour then passes the well-preserved Soviet-style buildings before arriving at the advanced assembly line for large-wheel tractors, where one tractor rolls off every three minutes.

Thirty percent of China's tractors are produced here, and they have been exported to more than 150 countries, Guo notes.

Hands-on activities include a clay tractor workshop and a tractor assembly model class, she recommends.

Zhang Nan, a representative of Beijing's travel industry, observes that a rising number of students across the country have opted for study tours.

Experts attribute the trend to a shift in expectations, as parents and educators no longer want passive sightseeing; they seek destinations where young people can touch, make and ask.

"The universal feedback is that the destinations that truly move people are those that explain culture thoroughly and make the experience profound," Zhang Nan explains.

Luoyang has stood out as a top destination, she adds.

"Luoyang's history is not a cold display but a living scene in which you can participate," she says.

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Sanya 2026 Games Special



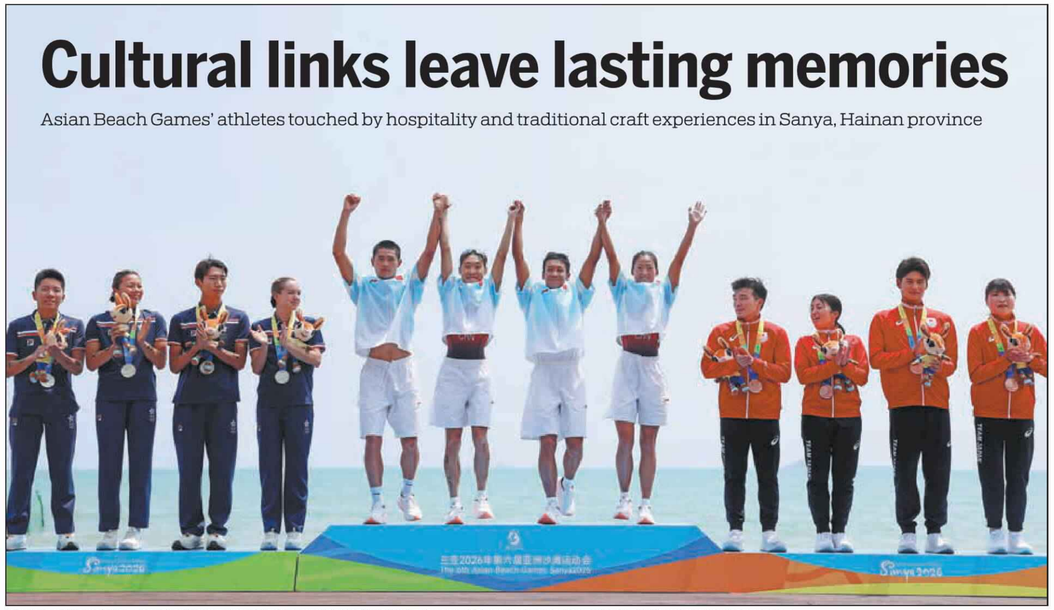
Thailand and Chinese Taipei compete in women's beach kabaddi. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY



Two Saudi Arabian beach soccer players celebrate a goal. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

Cultural links leave lasting memories

Asian Beach Games' athletes touched by hospitality and traditional craft experiences in Sanya, Hainan province



Members of Team China celebrate at the medal ceremony on Saturday after winning the aquathlon mixed relay at the Asian Beach Games. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

By WANG YUCHEN
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The sixth Asian Beach Games Sanya 2026 brought its curtain down on Thursday in the Hainan province city, yet for many athletes, the most enduring memories may lie not in medals or ceremonies, but in quiet moments away from the spotlight.

They may be found in a sheet of calligraphy, a conversation at a craft booth, a shared meal or a photo taken with volunteers before departure. In that sense, Sanya 2026 offered athletes from across Asia not only a place to compete, but a place to meet, learn and leave with memories of the host city.

Held from April 22, the Games brought together more than 1,600 athletes from 45 Asian countries and regions.

Much of that experience unfolded at the athletes' village in Sanya Bay. Alongside accommodation, dining, transport and medical support, the village gave athletes space to unwind between events, visit cultural booths and interact with other delegations.

More than 5,100 service personnel worked in and around the village, covering catering, transport, security, cleaning and village operations. Their work kept daily life running smoothly, making room for the cultural activities and everyday exchanges that gave the village its warmth.

At the village's intangible cultural heritage exhibition area, athletes tried hands-on activities ranging from calligraphy, paper-cutting and kite-making to Li brocade, coconut carving and other Hainan crafts, guided by local artisans who explained the techniques and stories behind the works.

One participant followed a paper-cutting pattern to make a lantern, while another used a brush to write Arabic script alongside Chinese calligraphy on a sheet of paper. In such moments, the heritage displays became hands-on experiences shaped by face-to-face exchanges with local artisans.

For Magdalene Lau Ing Siew, a Malaysian open water swimmer whose family has roots in Fujian province, the visit had personal resonance. It was her first trip to China, and she was especially drawn to the coconut-carving area. "From my grandfather's stories, I learned that China is a very beautiful country and also his hometown. That was why I had been looking forward to coming here," she said.

Other members of visiting delegations also found familiar elements in Hainan's traditions.

A doctor with the Sri Lankan delegation said Li brocade patterns reminded him of similar handicrafts back home. "There are similar handicrafts in Sri Lanka, so it was easy for me to get started," he said.

During a calligraphy activity, a doctor with the Thai delegation tried Chinese calligraphy for the first time. "Chinese calligraphy is very beautiful and artistic," the doctor said, adding that he wanted to take the work home to his family.

Together, these encounters helped the village become more than a service base. For many athletes, it felt like a temporary home during the Games. A piece of calligraphy, a handmade craft or a photo with volunteers became a reminder for some of their time in Sanya beyond the competition schedule.

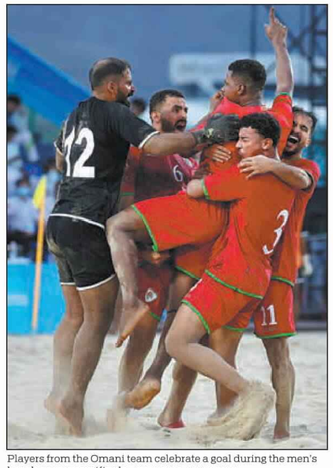
Traditional Chinese medicine added another dimension to the village experience. At the village's traditional Chinese medicine clinic, athletes could try massage, acupuncture, cupping and moxibustion. Medical staff provided services to delegations including those from Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan, with translation devices helping them communicate. The clinic offered athletes another form of care as well as a glimpse of Chinese wellness traditions.

Everyday interactions also shaped life in the village. Volunteers helped athletes with transport arrangements, schedules and village services, offering practical support and a welcoming presence throughout the Games. As athletes from Nepal prepared to return home, they presented gifts to volunteers and posed for photos together.

In dining areas and other shared spaces, athletes sampled dishes such as Hainan rice noodles, Indian curry shrimp and Korean kimchi, while talking about training, food from home and their customs.

For some athletes, the experience extended to Sanya itself. Marc Alexander Lim, a jujitsu athlete from the Philippines, described the organization of the Games as "super smooth" and said he hoped to return to the city to enjoy its seafood and night markets.

Hadi El Chabib, a Lebanese beach volleyball player, said the Games combined high-level competition with cultural discovery. "It's a beautiful country, beautiful people, very nice culture," he said, adding that the competition was well organized and that his team had enjoyed its time in China.



Players from the Omani team celebrate a goal during the men's beach soccer semifinals. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY



An athlete from Bhutan experiences the art of coconut carving in the intangible cultural heritage exhibition area. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY



Davoud Shokri Baghdadabadi (second from right) of the Iranian team kicks out for a goal during the men's beach soccer final on Wednesday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

Nations find peace and solidarity through sport

By XING WEN and **CHEN BOWEN**
in Sanya, Hainan province

> "I think all the people in Iran are very happy about this achievement in Sanya. Sports can heal our pain."
>
> **Mahdi Alinejad,** secretary-general of the Iranian National Olympic Committee

No cleats. No hard ground. No room for reckless slides or brute force. Instead, beach soccer rewards barefoot artistry on soft sand: delicate footwork, razor-sharp turns, and tiny passing combinations that carve open defenses.

Most captivating of all, stunts like diving headers, scissor kicks and bicycle kicks hang in the air just long enough for the crowd to erupt.

To play barefoot could somehow lower one's guard. It means shedding disguises, leaving behind identities and pretenses, so that the soles can feel the sand's warmth directly; skin to earth, body to nature.

Under a warm sea breeze and orange sunset, the recently concluded sixth Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan province, brought players and spectators together to share in the laid-back, respectful and peaceful vibe of beach soccer matches.

Now look at the four best beach soccer teams in the Games: Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Palestine.

Caught in active conflict, shaken by regional turmoil, or burdened by unresolved, long-standing strife; all are facing uncertainties. Not one is truly at peace.

Take Iran for example, a nation still bleeding from war. It sent a 57-athlete delegation to contest 10 out of the total 14 sports disciplines in Sanya, and ended up third on the medal table with nine golds and one silver.

"It was a historic placing for our team," said Mahdi Alinejad, secretary-general of the Iranian National Olympic Committee.

He said the war had destroyed some of their sports training bases and there were no flights from Tehran. They had to start their journey with several bus rides that took more than 20 hours to reach Ashgabat, the capital of neighboring Turkmenistan, from which they could finally take a plane. The whole journey took them 52 hours.

"We tried to make up for the lack of training, as we didn't have much time to prepare because of the war," Alinejad told China Daily after Iran beat Oman 6-2 to clinch the gold medal in beach soccer on Wednesday night.

"I think all the people in Iran are very happy about this achievement in Sanya. Sports can heal our pain," he said, adding that they received a warm welcome in Sanya, as they constantly heard support and cheers from the stands. "We want to show that we support the peace and unity on our continent."

Talib Al-Thanawi, head coach of Oman's beach soccer team, said that they have a good relationship with Iran in sports. They invite each other to exchange and play matches, and they often meet in the finals of major tournaments.

When asked if he believed that sports can make the world a better place, he responded with an immediate yes. "In a sporting gala like this, you meet people, you get connected, and you find new friends," he said. "You see (that in) the world, war's often happening. But here? Not one makes a difference."

Mundhir Al-Barwani, team doctor of Oman's beach soccer team, shares the same sentiment. A beach soccer lover since the age of 6, he said he enjoyed watching the games and soaking up the atmosphere. He was often seen smiling broadly while dancing to the music on the sidelines.

"I also live in the athletes' village, where athletes from different countries interact very frequently, and I talked a lot with medical team members from countries including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia," he said.

"Sport is loved by everyone, and that really brings everyone together, regardless of where you are in the world. So I think that's something you can see through every aspect of sports," said Saphna Ravichandran, a legal counsel at the Asian Football Confederation.

Reflecting on the Games, Husain Al-Musallam, director-general of the Olympic Council of Asia, highlighted that the presence alone of these conflict-ridden countries demonstrates that this is a game of peace — and that, he said, is the core value of the Games.

"You saw the athletes living in one place under one roof, in one restaurant, in one competition venue, in one training venue. And they are happy with each other. They are hugging each other," said Al-Musallam. "The future Games will follow in the footsteps of the Sanya Asian Beach Games."

Contact the writers at xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn



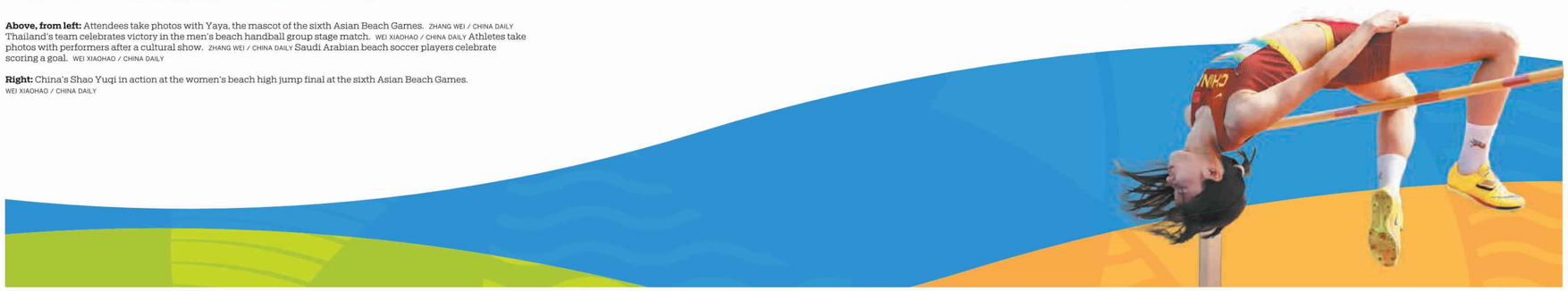






Above, from left: Attendees take photos with Yaya, the mascot of the sixth Asian Beach Games. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY Thailand's team celebrates victory in the men's beach handball group stage match. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY Athletes take photos with performers after a cultural show. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY Saudi Arabian beach soccer players celebrate scoring a goal. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

Right: China's Shao Yuqi in action at the women's beach high jump final at the sixth Asian Beach Games. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY



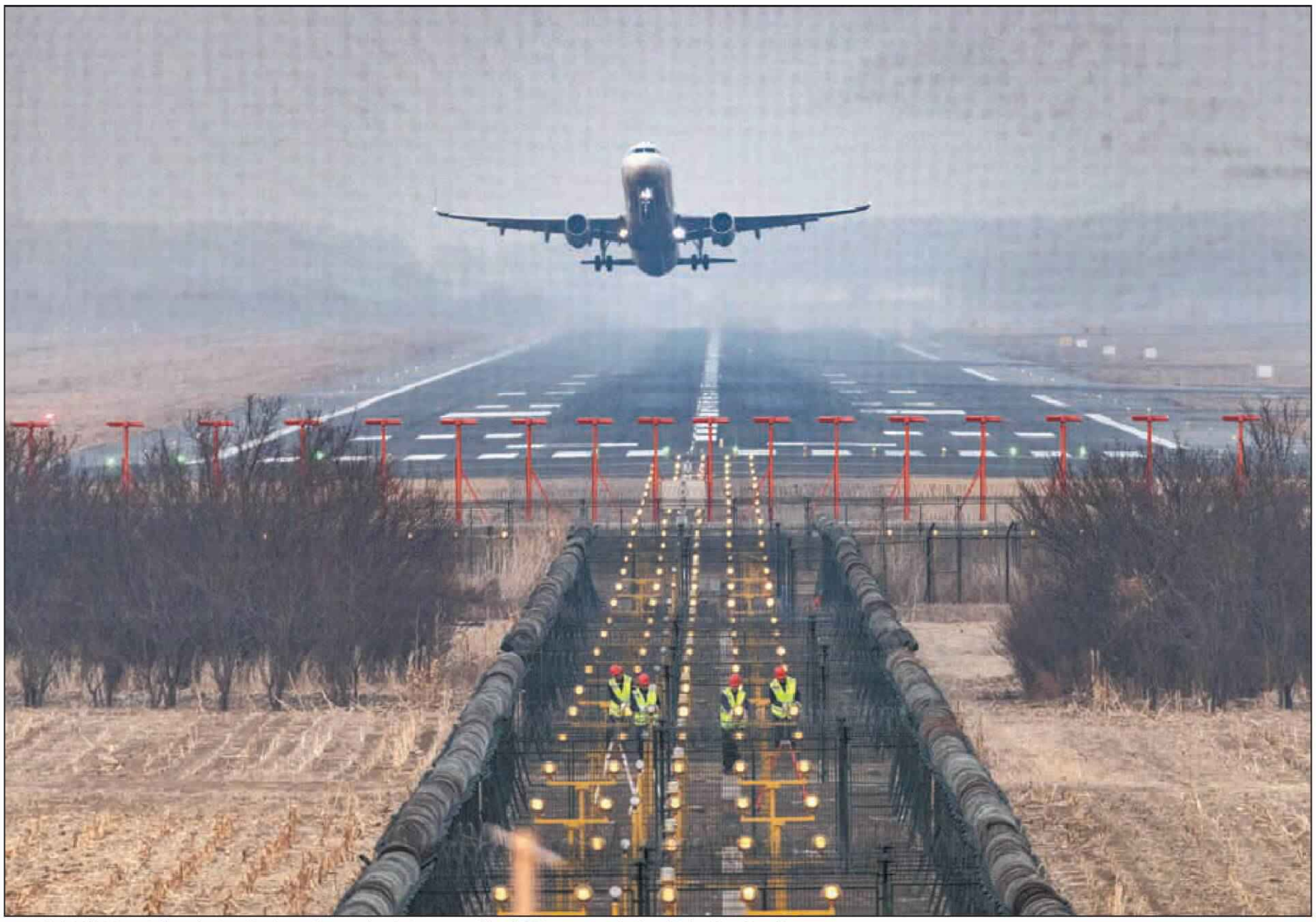


An Iranian athlete tests his chopstick skills with a traditional Chinese game in the athletes' village. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

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IMAGE



Airfield lighting staff conduct routine inspections and maintenance on March 26 to ensure safe aircraft takeoff and landing. PHOTOS BY CHEN SONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Airfield lighting staff inspect taxiway guidance signs to ensure clear and accurate guidance for night taxiing operations on March 26.

GUARDING THE SKIES

Shenyang airport's team behind the lights

As night falls over Shenyang Taoxian International Airport, its airfield lighting system guides aircraft takeoff and landing, backed by the 24/7 dedication of the Ruijie Chuangxin Team from the Airfield Lighting Supporting Office. Dubbed the "guardians of the airport's eyes", the team stands firm at their posts, wielding professional skills to ensure the safety of flight operations.

Airfield lighting is the "lifeline" for aircraft movements. The team undertakes a full range of tasks including inspection, maintenance, emergency repairs and upgrades of runways, taxiways, lighting systems and signage. Operating on round-the-clock standby, the team adheres to a "second-level response and minute-level disposal" principle to ensure uninterrupted facility performance.

During the winter-spring transition period, sharp temperature fluctuations pose severe challenges. Working only during flight gaps, team members must carry tools, climb towers, and calibrate, repair and replace lights one by one on icy runways, strictly complying with civil aviation standards to eliminate hazards.

Beyond routine work, the team has made notable strides in innovation. It has independently developed rapid maintenance tools, boosting lamp replacement efficiency by 30 percent, established a closed-loop "prediction-inspection-rectification" mechanism to prevent risks at the source, and promoted technical continuity through a mentor-apprentice system.

Through harsh winters and scorching summers, the team members steadfastly adhere to their posts. With their commitment, they embody civil aviation spirit, providing a reliable "air beacon" for airport safety and passengers' peaceful journeys.

CHINA DAILY



Airfield lighting staff carry out the disassembly, inspection and commissioning of vertical runway edge lights in the workshop on March 26, preparing for reinstallation.



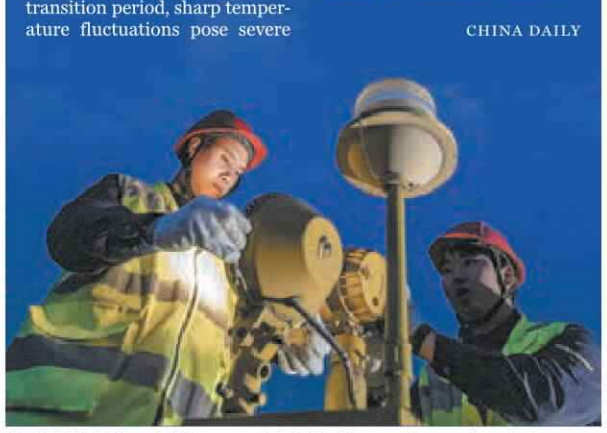
Senior technicians offer hands-on guidance to junior staff, explaining the functions and layout of airfield lights on March 26.



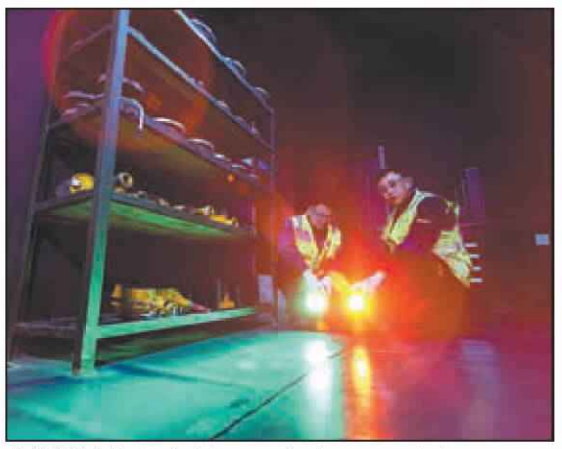
Airfield lighting staff inspect airport lighting facilities on March 26.



Daily tools, instruments and equipments used by airfield lighting staff are displayed.



Airfield lighting staff carry out detailed inspection and maintenance of the approach lighting system, ensuring safe visual guidance for aircraft landing at night on March 26.



Airfield lighting technicians conduct power-on tests on runway threshold lights and end lights in the workshop on March 26.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:38 PM

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BIZ LIFE

Healthcare, rehab applications account for largest share of demand

BCI tech moves beyond research labs





Top: An employee from BrainCo showcases using intelligent bionic hands to practice calligraphy during the 135th China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong province on April 15, 2024. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA **Left:** A staff member with a disabled right hand from BrainCo takes off glasses with the company's intelligent bionic hand during the third China International Supply Chain Expo in Beijing on July 17. JU HUANZONG / XINHUA

> "The purpose of technology is ... whether it can help people rebuild their lives."
>
> A spokesperson for BrainCo

By LI JING
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On a weekday afternoon, Cai Yuqingyan waits outside a kindergarten gate. For most parents, the moment a child runs into their arms is entirely unremarkable. For Cai, it is a hard-won triumph.

A world champion in para swimming and canoeing, Cai lost her leg in a traffic accident before her third birthday. For decades, navigating life on crutches meant that even a simple, spontaneous embrace required careful physical calculation.

That changed after she was fitted with an intelligent bionic leg developed by Chinese neurotech firm BrainCo.

"Now when my daughter runs toward me, I can stand steady and catch her," Cai said. "It used to be something I had to consciously prepare for. Now, it's just everyday life."

Her experience reflects a broader shift as brain-computer interface (BCI) technologies begin moving beyond research laboratories into commercial medical devices aimed at rehabilitation and assistive care.

Industry researchers say the market remains small but is expanding rapidly. Global BCI revenue could grow from about $562 million in 2024 to more than $2.2 billion by 2032, market research firm Kings Research estimates, with healthcare and rehabilitation applications accounting for the largest share of current demand.

For BrainCo, the move from academic theory to commercial hardware was sparked by a chance encounter.

During the company's early days, its researchers met a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who had lost his right hand in a laboratory accident. The engineering team began to wonder if their ongoing research into neural signals could be applied to control a prosthetic limb. That single question birthed the company's first neural-controlled prototype.

As development continued, the potential market became clearer. China is home to about 85 million people with disabilities, according to the China Disabled Persons' Federation, including 24 million living with limb impairments. Many advanced assistive devices remain expensive or difficult to access, limiting their use among potential users.

That gap helped shape BrainCo's commercial strategy, which the company says focuses on usability and affordability. Engineers focused on improving neural signal decoding to enable more precise movement control. The company says its prosthetic hands can move individual fingers independently, allowing users to perform tasks such as typing or writing.

Globally, much of the attention around BCI technology has focused on invasive brain implants developed by companies such as Elon Musk's Neuralink. These systems implant electrodes directly into the brain to capture high-resolution neural signals, but they involve neurosurgery and lengthy and stringent regulatory approval.

BrainCo has instead focused on noninvasive wearable devices designed to interpret neural signals through external sensors. The approach avoids surgical procedures and could potentially reach a broader range of rehabilitation and consumer health applications, the company said.

The technology relies on proprietary hydrogel electrodes designed to capture neural signals without conductive gels.

According to the company, the sensors can achieve about 95 percent of medical-grade signal quality while decoding motor intentions in roughly 200 milliseconds.

BrainCo said its products are now sold in more than 35 countries and regions, with overseas markets accounting for about 30 percent of its revenue.

Despite the technological progress, wider adoption of BCI-based rehabilitation devices still faces challenges. Healthcare systems and insurance providers remain cautious about emerging neuro-technology, while procurement processes for assistive devices can move slowly.

Policy support is beginning to emerge. In 2025, the National Healthcare Security Administration issued pricing guidelines for neurological medical services that, for the first time, created dedicated reimbursement categories for BCI procedures, including fees for implanting and removing invasive BCI devices as well as adaptation services for noninvasive systems.

The move signaled growing policy recognition of BCI technology as it begins moving toward clinical application. The regulator has released 39 batches of medical service pricing guidelines covering about 180 new technology categories to help speed up the clinical adoption of emerging medical technologies, according to official data.

"The policy framework could help accelerate adoption of rehabilitation devices by clarifying how neurotech services may be priced and integrated into healthcare systems," said a spokesperson for BrainCo.

To expand access, BrainCo says it has focused on reducing manufacturing costs by developing core components in-house and using domestic supply chains.

The company says the retail price of its intelligent prosthetic limbs is roughly one-fifth to one-seventh that of comparable products in some Western markets.

Local governments have also begun testing the technology. In Zhejiang province, a government-backed program has already helped fit around 2,000 people with intelligent prosthetic limbs.

For some users, the changes are felt in everyday milestones. Hou Yunyan, a snowboard athlete who lost her left leg in a car crash at age 9, had never climbed stairs independently even after joining a sports team years later.

That changed after she began using a neural-controlled prosthetic leg.

"I felt calm and steady," she recalled of the first time she climbed a staircase on her own. "It was the first time I experienced what it feels like to walk upstairs."

"The purpose of technology is not how futuristic it looks," a BrainCo spokesperson said. "It's whether it can help people rebuild their lives."

Policy, venture capital powering commercial rollouts

By LI JING

Inside a quiet rehabilitation ward in eastern China, a paralyzed patient stares intently at a plastic cup. He doesn't move a muscle, yet a robotic, pneumatic glove encasing his paralyzed hand suddenly hums to life, smoothly closing its fingers around the cup.

The invisible trigger? His sheer intention.

By decoding neural signals and bypassing severed spinal cords entirely, brain-computer interface (BCI) technology is performing what looks like medical magic. But behind this clinical breakthrough lies a rapidly maturing business ecosystem. Driven by a strategic influx of venture capital and robust policy tailwinds, BCI is fast graduating from academic curiosity to early commercial deployment.

For years, the BCI sector was a pure-play scientific endeavor confined to university labs. Today, it is arguably the hottest frontier in venture capital.

Data from a recent report by the Beijing-based Fourth Wave Technology Think Tank and Zhongguancun Tiancheng Innovation Research Center paint a staggering picture. Throughout 2025, Chinese BCI startups recorded at least 24 financing events, raising more than 1.45 billion yuan ($212.1 million). In stark contrast, the first three months of 2026 alone saw at least 17 funding rounds, with the total capital raised already eclipsing the entirety of 2025.

The report projects China's BCI market could breach the 5-billion-yuan mark in 2026, on track to reach 15 billion yuan by 2030.

The deal flow reflects this bullish sentiment. Hangzhou-based BrainCo closed a massive 2-billion-yuan funding round in January. More recently, Shanghai-based medical neurotech firm StairMed secured 500 million yuan, bringing its total funding to more than 1.1 billion yuan within a single year.

"The technology is at an inflection point, transitioning from experimental verification to early clinical implementation," Gu Xiaosong, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said at a BCI developer conference in Tianjin. He attributes this shift to breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, machine learning algorithms, and high-performance computing, which are finally transforming laboratory prototypes into clinical-grade medical systems.

In July 2025, China issued BCI industry development guidelines, urging breakthroughs in core hardware/software, high-performance products and real-world applications. Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong province and others introduced supportive policies.

In the 2026 Government Work Report, BCI was formally designated as a future industry, prioritized alongside strategic sectors such as advanced robotics and embodied AI. This alignment underscores BCI's role not only as a medical tool, but also as a critical control component for the next generation of intelligent machines.

The true catalyst for the current market exuberance was a recent regulatory breakthrough. China's National Medical Products Administration approved the world's first implantable BCI medical device for clinical use.

Dubbed the NEO system, the semi-invasive device acts as a wireless translator between the brain and the body, specifically designed to help patients with cervical spinal cord injuries regain hand-grasping functions.

Developed by a Tsinghua University research team led by professor Hong Bo from the School of Biomedical Engineering in collaboration with Neuracle, the NEO system represents a different technological approach from some Western competitors.

In the United States, Elon Musk's Neuralink is pursuing a fully invasive route, implanting electrodes directly into brain tissue. While this can yield high-resolution signals, it involves more invasive surgery and associated risks.

Tsinghua's NEO, by contrast, is implanted with its main device embedded in the skull, while electrodes are placed over the dura mater between the skull and the cerebral cortex, without penetrating brain tissue.



A patient undergoes rehabilitation treatment through mental control using a brain-computer interface device at a hospital in Chongqing on April 10. CHEN CHENG / XINHUA

"For quadriplegic patients with cervical spinal injuries who can't grasp objects, we implant a coin-sized device outside the dura mater using minimal invasive surgery," Wang Yujing, Neuracle product director, told People's Daily.

"The system decodes brain signals in real time, enabling them to control a pneumatic glove with their thoughts to grasp objects or drink water," she added.

The clinical data are highly promising. In trials conducted across 11 Chinese hospitals, all participants achieved brain-controlled grasping. The system boasted a decoding accuracy exceeding 90 percent, with a response delay of mere milliseconds. Furthermore, the implant is powered wirelessly through near-field communication, eliminating the need for internal batteries and risky replacement surgeries.

Despite the hype surrounding surgical implants, the reality of today's commercial landscape is far less invasive.

According to the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, noninvasive systems — such as wearable EEG headsets — currently account for more than 80 percent of China's BCI market. Because they require no surgery, companies are already monetizing these devices, rolling out products ranging from neurofeedback headbands for gamers and students, to advanced sleep-monitoring systems.

Yet, beneath the soaring valuations, sobering technical and ethical hurdles remain.

For implantable devices, the human body's immune system is a formidable opponent. Over time, the body forms scar tissue around implanted electrodes, which can degrade signal quality.

Data scarcity is another major bottleneck. Unlike generative AI models that are trained on billions of readily available internet texts, BCI algorithms require highly sensitive neural data, which is exceedingly difficult and expensive to collect.

Then there is the issue of cognitive privacy. Recognizing the profound ethical implications of "reading minds", China's Ministry of Science and Technology issued the country's first national ethical guidelines for BCI research in February 2024, ensuring the technology remains "tech for good" and prioritizing patient autonomy.

"The approval of the first product is just the beginning," noted Hong of Tsinghua University. Scientists are still grappling with deep biological mysteries, such as how these interfaces interact with the brain's natural plasticity, and whether they can actually help heal the nervous system rather than just act as a high-tech crutch.

For now, medical rehabilitation will be the industry's most viable cash cow. But the ultimate ceiling of the BCI market remains unknown.

Translating the silent symphony of human thought into code remains one of the most complex engineering challenges in modern history. As one researcher put it: decoding any conventional computer system is child's play compared to understanding the human brain.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:38 PM

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TRAVEL



People visit the exhibition *Stories of the MASP* during the official inauguration of the new building of the Sao Paulo Museum of Art on March 28, 2025. ISAAC FONTANA / EPA-EFE

Beyond the beaches Brazil's urban giant beckons

Sao Paulo entices more travelers to rediscover city with deep cultural density

By **ALFRED ROMANN**
in Sao Paulo, Brazil
For China Daily

At first glance, Sao Paulo can seem hard to read.

Brazil's main financial center does not offer itself in the postcard language of Rio de Janeiro. There is no single defining vista, no instantly digestible icon that explains the whole place. It is too large, too layered and too restless for that.

But after a few days, another city emerges: one of deep cultural density, where heavy tropical rain can give way to a blazing sunset, where dense greenery presses up against office towers, and where a walk at dusk can lead from formal avenues and modernist landmarks to streets alive with bars, food and conversation.

On a recent visit, the city revealed itself in fragments: a skyline glowing orange after a storm, late-night crowds spilling onto the pavement under strings of lights, buses moving beside protected bike lanes, and a sense of dense urban life. Sao Paulo does not feel curated for tourists.

That may be precisely why it is beginning to resonate with Chinese travelers.

For years, Latin America sat outside the mainstream imagination of China's outbound tourism market, except for a handful of marquee destinations. Brazil, though admired from afar, often remained more of an aspiration than an actual itinerary. The fact that China is very far away may have played into it — it can take a full day or more to get there from many cities in China.

Still, this appears to be changing.

Official Brazilian figures show that the country received 94,400 visitors from China from January to November 2025, surpassing the total recorded for all of 2024.

The growth validates a premeditated strategy by Brazil's tourism authorities.

"Attracting Chinese tourists is a strategic opportunity for Brazil," said Marcelo Freixo, the then president of Embratur, the country's international tourism promotion agency, last May. "This rapprochement is essential to paving the way toward new connections and, potentially, allowing more Chinese people to discover the attractions of Brazil."

A few months later, in January 2026, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced that Brazil would exempt certain categories of short-term visas for Chinese citizens, in reciprocity for the exemption China had granted Brazilians.

Travel interest spiked. According to Qunar, a major Chinese online travel platform, searches for flights to Sao Paulo jumped 22 percent hour by hour right after the announcement.

The timing is significant because Brazil is in the middle of a tourism boom.

The country closed 2025 with more than 9.2 million international visitors, a record. Sao Paulo led the country for foreign arrivals, receiving 2,753,869 international visitors throughout the year, ahead of Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul, the southern state that borders Uruguay and Argentina. That makes the city not just Brazil's financial capital, but its main gateway for foreign visitors.

Gateway to country

Sao Paulo is often the point of arrival, the place where a continent-scale trip often begins, but it is also a place worth lingering in.

What visitors find is not a city organized around a single landmark or feature, but one built on accumulation with the closest beaches sitting more than an hour away.

Sao Paulo rewards appetite: for museums, for architecture, for food, for neighborhoods and for the pleasure of noticing how many different histories have been compressed into one metropolis.

Italian, Japanese, Portuguese and many other immigrant communities have shaped the city's cuisine, traditions and public life over generations, helping create one of the world's most varied urban food scenes. Official Brazilian tourism material highlights that multicultural layering is one of the city's defining traits.

That diversity is one of Sao Paulo's most appealing aspects for travelers from China, and anywhere else.

Meals can become a kind of map.

A day might begin with strong Brazilian coffee and pao de queijo (a pastry with cheese), move on to ramen or sushi in Liberdade, continue with an Italian lunch in Bixiga or Jardins, and end the day with cocktails and plates to share in a crowded neighborhood bar.

This is a place where Michelin-starred restaurants sit not far from old markets, corner bakeries and family-run eateries. The range is staggering, but what stands out even more is the way food here reflects migration, adaptation and urban confidence.

Liberdade may be one of the city's most immediately legible neighborhoods for Chinese visitors. Liberdade remains the neighborhood most associated with the city's large Japanese population, but the district today also carries broader East Asian influences, including Chinese and Korean, visible in its shops, grocery stores and restaurants.

For Chinese travelers, that can create moments of recognition in a city that is otherwise unmistakably Brazilian. The lanterns, the signs, the food and the foot traffic may feel familiar in fragments, yet the atmosphere is entirely local, shaped by Sao Paulo rather than transplanted into it.

Still, Sao Paulo's strongest case as a destination may be its cultural infrastructure.

Paulista Avenue remains the city's symbolic spine, and the Sao Paulo Museum of Art, known as MASP, is one of its essential stops. The museum, founded in 1947, became the first modern museum in Brazil. Its building, designed by Lina Bo Bardi, is among the most recognizable pieces of modern architecture in Latin America: suspended, severe and unforgettable. And its collection is impressive.

Even travelers with little prior knowledge of Brazilian art are likely to feel the force of the place. MASP is not simply a museum to visit; it is one of the structures that seems to explain Sao Paulo's ambitions back to itself.

"Sao Paulo surprised me," said Karina Rubio, a visitor from Chile who was in the city for the first time attending a conference and had just stepped out of the MASP. "It feels very alive. There is music, a lot of culture and a lot of good food ... the museum was one of the highlights for me."

Another highlight for Rubio was the city's famous churrascarias (or steakhouses), typically all-you-can-eat-style restaurants serving a variety of cuts of beef.

"Of course I had to try them!" she said.

Not far away, Ibirapuera Park offers another version of the city.

Often described as Sao Paulo's "green lung", the park brings together open lawns, dense trees, lakes, museums and performance spaces in one vast urban expanse. It is where many visitors understand that Sao Paulo, for all its scale and density, also knows how to make room for clean air, shade and peace.



An attendee visits the *Arts of Africa* exhibition during the official inauguration of the new building of the Sao Paulo Museum of Art on March 28, 2025. ISAAC FONTANA / EPA-EFE



People enjoy walking, running, cycling and strolling in Ibirapuera Park, in the southern part of Sao Paulo, one of the main outdoor leisure spots in the city. LECO VIANA / THENEWS2

> "This is the year of Brazil in China and we have a plan of action that will further boost the interest in knowing our culture and our natural destinations, which today are the ones that most attract the Chinese."
>
> **Marcelo Freixo,** former president of Embratur, an international tourism promotion agency in Brazil

The park also says something important about the city's character. In many global metropolises, cultural life is scattered. In Sao Paulo, it can feel concentrated, almost insistently available. Art, performance, architecture and public life are not tucked away from one another. They overlap.

And that overlap is part of what makes the city so compelling.

Sao Paulo is a megacity, but not a sealed one. It does not feel like a glass box of towers and highways, even though it has plenty of both. Trees soften vast stretches of it. Neighborhoods break up the scale. Street life keeps reasserting itself.

From a window overlooking one of the city's greener central areas, the skyline after rain can look almost theatrical, with towers fading into haze and an orange band of sunset setting the horizon on fire. Later, the city reassembles itself in lights, traffic and silhouettes.

At ground level, it often feels more intimate than its size should allow.

During a recent evening, tables spilled out into the street outside a bar, and office workers and younger drinkers stood shoulder to shoulder under strands of yellow lights. The scene felt easy, social and dense with energy.

Traffic, however, can be brutal at rush hour. TomTom's 2025 data showed that a 10-kilometer drive in Sao Paulo took about 34 minutes in the morning rush and more than 37 minutes in the evening. The saving grace is public transport: the subway and rail map spreads across the city and deep into the wider metropolitan area, giving visitors a practical way to avoid the worst road congestion.

These details help explain the kind of traveler Sao Paulo is likely to attract.

New strategy

This is not primarily a city of passive sightseeing. It is a city for people who like urban texture, who enjoy moving through neighborhoods, who want to eat well, who do not mind a little ambiguity and who understand that some of the world's best travel experiences arrive not in one grand reveal but in layers.

That also helps explain why Sao Paulo fits Brazil's new strategy for engaging Chinese travelers.

Brazil has been working to make itself more visible and more bookable in China.

Embratur returned to ITB China, the largest B2B travel trade show focused on the Chinese market, in 2025 after a six-year absence.

The agency said at the time that it was making a strategic push into China with a variety of efforts, including launching a "Brazil Travel Specialist" platform in Mandarin to train Chinese travel agents and operators, an official tourism website in Mandarin and opening a public relations office in China.

Brazil also moved to expand its presence through Chinese-language promotion and partnerships with major travel companies. Reports on those efforts said agreements were signed with Trip.com Group and Tongcheng Travel.

"We are very optimistic about the growth that we will continue to see in the Chinese market," said Freixo in February. He credited the visa exemptions announced in January with much of the growth.

"This is the year of Brazil in China and we have a plan of action that will further boost the interest in knowing our culture and our natural destinations, which today are the ones that most attract the Chinese," said Freixo.

Long-haul tourism depends not only on desire, but on visibility, language access and booking infrastructure. The easier Brazil becomes to search, compare and book in Chinese, the more likely Sao Paulo is to shift from an abstract possibility to a real itinerary.

Sao Paulo has long had the substance to attract international leisure travelers, but abroad it was often overshadowed by Brazil's beach imagery and by its own reputation as a city of business first. That reputation is not wrong. Sao Paulo is a commercial powerhouse. But it is also incomplete.

The same city that hosts major corporations and trade fairs also offers one of the richest urban experiences in the Americas. It is a place where migration shaped cuisine, where culture remains publicly visible, where modernism still feels alive and where the city's immense scale generates not sterility but variety.

For Chinese travelers who are increasingly willing to go beyond the most established long-haul routes, Sao Paulo offers something more substantial than easy fantasy. It offers a real metropolis.

That may be why the city feels newly timely.

Chinese visitors looking at Sao Paulo now are not simply looking at another faraway destination. They are looking at a city that broadens the map of what Brazil means: not only beaches and samba, but museums, immigration histories, high culture, nightlife, architecture and one of the world's most exciting food scenes.

It is the cumulative force of the place: the food, the art, the greenery, the sense of scale, the energy after dark, the neighborhoods that keep shifting register from block to block, and the feeling that the city is always revealing another version of itself.

Sao Paulo asks for curiosity more than certainty. It does not hand itself over all at once.

For travelers willing to meet it on those terms, it may prove to be not only Brazil's main gateway, but also one of Latin America's great city breaks.

Alfred Romann is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

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SPORTS

2026 ASIAN BEACH GAMES



China's Shao Yuqi and Hu Linpeng, the respective high jump gold and bronze medalists from November's 15th National Games, both added a silver medal to their collections at the 2026 Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan province. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY





China's Hu Linpeng (top) and Shao Yuqi in action in Sanya, Hainan province, during the Asian Beach Games. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY AND XINHUA

Rising to the challenges of unique locale

Powdery sand and expansive arena combine to create a jump in difficulty

By **XING WEN**
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On a sunny Sunday on Sanya's Phoenix Island in the tropical island province of Hainan, the women's high jump final of the just-concluded 2026 Asian Beach Games drew a packed house at the athletics venue, and for good reason.

China's Shao Yuqi and Hu Linpeng, the respective gold and bronze medalists from November's 15th National Games, were both expected to add another medal for their country.

But the open-air setting, with swaying coconut trees and an expanse of azure sea dwarfing the competition mats, along with a sand-covered run-up area, would test them in ways a traditional stadium high jump setup never could.

"When you compete indoors, the mats and the bar look quite large. In a 400-meter open-air stadium, they shrink a bit. But, today, on the sand, they seem tiny. The sky and the background stretch out endlessly, so it's a very wide-open view," said Hu.

While spectators can enjoy a unique and picturesque experience — watching athletes arch their backs and float over the bar with the sea breeze — for the jumpers, adapting to this environment is a real challenge, because the vast, open setting messes with their ingrained spatial awareness, making technical mistakes more likely.

"The sand saps some of your energy, so you don't build up as much speed on the run-up. That means we have to rely more on vertical explosive power," Hu said.

The run-up takes place on soft sand, while the takeoff zone features a standard rubber surface, creating an abrupt shift in underfoot conditions. Compounding the challenge, sand inevitably spreads across the rubber.

"The surface is slippery when you take off, and there is a risk of injury. I tried to control my speed during my approach and adjust my steps. It was so hard," said Filipino men's high jump athlete Leonard Grospe in an interview following the first competition day.

During the competition, both Shao and Hu missed twice at 1.83 meters, before finally clearing it on their third attempts. After Uzbekistan's Barnokhon Sayfullayeva successfully made 1.85m, the two Chinese jumpers decided to skip their remaining tries at that height and moved straight to 1.87m. Unfortunately, they failed all three attempts, and both had to settle for silver.

"Of course, I'm disappointed not to win the gold, but I'm still proud that we Chinese athletes took home two silver medals — and congratulations to the gold medalist," Shao said.

"No matter what kind of venue we compete in, everyone faces the same conditions. As long as you give it your all, there's no reason to regret anything," Hu added.

As the high jump competition was wrapping up, the 4x60-meter relay races had already begun on the adjacent track, with the cheers from the crowd ringing out.

Yet, both jumpers said they didn't notice any of it — they were completely absorbed in their own performances.

That same ability to block out distractions has served them well off the field, too, especially in coping with the surge of public attention that followed the 15th National Games.

People haven't just been talking about their athletic prowess; more visibly, they've also been drawn to their striking good looks and toned, athletic physiques.

Seeing so many spectators come out to cheer for her, Shao said that all this public interest is actually a good thing for athletics.

"If people can focus that attention on the high jump, I'd be very happy," she said.

Now 24, Shao is a postgraduate student at Tsinghua University's School of Social Sciences and is often called a "beauty A-grader" by the public.

She finds it natural to balance her academic studies with her training.

Standing at just 1.75 meters — hardly an advantage for a female high jumper — Shao has strengthened herself by training more than 300 days a year.

She now has her sights set on this year's Asian Games in Nagoya, Japan.

This year is the Year of the Horse, her zodiac year, and she likens herself to a colorful pony.

"Compared to those tall, powerful horses, I might look small, but even the small have their own strength."



Brown University's Olivia Pichardo pitches during the ninth inning of a Division I game against Cornell last week. AP



Pichardo fist bumps Brown catcher Andrew Hanlon after getting the final out of their team's 16-4 win over Cornell last week. AP

BASEBALL

Pioneer Pichardo reluctant to steal team's spotlight

In her ideal world, Olivia Pichardo would just play ball and not take attention away from her teammates.

"Sometimes it feels a little ridiculous," she told reporters. "But, it's something I understand is going to happen. That's not what my primary focus is ever on."

Pichardo grew accustomed to being the only girl on her baseball team during her years in Little League, high school and travel ball. Four years ago, she tried out for the Brown University team, made it and, early in her freshman season, became the first woman to appear in a Division I game when she pinch-hit against Bryant University.

As a senior, last Saturday she became the first woman to pitch in a Division I game when she got the final out in a key win over Cornell.

"I feel like sometimes it might distract a bit too much from the success of our team," Pichardo said.

"We just made the playoffs for the first time since 2007, so that's a huge accomplishment, and I wouldn't want to take away from that."

Pichardo was listed as an outfielder and pitcher in her first three years, and focused only on pitching this season. The fact she stuck it out for four years might seem surprising. Brown has played 151 games since Pichardo arrived, and she has appeared in only six. She pinch-hit once as a freshman, once as a sophomore and three times as a junior, when she also played right field for an inning and caught two fly outs.

> "I've always been able to play at every level that I've progressed to, so there was never any reason for me to stop playing baseball just because I didn't see other women in the same space as me."
>
> **Olivia Pichardo,** the first woman to play Division I college baseball

Until Saturday, she hadn't appeared in a game this season, let alone warmed up in the bullpen. With Brown leading Cornell 16-3 in the ninth inning, coach Frank Holbrook's plan was to have little-used reliever Ty Harris get the first two outs and have Pichardo finish.

The 174-centimeter, 75-kilogram Pichardo has a four-pitch repertoire that includes a low-80s four-seam fastball to go with a sinker, changeup and curve. She entered with the bases loaded and threw two fastballs to Tyler Beaulieu, who grounded out to short to end Brown's 16-4 win.

Pichardo said she has never had any problem melding with her teammates. She prefers just being one of the guys and not taking spotlight away from the team. She does, however, understand the magnitude of what she's accomplished, not just in college, but also in summer ball. In 2023, she became the first woman to hit a home run in a summer league, connecting for Sag Harbor in the Hamptons Collegiate Baseball League.

"It's important for inspiring the younger generation of female baseball players, give them some kind of hope, I guess, that, if they want to play at the collegiate level, no matter what division, that door is open for them and it is possible," she said.

Pichardo, who graduates this spring with a degree in business economics, has been able to capitalize on name, image and likeness opportunities as the most visible woman in college baseball.

She's in her third year as an endorser for the baseball equipment and apparel company Warstic Sports, and she has a deal with Topps Allen & Ginter baseball cards.

Once Brown's season ends, she'll turn her attention to trying out for the United States women's team that will play in the group stage of the 2027 World Cup. She has been a regular on Team USA since 2022 and pitched against Japan in the 2024 World Cup in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Pichardo said she's been grateful for every baseball opportunity since her father signed her up for a league in her hometown of Queens, New York, when she was six years old.

"He didn't have any sons, so I like to say I was his designated son," she said. "I've always been able to play at every level that I've progressed to, so there was never any reason for me to stop playing baseball just because I didn't see other women in the same space as me. It was my first sport, my first love, and I knew I wanted to try and play at the highest level possible."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

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SPORTS

SOCCER

Gunners shoot first, but Atletico returns fire

Arsenal and the Rojiblancos exchange penalties in Madrid, as Champions League semifinal first-leg ends in a 1-1 draw

Atletico Madrid and Arsenal exchanged penalties in a 1-1 draw in the first leg of the Champions League semifinals on Wednesday, a gritty encounter with plenty of intensity from start to finish, even if it lacked the fireworks of the nine-goal thriller that saw defending champion Paris Saint-Germain edge Bayern Munich 5-4 in France on Tuesday.

Viktor Gyokeres put Arsenal ahead at the Metropolitano stadium on Wednesday, converting a 44th-minute penalty kick before Julian Alvarez equalized for Atletico — also from the penalty spot — 12 minutes later.

The Gunners were awarded another penalty in the 78th minute after Eberechi Eze was brought down by David Hancko inside the area, but the call was overturned after a video review.

The second leg is in London next Tuesday, when both clubs have a shot at returning to the final after a long absence, giving whichever side makes it a chance to win the European title for the first time.

"Here, you have to suffer. Many teams have suffered here, including some of the best in the world," Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta said.

"We had some good moments in the match, and moments where we had to suffer. The margins are very slim. We are in an incredible position — the semifinal of the Champions League. Now, we have to play in front of our people — it's in our hands."

In the league phase of the competition, Arsenal routed Atletico 4-0 at the Emirates Stadium.

Atletico last made it to the Champions League final in 2016, when it lost to crosstown rival Real Madrid.

"We tried," Atletico midfielder Jorge Resurreccion said. "We went behind to that penalty, which was doubtful, but the team recovered and we were able to equalize with a penalty ourselves. We had the opportunities to win, but it will all be decided in the second leg. I think we played a good match."

Gyokeres broke the deadlock from the penalty spot after he was brought down inside the area by Hancko, who was a bit late to the ball and slightly bumped the Arsenal striker from behind.

The buildup came after Atletico lost possession in attack.

"Overall, I think it was a tough game, we know it's a tough place to come, but it's only halftime," Gyokeres said.

"We know that, when we play at home, with our fans, it's going to be different, for sure, and we just have to do our job, be at our best. It's going to be a good game at home."

Arsenal last appeared in the final in 2006, when it lost to Barcelona.

The Rojiblancos' equalizer came after a handball by Arsenal defender Ben White following a shot by Marcos Llorente.

The call came after a video review, and Alvarez converted the penalty with a firm shot for his 10th Champions League goal this season, before being replaced later in the second half with an apparent injury.

Gyokeres' opening penalty was Arsenal's first attempt on target, but both teams had exchanged a few early chances.

Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya had made a nice save on a shot by Alvarez, and Martin Odegaard — who was also substituted later — had his dangerous strike from inside the area blocked by Atletico's defense.

Alvarez led the Atletico attack early on, but the connection with Antoine Griezmann and Ademola Lookman didn't work well until the second half.

Alvarez almost curled in a free-kick after the break, and both Lookman and Griezmann had chances shortly afterward. Griezmann struck the post with a shot in the 63rd minute, and Lookman, who had been doubtful to start because of a muscle injury, missed from close range later in the second half.

"We played a very good second half and had the chances to win the match," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said.

Griezmann, who played his last home Champions League fixture with Atletico, was named the player of the match.

The France star will join MLS club Orlando City this summer.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA





Left: Atletico Madrid's Julian Alvarez (second right) runs with the ball during Wednesday's UEFA Champions League semifinal first leg against Arsenal in Madrid. **Above:** Atletico's Antoine Griezmann (left) and Arsenal's Martin Zubimendi battle for the ball. **Bottom:** Arsenal players celebrate Viktor Gyokeres (left) scoring the opening goal. AFP / AP



Arteta infuriated by 'unacceptable' decision to overturn second penalty

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta called it "unacceptable", and said it was a moment that changed the course of his team's Champions League semifinal against Atletico Madrid.

Meanwhile, Atletico coach Diego Simeone's antics as Dutch referee Danny Makkelie studied the sideline monitor at the Metropolitano stadium came under scrutiny Wednesday.

In a white-hot atmosphere and the score locked at 1-1 in Madrid, Makkelie opted to overturn a second-half penalty awarded to Arsenal when substitute Eberechi Eze went down under a challenge from David Hancko.

"The whole sequence tells the story. I mean it's a clear contact," Arteta told TNT Sports. "At this level it's completely unacceptable."

The game ended 1-1 with the second leg set to take place at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium next week.

Arteta said Makkelie had reviewed the penalty incident 13 times before deciding to overturn his decision. Soccer's rules state decisions should not be changed unless there is a "clear and obvious error".

"You make that decision, you cannot overturn that decision when you have to look at it 13 times," Arteta added.

UEFA said the penalty was ruled out because no foul had been committed, despite replays showing clear contact between Hancko and Eze.

TNT Sports panelists Steven Gerrard, Martin Keown and Steve McManaman also disagreed with the Dutchman's decision to overturn the penalty, but they also pointed to Simeone's reaction on the sideline while the official reviewed the video.

"As the referee is coming over, before he's even looked at the screen, Simeone's in his face, he's waving his arms," said former Liverpool midfielder Gerrard. "Then, he's in his ear when he's at the screen. It's a performance, and he's the best at doing it."

McManaman, who played for Atletico's crosstown rival Real Madrid, said of Simeone: "His performance was terrible, and that's why people don't like the dark arts, or don't like Atletico Madrid."

Earlier in the game, Simeone and Atletico players complained about the penalty call that went against their team late in the first half. Viktor Gyokeres put Arsenal ahead by converting from the spot in the 44th minute. Julian Alvarez equalized for Atletico — also with a spotkick — 12 minutes later.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

MOTOR SPORTS

Antonelli chases hat-trick, as F1 season revs back up

MIAMI — Italian teenager Kimi Antonelli, the youngest championship leader in F1 history, will seek to complete a hat-trick of early season victories at the weekend, as Formula One returns after a month's enforced absence due to the conflicts raging in the Middle East.

The 19-year-old Mercedes driver, triumphant in China and Japan, leads teammate George Russell, who won the season-opening Australian Grand Prix, by nine points ahead of what is, effectively, the start of another season, complete with more revised rules and widespread car upgrades, at the Miami Grand Prix.

"After a month without any racing, we are ready to get back on track," said Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff.

"We've used this break to analyze the opening races, address our weaknesses and raise our level.

"We've started the season well, but that counts for very little if you stand still. We know our competitors will have used this time to improve and build a deeper understanding of their cars, so we expect the field to be closer in Miami.

"That's the reality of F1 — it's a challenge we must rise to."

Antonelli's early triumphs made him the first Italian driver since Alberto Ascari in 1953 to win two consecutive races. Ascari completed his treble that season.

Wolff also addressed the tweaks to the new regulations that will be introduced in Miami, aimed at making the cars, and the spectacle more natural, with reduced battery recharging in qualifying and increased super-clipping to reduce dangerous speed differentials.

He said the revised rules would "respect the DNA of our sport", and deliver an improved spectacle without any significant reduction to Mercedes' early-season performance advantage.



Mercedes driver Kimi Antonelli is looking to snatch a third win on the bounce when the F1 season restarts in Miami on the weekend. AP

For Mercedes, Sunday's race is an opportunity for a first win in Florida since the event was launched five years ago. It has been won twice by four-time champion Max Verstappen for Red Bull, and twice by McLaren with a win apiece for reigning world champion Lando Norris and teammate Oscar Piastri.

'Completely new car'

They will harbor hopes of claiming points, too, with success in Saturday's sprint race, which was won last year by Norris.

Ferrari, however, is widely expected to be a strong contender when it arrives in Miami. Like McLaren, Ferrari is bringing an almost "completely new car", with a heavily revised package.

"It was one of our best tracks for pure pace, compared to others, last year," said Norris. "It's a different track, and it may still suit us a little more than others."

After winning in 2022 and 2023, Verstappen will be aiming to stop Mercedes' winning run and revive Red Bull's challenge this year after a discouraging start. He is ninth, on 12 points, 60 adrift of Antonelli, with teammate Isack Hadjar in 12th place on four points.

Ferrari's duo of Charles Leclerc and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton is third and fourth, respectively, on 49 and 41 points, with many paddock observers suggesting Ferrari is poised to fight for a first win since Carlos Sainz's success in Mexico in October 2024.

Leclerc's eighth and last win came in Austin, Texas, shortly before Sainz's triumph, while Hamilton is chasing his 106th win and first since the 2024 Belgian Grand Prix — before he joined Ferrari. After a desultory first year, the Briton said he is relishing the challenge of a new formula that has seen him rediscover his racing mojo.

"We're all recharged after the break," said Russell, expressing the feelings of most drivers.

"I'm hoping we can continue where we left off."

It will also mark United States newcomer Cadillac's first racing appearance on home soil when Sergio Perez and Valtteri Bottas venture onto the grid at Hard Rock Stadium in a new American livery.

AFP

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Nature seeker

Wildlife photographer Dong Lei records rare wild creatures in Southwest China

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Ethiopian adventure

African nation offers cultural experiences for Chinese visitors

TRAVEL, PAGE 10

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 MONDAY, MAY 4, 2026

Xi commends exemplary young people

President's reply extends his festive greetings ahead of national Youth Day

By **JI HAISHENG**
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President Xi Jinping has encouraged Chinese youth to integrate their personal aspirations into the bigger picture of national development, while extending his festive greetings to young people nationwide ahead of China's Youth Day, which falls on Monday.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks in a reply letter to representatives of recipients of the China Youth May Fourth Medal and the New Era Youth Pioneer award.

In his reply, Xi commended those exemplary young people for their dedication in grassroots and frontline positions, such as sci-tech innovation, rural vitalization, social services and border defense, and highlighted that they have written a meaningful chapter of youth through practical work and responsibility.

This has demonstrated the confident, self-reliant and high-spirited outlook of Chinese youth in the new era, he added.

Citing that this year marks the beginning of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, Xi said it is a prime time for young people to contribute to the country's development. He expressed hope that those representatives will uphold lofty ideals, remain committed to hard work, and inspire more young people to integrate their personal pursuits into the country's overall development.

The president urged young Chinese to strive for new accomplishments in their posts and inject youthful dynamism into advancing the nation's new journey of development.

The China Youth May Fourth Medal and the New Era Youth Pioneer award are designed to honor outstanding young role models who demonstrate political advancement, high moral character, and make significant contributions to society.

Recently, 16 awardees who have won the titles since 2012 wrote to the president to report on their work and insights from serving at the grassroots level, and reaffirmed their resolve to contribute to national development.

This year, 29 individuals and 30 organizations have been awarded the China Youth May Fourth Medal, the country's highest youth honor for Chinese people aged from 14 to 40. Meanwhile, 749 young individuals received the New Era Youth Pioneer award.

Li Yao, a recipient of 2026 China Youth May Fourth Medal and a grassroots official of Kantiangezhuang village in Tangshan, Hebei province, said he felt profoundly inspired by Xi's reply and pledged to translate the encouragement into concrete action in promoting rural vitalization.

He said that he will work with fellow villagers to develop local specialty industries, improve the living environment, and encourage more young people to engage in agriculture and rural development — all with the aim of boosting the village's economy and increasing residents' incomes.

Qiu Kunfeng, also a 2026 China Youth May Fourth Medal recipient and dean of the Beijing-based China University of Geosciences' School of Earth Sciences and Resources, said that Xi's message has offered young people renewed motivation to contribute to the nation's broader development goals.

He said he will remain dedicated to teaching and research, venture into new technological frontiers, and work to address key challenges in strategic mineral exploration.

Zou Shuo contributed to this story.

Victory in Hungary



Valentin Debise (center), racing for EASTROC ZXMOTO Evan Bros Factory, celebrates on the podium after winning the FIM Supersport World Championship race at Balaton Park Circuit in Hungary on Saturday. The victory marks the third win of the season for ZXMOTO. AP





Holiday highlights

Above: Visitors explore exhibits at the Shanghai Natural History Museum in Shanghai on Saturday, as crowds flock to the venue during the May Day holiday.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Left: Visitors watch a traditional molten iron fireworks performance at Shuihu Hero City in Yuncheng, Shandong province, on Saturday.
QIAN HAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Beijing bans US sanctions on five Chinese cos, signals legal recourse

By **ZHONG NAN**
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The United States' sanctions on Chinese companies contravene international law and the basic norms of global relations, while Beijing's blocking measure aims to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of domestic firms and individuals, the Ministry of Commerce and analysts said.

The ministry issued a ban on Saturday prohibiting any recognition, enforcement or compliance with US sanctions imposed on five Chinese companies, including Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refining Co and Shandong Shouguang Luqing Petrochemical Co, on the grounds of their alleged involvement in Iranian petroleum transactions.

Since 2025, the US government has imposed sanctions on these Chinese firms under executive orders, placing them on the Specially Designated Nationals List, freezing their assets and prohibiting transactions with them.

In response, a spokesperson for the ministry said that China has consistently opposed unilateral sanctions lacking United Nations authorization and a basis in international law, adding that the prohibition order represents a concrete step under China's Rules on Counteracting Unjustified Extra-territorial Application of Foreign Legislation and Other Measures, which was approved by the State Council in 2021.

The issuance of the ban does not affect China's fulfillment of its international obligations or its protection of the legitimate rights and interests of foreign-invested enterprises under Chinese law, the ministry official stressed.

> "The company has strictly complied with laws and regulations since its inception. We have never engaged in any trade with Iran, and our suppliers guarantee that the origin of our crude oil does not fall under US sanctions."
>
> **Public filing from Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refining Co**

Hengli Petrochemical, the parent company of Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refining Co, condemned the US sanctions last week, dismissing US allegations of ties to Iran as "groundless" and lacking both factual and legal grounds.

"The company has strictly complied with laws and regulations since its inception. We have never engaged in any trade with Iran, and our suppliers guarantee that the origin of our crude oil does not fall under US sanctions," Hengli Petrochemical said in a public filing.

Analysts said that the US has long leveraged the dominance of its currency and financial system to extend the reach of its sanctions. Secondary sanctions — targeting entities dealing with blacklisted parties — have become a key policy tool to reshape global supply chains and influence cross-border commercial activities.

Mei Xinyu, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said that China maintains a neutral stance toward external conflicts, but will not tolerate infringements on the legitimate rights of its citizens and businesses.

"Safeguarding those interests is a necessary response to external pressures," said Mei. "At the same time, such measures do not alter China's broader commitment to openness, international cooperation and a stable, predictable environment for foreign investment."

Ding Rijia, a professor of industrial economy at China University of Mining and Technology-Beijing, said China's latest step highlights the country's growing use of legal instruments to counter the extra-territorial application of foreign sanctions.

"It sends a signal to both domestic and multinational companies that China is capable of providing a more predictable legal environment for cross-border trade," said Ding.

See ***Trade,*** *page 2*

Authority of Tokyo Trials 'must not be challenged'

By **ZHANG YUNBI**
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As neo-militarism is now rising in Japan and "beginning to pose a real threat", the Foreign Ministry said on Sunday that "it is all the more relevant" to revisit the backdrop, conclusion and principles of the historic Tokyo Trials that started 80 years ago.

Sunday marked the 80th anniversary of the opening of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, also known as the Tokyo Trials, on May 3, 1946.

The trials brought together judicial powers of 11 nations, used abundant solid evidence and a rigorous legal basis, found Japanese militarists guilty of waging the war of aggression and severely violating the international law, and brought to light the innumerable crimes Japanese aggressors committed in various Asian countries.

Through the Tokyo Trials, 25 Class A war criminals including Hideki Tojo were sentenced to death by hanging or imprisonment.

In a written reply published on the Foreign Ministry website, the spokesperson said the Tokyo Trials were held to implement the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, and embodied the collective will of both the victorious nations and the victimized peoples.

"Through the trials, the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter were upheld, and the fruits of victory in World War II were honored", the spokesperson said.

Japan's right-wing forces are still trying to whitewash the crimes committed during the war of aggression, including revising history textbooks and indoctrinating the Japanese people with a wrong perception of history, the spokesperson warned.

The right-wing forces currently are gearing up their drive to speed up remilitarization, deploy offensive weapons, rebuild the war machine and push for revision of the pacifist Constitution, the spokesperson said.

All these are diametrically the opposite of what "a country for peace" — as Japan claims itself to be — should do, the spokesperson added.

"The Tokyo Trials, as a litmus test of humanity's conscience, delivered historical justice and, along with the Nuremberg Trials, nailed the fascist war criminals to the eternal pillar of shame," the spokesperson said.

"The historical justice delivered by the two great trials must not be denied. Their legal authority must not be challenged. And the cornerstone of the postwar international order they laid must not be shaken," the spokesperson added.

Liu Jiangyong, a professor of Japan studies at Tsinghua University, said Japan's perspective on history and wars is closely linked to its current political landscape.

"Some in Japan view the convicted war criminals enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine as 'heroes' because they believe Japan's past colonial rule, aggression and expansion constitutes a history of 'victory' and 'pride' — they show not the slightest remorse," he said.

See ***Crimes,*** *page 2*

IN CHINA'S HEALTHCARE GAP, AN AI DOCTOR STEPS IN

Guidance, expert connections provided to patients in outlying communities

By **WEI WANGYU**
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Qian Zhifang sat at the kitchen table in her home in rural Hubei province, scrolling through her phone. The 65-year-old factory worker had just checked her blood pressure using a smartwatch her daughter had bought her. Within seconds, a message appeared on the screen, saying that her reading was slightly elevated.

Instead of traveling hours to the nearest city hospital in Wuhan, Zhang opened an app and typed a question, and the response came almost instantly from an artificial intelligence doctor.

"It reminded me to monitor my salt intake and suggested when to see a 'real' doctor," Zhang said. "For someone like me, it feels like having a family doctor at home."

She is part of a growing wave of digital healthcare users. What began as a set of experimental tools is evolving into a system operating at scale, one that simultaneously guides patients in daily health decisions and supports doctors in clinical care.

At the center of this transformation is Ant Health's AQ, launched in mid-2025. The platform has grown rapidly, particularly in smaller cities and rural areas, where access to specialists remains limited. The company reports surging adoption, with combined daily consultations exceeding 10 million and monthly active users tripling that number.

See ***Healthcare,*** *page 3*

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

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:39 PM

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NATION

Golden duet



Cao Yixin (third from right) and Shi Haoyue (third from left) celebrate on the podium after winning the mixed duet technical final at the 2026 World Aquatics Artistic Swimming World Cup in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Sunday, and pose with the British runners-up and Russian third-place finishers at the award ceremony. WANG JIAN / XINHUA

Chinese subs to boost Pakistan's defense

By **ZHAO LEI**
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The commissioning of the Chinese-built Hangor-class attack submarines will substantially improve the Pakistan Navy's combat and deterrence capabilities, according to military affairs observers.

Wu Peixin, an observer in Beijing, said that the deployment of the Hangor-class submarines marks a strategically significant hardware upgrade in the history of the Pakistan Navy.

"As the first submarines in South Asia fitted with an air-independent propulsion system, they are equipped with China's domestically developed Stirling engine, and this means they can navigate silently at certain speeds for several days. Such capability delivers a generational leap in performance compared with conventional diesel-electric submarines without AIP systems, and to some extent, enables them to engage with nuclear submarines," he said.

On Thursday, the commissioning ceremony for the first Hangor-class submarine, PNS/M *Hangor*, was held in the Chinese coastal city of Sanya in Hainan province.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, who visited China, and Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf, the top commander of the Pakistan Navy, attended the event and made speeches.

Zardari said that the induction of the advanced submarine was a "historic milestone" in the Pakistan Navy's modernization, affirming his nation's resolve to maintain a robust, balanced and credible defence posture.

Ashraf stated that the new submarines are armed with state-of-the-art weapons, advanced sensors and an AIP system, and they will be key in preserving maritime order and stability in the region.

The new assets will bolster Pakistan's maritime defense and modernize its fleet with cutting-edge technology, the admiral added.

According to the Pakistan Navy, the commissioning of the first Hangor-class submarine "marks another chapter in the time-tested and enriching friendship between Pakistan and China".

In 2015, the Pakistani government announced that Pakistan and China had signed a deal for eight attack submarines, disclosing that the first four vessels would be built in China, and the remaining four in Pakistan.

Wu noted that each Hangor-class submarine is fitted with a cylindrical bow sonar array and multi-line flank sonar arrays on both sides of the hull, granting the boat outstanding capabilities to detect and track hostile submarines.

The observer said that in terms of weapons systems, the Chinese-built submarines can carry torpedoes and missiles made by China as well as weaponry from other countries. These weapons are capable of striking surface warships, submarines and land-based facilities, and laying naval mines.

"With eight Hangor-class submarines set to enter service gradually in the future, Pakistan will build an asymmetric maritime advantage in its region. The new assets will offset its rival's numerical and scale edge in surface vessels, help to secure the country's transportation of fuels and materials, and strengthen its strategic influence across the Indian Ocean region," Wu anticipated.

Another observer, who wished to be identified only as Xiao, said the Hangor-class submarines can operate in coordination with Chinese-built frigates in the Pakistan Navy, and that means the Pakistan Navy can use a small group of advanced assets to pin down and deter hostile naval forces.

"Thanks to the AIP system and other modern silencing technologies, the submarine features outstanding acoustic stealth performance. It can team up with surface warships to strike enemy vessels and land targets at long ranges, wielding powerful strategic deterrence," he said.

Moreover, under the submarine project, China has transferred to Pakistan full sets of submarine design skills, construction techniques, and maintenance capacity, and has helped train a large group of workers, engineers and technicians, allowing Pakistan to break away from absolute reliance on Western suppliers and reduce the full life-cycle cost of the Hangor-class submarines, according to Xiao.

Tokyo Trials-related items donated to memorial hall

NANJING — Eighteen rare archival items related to David Nelson Sutton, a US assistant prosecutor at the Tokyo Trials and one of the earliest international prosecutors to investigate the Nanjing Massacre, were officially donated on Wednesday to the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders.

With this year marking the 80th anniversary of the start of the Tokyo Trials, the donation includes six original diaries written by Sutton between 1946 and 1948, when he was conducting investigations for the trial, as well as a series of original reports titled "Reports from China".

From May 3, 1946, to Nov 12, 1948, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East was held in Tokyo by 11 countries, including the United States, China, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, to try Japan's Class A war criminals after World War II.

Sutton came to China with the International Prosecution Section in 1946 and was tasked with investigating Japanese war crimes in China, with a particular focus on collecting evidence related to the Nanjing Massacre.

"Sutton was among the earliest members of the International Prosecution Section to conduct investigations in Nanjing and other places, and he played an irreplaceable role in the trial of the Nanjing Massacre case," said Zhou Feng, curator of the memorial hall.

The diaries recorded many details of Sutton's work during the Tokyo Trials. In one entry, dated March 9, he wrote that he had received formal orders to go to Shanghai, Nanking (Nanjing), Peiping (Beijing) and other sites in the China theater to investigate war crimes and gather evidence.

Another entry recorded his arrival in Nanjing at 11:20 am on April 2. On May 3, the day the trial opened, he described the defendants as looking like "insignificant beaten men".

Barak Kushner, a professor at the University of Cambridge, said the Sutton diaries "will be of great interest since there isn't a comparable diary from the time".

The donated materials also include Sutton's "Reports from China", which further exposed Japanese wartime atrocities in China, including mass killings, violence against civilians, germ warfare and the coercion of Chinese people into opium cultivation.

Yang Xiaming, a researcher with the Institute for National Memory and International Peace who began studying Sutton about two decades ago, said the archives donated this time are likely to have originated from a folder lost during the outsourced digitization of the Sutton archives by the law library of the University of Richmond in 2009, before eventually entering the auction market.



Zou Dehuai speaks about archival materials related to David Nelson Sutton that he has donated, during an exchange event marking the 80th anniversary of the opening of the Tokyo Trials in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on Wednesday. YANG BO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

"The core value of these archives lies in their status as irrefutable original first-hand historical materials, further strengthening the hard evidence of Japanese war crimes in China," Yang said.

The donor, Zou Dehuai, a collector born in the 1990s who has long searched for wartime historical evidence, first found the Sutton materials in November 2025 on a US-based auction website specializing in military artifacts.

After confirming Sutton's identity and reviewing preview images that indicated the items were original archival materials, Zou placed a bid for the collection and later arranged for its return to China with assistance from others.

At the donation ceremony, Zou received a donation certificate. He said the Sutton archives were the most expensive items he had acquired in a decade of collecting, and also his first donation.

"I hope that after the Sutton diaries settle in the memorial hall, they can better fulfill their value and tell every visitor that justice, though delayed, did arrive," Zou said.

Zhou, the curator of the memorial hall, said the Tokyo Trials had a profound and unshakable impact on safeguarding the victory of World War II and the postwar international order.

The return of these valuable archives to Nanjing, he said, provides new historical materials and perspectives for further research on the Tokyo Trials and helps uphold the legal conclusions of postwar justice and defend peace.

XINHUA

Lai's Eswatini trip dubbed a political farce

Mainland says Taiwan leader ditched people and wasted taxpayers' money

By **MO JINGXI** and **LI SHANGYI**

The Chinese mainland has criticized Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te's visit to Eswatini as a political farce, while urging the African nation and some other individual countries to stop serving as a prop for "Taiwan independence" separatists.

The remarks came after reports said Lai arrived in Eswatini on Saturday aboard a "private jet" of the King of Eswatini. Just a day earlier, a magnitude 6.1 offshore earthquake struck off Yilan county in Taiwan, with strong tremors felt in many areas.

A Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Saturday that Lai had ditched the people in Taiwan who were still reeling from the disaster and sneaked onto a foreign plane to "smuggle" himself out of the island, squandering taxpayers' money and performing a laughable stunt in front of the world.

"That just added yet another episode to the scandalous 'Taiwan independence' separatism," the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson said the undignified act of Lai and his like once again proves that the one-China principle has long been a basic norm in international relations and a prevailing consensus of the international community.

No matter how the Democratic Progressive Party authorities collude with external forces and keep those people in the DPP's pay, it will always be a losing cause and nothing will ever change the fact that Taiwan is part of China, the spokesperson said.

No matter how "Taiwan independence" forces try to cover up their nature or change their appearance, nothing can save their reputation or help them escape the denunciation of the international community, the spokesperson added.

"We urge Eswatini and some other individual countries to see where the arc of history bends and stop serving as a prop for 'Taiwan independence' separatists," the spokesperson said.

Eswatini is one of the 12 countries — and the only African country — that still maintain so-called "diplomatic relations" with Taiwan.

The Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council also slammed Lai's trip on Saturday, saying his previous attempt to visit Eswatini by chartered plane had been forced to be canceled after relevant countries upheld the one-China principle.

Chen Binhua, a spokesman for the office, said Lai refused to accept the setback and traveled to Eswatini "in a sneaky manner" while Taiwan was being hit by an earthquake, exposing his indifference to people on the island and his stubborn "Taiwan independence" stance.

Chen said safeguarding peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and leading secure and prosperous lives are what people on the island truly hope for.

"By disregarding public safety and deceiving the people at will, Lai is bound to be rejected by the vast majority of Taiwan compatriots," he said.

Chen said the one-China principle represents the trend of the times and the shared aspiration of the international community, adding that Lai's so-called "diplomatic achievement" was nothing more than a political trick that would only draw ridicule. "The overarching trend toward national reunification is irreversible," he said.

Contact the writers at mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

Crimes: Remembering history, vigilance urged

From page 1

"This year is particularly significant because of the Tokyo Trials anniversary. At such a crucial historical juncture, we must remember history while remaining vigilant against Japan's attempts to whitewash these war criminals," he added.

Recently, commemoration events have been held in China and Japan and by the international community to renew the historic significance of the trials.

On Sunday, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson quoted Mei Ru'ao, the late Chinese judge at the Tokyo Trials, who said, "Amnesia of past sufferings may lead to future disasters."

"Should anyone or any force foolishly attempt to reverse the verdict of aggression, they will be rejected by all peace-loving people in the world and brought once again before the tribunal of history," the spokesperson said.

Mei Xiaokan, daughter of Mei and a veteran researcher on the history of the Tokyo Trials, said, "What concerned my father most at that time was the possible scene in which those people (Japanese war criminals) do not receive the punishment they deserve."

"So he spared no effort in explaining what actually happened (during the war) to his fellow judges, trying to let them better know how atrocious the war crimes committed by the Japanese had been to the Chinese people," she told local media recently in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

Tokyo's fallacies such as "a trial exercising so-called victor's justice" and "Japan's war of self-defense" were refuted at the trials, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson noted. "Accepting the judgment of the Tokyo Trials is the prerequisite for Japan's postwar return to the international community."

Trade: Predictable policy environment seen as key

From page 1

He added that the policy measure will help reduce compliance uncertainty for firms operating in multiple jurisdictions, while reinforcing the resilience of global supply chains in the face of rising unilateralism.

Zhang Xin, head of customs affairs at Oriental Energy (Ningbo) New Material Co, a Ningbo, Zhejiang province-based petrochemicals producer, said a predictable policy environment is fundamental to the sound development of China-US economic and trade relations, adding that the company will maintain US imports and optimize supply chains to ensure stable raw material supply.

The company imported 258,000 metric tons of liquefied propane from the US, valued at $150 million, in the first four months of this year, according to data from Ningbo Customs.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:39 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:39 PM

COVER

Healthcare: AI doctors to bridge divide

From page 1

Its popularity reflects a structural challenge long facing China's medical system. While the country has world-class hospitals in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai, patients from smaller towns and rural areas often travel long distances for specialist care. Many crowd into large urban hospitals for conditions that might be handled elsewhere.

AQ aims to relieve some of that pressure by combining AI-generated health guidance with access to real doctors.

"People often need guidance before they ever see a doctor, and support after they leave the hospital," said Shen Yunfang, head of communications at Ant Health. "Our goal is to help users understand their health situation earlier, while making sure they still seek professional medical care when needed."

Behind the app is a large network of medical data and partnerships. According to Ant Health, the system draws on clinical guidelines, peer-reviewed medical journals, and collaborations with more than 5,000 hospitals and 300,000 physicians. Despite the impressive numbers, the company stresses that the platform is designed to assist doctors, not replace them.

More than 55 percent of AQ users live in third-tier cities or smaller communities, according to the company. "In those regions, people may not have easy access to top hospitals," Shen said.

As these users may depend on the app more than people living in urban areas, Shen assured that they have complete control over the uploading and utilization of their data, including test results, prescriptions, or photos for AI-assisted interpretation through the platform's question-and-answer function. Privacy protections automatically blur sensitive information, and data is encrypted end to end, she said.

"We strictly follow the nation's legal requirements and regulations, and ensure that only the user can access their health data," Shen said. "Trust is critical when dealing with medical information."

One of the app's most unusual features is a library of "AI doctor avatars". These digital assistants are modeled on the knowledge and clinical experience of more than 1,000 physicians.

Patients can ask routine questions to these virtual doctors, while complex cases are redirected to human specialists.

"The avatars allow doctors to focus their time on difficult cases," Shen said. "At the same time, they allow patients in remote areas to interact with medical experts they might otherwise never reach."

Beyond commercial platforms, researchers are pushing the boundaries of what AI in medicine might become.

At Tsinghua University, scientists have developed an experimental system known as "Agent Hospital", where AI doctors are trained to diagnose and treat simulated patients in a fully virtual environment. The system allows multiple AI agents to collaborate, mimicking the workflows of real hospitals.

"The idea is to let AI systems learn medicine the way young doctors do, through repeated exposure to cases, decision-making, and feedback," said Liu Yang, executive dean of the Institute for AI Industry Research at Tsinghua University and the project's lead scientist.

"In a virtual setting, they can accumulate experience at a scale and speed that would be impossible in the real world," Liu said.

The project offers a glimpse of a more automated future, in which elements of medical care could be scaled far beyond the limits of human staffing.

"We are not trying to replace hospitals," Liu added. "But we are exploring how parts of medical reasoning and routine care could be standardized and extended through AI."



The international health consumption sub-zone of the 6th China International Consumer Products Expo opens at the Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone on April 12 in Hainan province. Guests experienced the AI medical robot dedicated area. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY.

> "Our goal is to help users understand their health situation earlier, while making sure they still seek professional medical care when needed."
>
> **Shen Yunfang,** head of communications at Ant Health



A radiologist retrieves a patient's coronary artery CT angiography from the AI workstation and uses AI to assist in image interpretation and diagnosis in Huzhou, Zhejiang province. PAN XUEKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



The 2026 International Medical Devices Expo is held in Shanghai on April 9, displaying AI imaging solutions from Shenzhen Blue Shadow Medical Technology. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Yet as the technology advances, so do the questions surrounding it.

The rapid expansion of AI healthcare tools has sparked debate over accuracy, accountability, and the evolving role of physicians.

While platforms emphasize that AI is designed to assist rather than replace doctors, some experts warn that overreliance on automated systems could introduce new risks, particularly in complex or ambiguous cases.

"Medicine is full of uncertainty," said Mo Kai, a Beijing-based health policy expert. "When cases fall outside standard patterns, human judgment becomes critical, and that's where current AI systems still struggle."

There are also concerns about accessibility. While digital tools can extend care to underserved populations, they may be less effective for elderly users or those unfamiliar with smartphones.

"Technology can expand access," Liu said, "but ensuring that it remains usable and trustworthy for all populations is just as important as improving its intelligence."

Some physicians say such tools are already changing how they work.

Zhang Ling, a cardiologist at China-Japan Friendship Hospital, uses Ant A-Fu's desktop platform to manage online consultations and review patient histories.

"The AI assistant organizes patient information before I even begin the consultation," Zhang said. "It identifies potential warning signs and highlights urgent cases."

That kind of triage can be valuable in China's busiest hospitals, where doctors often see dozens of patients each day.

"It doesn't replace clinical judgment," Zhang added. "But it can make the system much more efficient."

Still, adoption has not been without resistance, particularly from within hospitals. Some administrators and clinicians remain cautious about integrating large AI models into clinical workflows, citing concerns over reliability and professional risk.

"Medicine is not just pattern recognition, but involves judgment, responsibility, and uncertainty," said a hospital administrator who asked not to be named.

"If an AI system produces an incorrect recommendation, even rarely, the consequences in a clinical setting can be serious. That's where many institutions remain hesitant."

Concerns over data governance present an additional barrier. While technology companies stress that patient information is protected, some hospitals are reluctant to share internal data with external platforms, fearing loss of control or unintended exposure.

"From the hospital's perspective, data is one of its most sensitive assets," the administrator said.

"Even if companies claim the data won't be used beyond specific applications, it sometimes sounds not trustworthy enough. Trust takes time to build."

Developers say such concerns are understandable, but, in many cases, misplaced. According to Shen, the Ant Health communication head, most platforms operate under strict data isolation protocols, with patient information encrypted and stored within controlled environments.

Data used for AI-assisted services is typically not fed back into foundational model training, and these safeguards are often written into formal agreements with partner institutions.

"We don't use hospital data to train base models, and that is clearly specified in our contracts," Shen said. "There are also strict rules governing data storage, access permissions, and system architecture."

With AI medicine remaining a developing field, experts have said that algorithms must cope with more diverse medical conditions and the digital barriers faced by users. Ensuring accuracy and maintaining public trust will remain critical challenges.

Ant Health says it is already working on new features, including chronic-disease management tools. A senior-friendly interface with dialect support for elderly users launched in February.

For patients like Qian in Hubei, the technology is already reshaping everyday healthcare. She now checks her blood pressure regularly and consults the app whenever she has questions. If necessary, it can connect her directly to a physician online. "It makes me feel less alone dealing with my health," she said.

Digitized medical services scale up, but real-world performance remains uneven

By **WEI WANGYU**
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As artificial intelligence gains traction in China's healthcare system, experts say its expansion is following a clear pattern, shaped as much by clinical realities as by technological capability.

Across academia and industry, there is a growing consensus that AI healthcare holds tangible potential in improving efficiency, extending access, and shifting care toward earlier intervention. Yet where and how these systems are deployed remains highly selective.

"AI tends to be adopted first in areas where data is standardized, workloads are heavy, and risks are relatively controllable," said Wu You, an associate professor at Tsinghua University's medical school.

"These conditions make it easier to integrate AI as a tool for assistance and quality control," Wu said.

That logic has placed imaging-related specialties at the forefront. In radiology, AI systems are increasingly used to assist with CT and MRI interpretation—tasks that are repetitive, high-frequency, and governed by standardized workflows.

Digital pathology is another fast-growing area, supporting the development of regional pathology centers and cloud-based diagnostic networks, although human experts still dominate most clinical decisions.

Beyond diagnostics, AI is also gaining ground in hospital quality management. Tools for prescription review, medical record auditing, and disease-specific quality control are being deployed to improve consistency and reduce error rates.

Meanwhile, patient-facing applications, such as intelligent triage, pre-consultation services, and automated billing, are reshaping hospital workflows, even if many rely more on digital infrastructure than advanced clinical intelligence.

Despite this progress, adoption remains concentrated in top-tier hospitals.

"In most cases, AI systems are first piloted in large tertiary hospitals, which are deeply involved in their development and validation," Wu said. "Only after that do they gradually expand to regional healthcare networks. Direct adoption at the primary-care level is still limited."

One structural reason is that the current medical practice still assumes that physicians must be capable of evaluating and, when necessary, correcting AI-generated outputs. In lower-tier settings, where technical training and resources may be more constrained, that condition is not always met.

Another challenge lies in the gap between controlled testing and real-world performance.

Regulatory approval in China typically confirms that AI systems meet baseline standards for safety and accuracy under controlled conditions. But once deployed in clinical environments, outcomes can vary widely.

"Effectiveness depends on who is using the system, how it is integrated into workflows, and how long it has been in use," Wu said.

In a multiyear study tracking AI-assisted lung CT analysis at two hospitals in Beijing, Wu and her colleagues observed markedly different patterns between junior and senior physicians.



Multiple AI products are showcased at the Artificial Intelligence and Robotics Innovation Products and Services Release Event in Guangzhou,Guangdong province in September. QIN ZIHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Less experienced doctors were more likely to rely on AI suggestions, sometimes leading to short-term increases in false positives and longer reporting times. Senior doctors, by contrast, showed more stable performance, with gradual improvements emerging over time as workflows adapted.

The findings suggest that early declines in efficiency, particularly among less experienced users, should not necessarily be interpreted as technological failure, but rather as part of the adjustment process in human-machine collaboration.

More broadly, they point to the limits of a regulatory approach focused solely on market entry.

"In high-risk and complex medical scenarios, governance cannot stop at approval," Wu said. "It needs to extend to continuous evaluation and adaptation in real-world use."

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in healthcare systems, experts say the next phase will depend less on technological breakthroughs than on how effectively these systems are integrated, monitored, and governed.

The promise of AI in medicine may be substantial. But its success, they argue, will ultimately be determined outside of controlled trials, in the messy, variable realities of everyday clinical practice.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:39 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:39 PM

WORLD

Vintage beauties



Children look over classic vehicles at a car expo in Auckland, New Zealand, on Sunday, as enthusiasts gather to showcase vintage models and share automotive culture. WU JIAXIANG / XINHUA

US prepares to guide ships through strait

Iran warns that "Project Freedom" initiative would be considered a violation of ceasefire

By SHI GUANG in New York
shiguang@chinadailyusa.com

US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that the United States will launch a new effort to "guide" hundreds of stranded ships through the Strait of Hormuz as early as Monday, a move that Iran quickly warned would violate a fragile ceasefire.

Trump said in a social media post that "neutral and innocent" countries have been affected by the Iran war, and "we have told these Countries that we will guide their Ships safely out of these restricted Waterways, so that they can freely and ably get on with their business".

The initiative, called Project Freedom, would begin on Monday morning, Trump said, adding that his representatives are having discussions with Iran that could lead to something "very positive for all", The Associated Press reported.

Trump warned that any interference in the program would be dealt with "forcefully," but provided few specifics about how it would work.

In response, Iran's National Security Commission Chairman Ebrahim Azizi said any US interference with the Strait of Hormuz would be considered a violation of the ceasefire.

"The Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf would not be managed by Trump's delusional posts!" Azizi said on X.

He said Trump's announcement is an attempt to shift the blame for the blockade in the Strait of Hormuz to Iran, allowing him to authorize US strikes without Congressional approval.

Iran's tight restrictions on shipping through the strait, combined with a US naval blockade that has curtailed Iranian oil exports and disrupted tanker traffic, have shaken global markets.

Crews stuck on the mainly oil and gas ships have spoken about running low on food, water and other supplies.

Many sailors come from countries in south and southeast Asia.

On Sunday, a cargo ship near the Strait of Hormuz said it was attacked by multiple small craft, marking at least two dozen attacks in and around the strait since the Iran war began, according to an AP report.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, the first reported in the area since April 22, the operations center said.

Meanwhile, Tehran said it was reviewing the US response to its latest proposal on ending the war.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei said on Sunday the United States has responded to Iran's 14-point proposed plan to end the war.

He made the remarks in an interview with state-run IRIB TV while noting that the US response is being reviewed.

He stressed that Iran's plan is exclusively focused on ending the war, and "nothing pertaining to the nuclear field's details exists in it".

"At present, we are focused on the parameters related to ending the war in the region, including Lebanon," Baghaei added, stressing "we have no nuclear negotiation at this stage".

Trump on Saturday said he was reviewing the proposal but expressed doubt it would lead to a deal, adding on social media that "they have not yet paid a big enough price for what they have done" in the nearly 50 years since the Islamic Revolution there.

Iran's proposal called for the US lifting sanctions on Iran, ending the US naval blockade of Iranian ports, withdrawing forces from the region and ceasing all hostilities, including Israel's operations in Lebanon, according to the semi-official Nour News and Tasnim agencies.

Xinhua and Agencies contributed to this story.

Pentagon to pull more troops from Germany

WASHINGTON — United States President Donald Trump said on Saturday the country plans to withdraw "a lot further" than the 5,000 troops from Germany that the Pentagon had earlier said.

"We're going to cut way down, and we're cutting a lot further than 5,000," Trump told reporters before boarding Air Force One in Florida.

The Pentagon announced on Friday the withdrawal of about 5,000 US troops from Germany, which is expected to be completed over the next six to 12 months.

"This decision follows a thorough review of the (Defense) Department's force posture in Europe and is in recognition of theater requirements and conditions on the ground," Pentagon chief spokesman Sean Parnell said.

NATO said on Saturday that it was working with the United States to understand Washington's decision to withdraw troops from Germany, amid fresh tensions between the US and Germany over the Middle East crisis.

Earlier, Trump hinted at a troop withdrawal after German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said Iran was "humiliating" the US in negotiations to end the conflict between the two sides.

On Thursday, Trump said he may also reduce US military presence in Spain and Italy, while criticizing European allies for not helping in the US-Israeli war against Iran.

Spain's Defense Minister Margarita Robles called Trump's statements "neither appropriate nor, of course, based on any legal grounds".

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said on Thursday that Berlin is prepared, while stating that major US military sites, such as the Ramstein Air Base, still serve an irreplaceable role for both sides.

More than 36,000 US troops were assigned to bases throughout Germany as of December, along with nearly 1,500 reservists and 11,500 civilians.

Yu Xiaohua, a professor at Germany's University of Goettingen, said that Trump might execute a symbolic reduction, maybe a few hundred troops, as a political gesture. Still, some observers see a broader shift underway.

In a commentary published in the French daily Le Monde, former German vice-chancellor Joschka Fischer said, "Whatever the case, the dissolution of the alliance has already begun."

XINHUA

Africa eyes benefits from tariff waiver

By NDUMISO MLILO in Johannesburg
For China Daily

With China's zero-tariff offer taking effect on Friday, South African experts and the business community expect it to boost China-Africa trade and bring economic benefits to the continent.

While China previously offered duty-free access to dozens of least developed countries, the current offer has been expanded to include middle-income countries such as South Africa and Nigeria.

Theuns Botha, CEO of Kingday Textiles, which imports textiles from China and exports aluminum and zinc to it, urged South African companies to take advantage of the opportunity.

"This is an incredible opportunity. China is trying its best to increase trade with African countries," he said.

"This offer has been extended to benefit the manufacturing, agricultural and mining sectors and increase employment with high demand from China. We are seeing China opening its markets and making concessions available to the rest of the world," Botha said.

The zero-tariff policy could provide relief to African countries facing uncertain trade relations with the United States, which has unilaterally imposed tariffs, he said.

Dealing with Washington has become "difficult and complicated" under the current US administration, he said, adding that South Africa should expand its production capacity to increase exports to China.

Wolfe Braude, a manager at the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa, welcomed China's offer while urging exporters to meet the country's regulatory requirements.

African nations seeking to export agricultural products to China must negotiate and sign sanitary and phytosanitary protocols, he said. South Africa has already signed several such protocols but is planning to add cherries and blueberries to the list this year, he added.

Standards compliance

For nonagricultural products, exporters must comply with the standards set by China's regulatory authorities, Braude said.

Navigating the Chinese market comes with challenges for some companies because of its regulations and procedures, and smaller businesses will require capacity-building support to fully benefit from the opportunity, he said.

Exporters will benefit from understanding the Chinese systems, rules and regulations as a result of the Framework Agreement on Economic Partnership for Shared Prosperity, which South Africa signed with China earlier this year, he said.

Under the agreement, African countries are also expected to benefit from cooperation in areas such as green energy, digitization, technical expertise and financing, he added.

China's development experience offers valuable insights for Africa, Braude said, noting that the country has successfully confronted many of the challenges that African economies continue to face.

Philani Mthembu, executive director at the Institute for Global Dialogue in South Africa, said the zero-tariff policy could further strengthen Africa-China trade ties.

"China is opening its market to South African products, particularly in the agriculture sector, which is very important," Mthembu said.

Looking ahead, he said the next step in the trade relationship should involve greater investment and manufacturing partnerships.

"Even in the automotive space, we encourage China to build factories to manufacture high-tech and other products within the African continent," he said.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Smoke screen

Thick ash billows from Mayon Volcano as seen from Camalig in Albay Province, the Philippines, on Saturday, blanketing dozens of villages and forcing thousands to evacuate as authorities enforce a 6-kilometer danger zone.

CHRISTIAN ANONUEVO LORILLA VIA AP



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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No.1819

China-Australia partnerships offer bright spot amid global disruptions

By XIN XIN and **ALEXIS HOOI**
in Sydney

China-Australia partnerships offer a bright spot amid major disruptions to global supply chains, business leaders heard at a recent industry event in Sydney, where speakers pointed to expanding collaboration as a way to navigate rising uncertainty.

Australia's designation as the Country of Honor at this year's China International Supply Chain Expo, to be held in Beijing in June, is expected to provide an important platform for deepening industrial and supply chain ties, in line with China's push for high-quality development.

The momentum is particularly visible in renewable energy, with export-ready Australian companies seeking closer engagement with China's rapidly growing energy ecosystem. The Smart Energy Council, in partnership with the Australian Trade and Investment Commission, will lead a delegation of companies to the expo.

David McElrea, the council's chief advocacy officer, told China Daily that the sector illustrates the "enduring partnership" between the two countries. "In Australia, we use a lot of Chinese material and investments; whether it's solar panels, batteries or electric vehicles," he said, highlighting China's central role in driving the global renewable energy transition.

"We're constantly impressed by the innovation in China," he said. "There are so many ways we can work together and the future for cooperation is bright."

The expo promotes collaboration across industry, academia, research and application, encouraging interaction between Chinese and international businesses to strengthen global industrial and supply chain partnerships.

Ma Lei, chief representative of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade's office in Australia, said Australia's confirmation as the Country of Honor reflects its "strong confidence" in deepening industrial and supply chain cooperation and will inject new momentum into the countries' economic and trade ties.

Ma, whose office organized the Sydney event, said the expo's focus on major industrial chains, including advanced manufacturing, is "perfectly aligned with China-Australia cooperation priorities", creating broad opportunities for businesses in both countries.

Chen Jianyu, general manager of the Sydney branch of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, said Australia's designation at the expo reflects the depth of bilateral economic cooperation and underscores the important role of Australian businesses in global supply chains.

The bank, a strategic partner of the expo, supported the Sydney event with the China Chamber of Commerce in Australia.

"Leveraging the ICBC's extensive global network and deep presence in China, we aim to help Australian enterprises connect with the right partners, explore new opportunities and achieve tangible business outcomes," Chen said.

Arnold Jorge, CEO of the Export Council of Australia, told China Daily that heightened uncertainty and ongoing supply chain reconfiguration have made stability a priority.

Against that backdrop, he said Australia's relationship with China — its largest trading partner — offers much-needed complementarities to help overcome current challenges.

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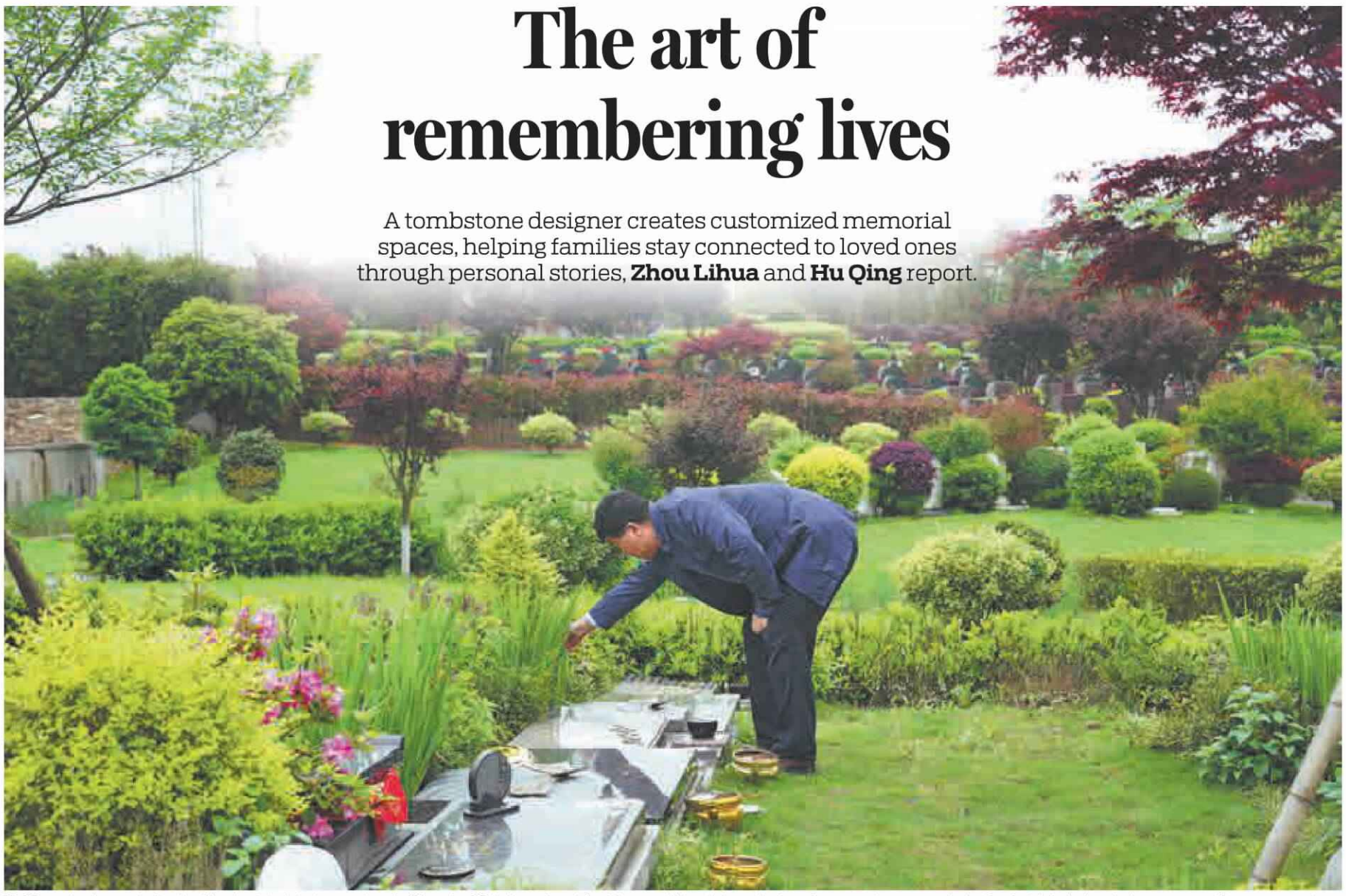
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PEOPLE

The art of remembering lives

A tombstone designer creates customized memorial spaces, helping families stay connected to loved ones through personal stories, **Zhou Lihua** and **Hu Qing** report.



Xu Hang checks vegetation beside a burial plot at a cemetery in Xianning, Hubei province. The 42-year-old tombstone designer incorporates seasonal planting into his designs to keep spaces alive year-round.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

During this year's Tomb-Sweeping Day, Xu Hang moved slowly along rows of tombstones at Crane Lake Memorial Park in Xianning city, Hubei province. He brushed dust from the surfaces, and paused beside one he had designed years ago, lost in thought.

No one asked him to do this. It is simply something he has done for nearly 20 years.

The tombstones stand in silence. Each one holds a story that can no longer be spoken aloud.

And Xu's work ensures those stories are not entirely lost.

At 42, Xu is a tombstone designer. Over the past two decades, he has designed nearly 1,000 tombstones.

Having studied environmental art design at Xi'an Polytechnic University, Xu had not planned to enter the funeral industry. After graduation in 2006, he took a job at a cemetery in Zhengzhou, Henan province, and stayed for nearly a decade.

"I wasn't interested in the job at all back then," he recalls.

The setting felt far removed from his ambitions. But over time, something shifted — not through design theory or artistic pursuit, but through an encounter he still remembers clearly.

More than a decade into his career, Xu was organizing a burial ceremony when he presented a tombstone design to a woman in her 50s who had just lost her husband. After the ceremony, she suddenly dropped to her knees.

"Thank you, child," she said.

The moment stayed with him. The woman, whom he later referred to as Aunt Li, told him the tombstone carried the memory of their 30 years together. From then on, she said, this would be the place where she could return and "talk" to her husband.

At that moment, Xu began to understand that what he was shaping was not just stone, but a form of continuity — something that allowed the living to remain connected to those they had lost. A tombstone could hold the presence of a parent for a child, or offer quiet companionship to someone left behind.

"That was when I realized this job could truly matter," he says. "It allows me to help people, and earn their trust."

From then on, he chose to take the work seriously.

He stopped chasing abstract notions of "art" and began by listening. Before starting any design, he sits with families and asks simple questions: What colors did they like? What music or opera did they enjoy? What kind of life did they live?









Clockwise from above: Xu Hang inspects the health of a tree at a cemetery in Xianning, Hubei province. Xu discusses a tombstone design plan with a colleague. A hand-drawn tombstone sketch by the designer. He uses computer software to develop a burial plot master plan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A typical design takes around 10 days. Xu begins with hand-drawn sketches, refining them through conversations with the family. Once a direction is agreed upon, he develops digital renderings to finalize materials, colors and layout.

His work often extends beyond the tombstone itself. He treats each site as a small, contained environment — a place designed not only for remembrance, but for return.

Xu says he avoids the traditional use of plain black stone, instead creating what he describes as a "small courtyard". Evergreen plants provide structure, flowers bloom in spring, and even in winter there is some greenery, ensuring the space never feels desolate.

He often leaves intentional blank spaces on the stone, inviting families to return each year and add their own inscriptions or elements. He also visits regularly to check conditions and maintain the sites.

Xu follows a principle passed down from his parents. "If you deceive the living, you may still have a chance to make amends. But if you deceive the dead, you never will," he says.

One project continues to stay with him. A young woman once described her father, a serviceman stationed on a remote island. Her clearest memory was of arriving each year to find him waiting at the dock, the sea stretching behind him under a vast sky.

Xu translated that memory into a horizontal tombstone. Small stones outlined the shape of the island, while the background opened into a wide "sky", decorated with small stones in shades of blue, yellow and white, inspired by *The Starry Night* created by Vincent van Gogh.

When the woman saw the finished design, she said nothing.

"But I knew she understood," Xu says.

His work has drawn attention beyond families. Ding Shan, a teacher at the School of Art and Design at Wuhan University of Technology, became a client two years ago when Xu designed a shared burial site for his grandfather and father.

"Xu Hang is very approachable. We had detailed discussions about materials, design and dimensions to meet my specific requests," Ding says, adding that what impressed him most was Xu's attitude toward his job — treating it as a delicate act of creation rather than just a way to earn a living.

> "The tomb sits by a lakeside cherry blossom tree, with cranes and black swans nearby. It feels more like a park than a cemetery. Knowing our loved ones rest in such a place brings us a sense of peace."
>
> **Ding Shan,**
> a client, teacher at the School of Art and Design at Wuhan University of Technology

"The garden-style layout was truly thoughtful," he says. "The tomb sits by a lakeside cherry blossom tree, with cranes and black swans nearby.

"It feels more like a park than a cemetery. Knowing our loved ones rest in such a place brings us a sense of peace," Ding says.

In recent years, Xu has noticed a shift in how people approach memorials. Families are less concerned with scale or formality, and more focused on emotional expression. They want tombstones to reflect the individuality of the person being remembered — places where they can sit, talk, and spend time.

Younger clients, in particular, often bring clear and personal ideas. Some bring sketches; others gather references and images to explain what they have in mind, he says.

After 20 years in the field, Xu believes not everyone is suited to the work.

"It's not about skill," he said. "It's about what's in your heart."

Awards no longer concern him. What matters is the moment when a family looks at a design and says, "I never imagined it could be like this."

That, he believes, is enough.

He no longer cares about leaving his own name behind. If anything is to endure, he believes, it should be the lives of ordinary people — each one carrying its own quiet significance.

Liu Kun contributed to this story.

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READ



Seeing the wild side of life one frame at a time

Photographer Dong Lei documents the extraordinary diversity of China's environment over the course of 20 years

By CHEN LIANG
chenliang@chinadaily.com.cn

The year began with a quiet milestone for Dong Lei, a photographer from Chengdu in Sichuan province; the publication of his new book, *My Wildlife Circle of Friends*.

He told China Daily that the seed for a photo book had been planted in 2014-15, initially conceived with the title *Mountains of Southwest China Through the Eyes of a Nature Photographer*. In 2017-18, he frequently ventured deep into the Gaoligong Mountains in Yunnan province, documenting the elusive pheasant, Sclater's monal. He spent weeks in isolated wilderness. During downtime, or on rainy days when leaving camp was impossible, he began to create the book and later completed a first draft.

Eventually, a publisher expressed interest. The working title shifted to *China's National Parks (Southwest Chapter) Through the Eyes of a Nature Photographer*, with 10 chapters on key species distributed across 10 national parks of Southwest China.

However, with only five national parks being officially established so far and only two falling within his reach, the publisher had to rethink the marketing strategy. The title was changed to appeal to a younger audience. "The cover design is more cartoonish, but the content inside remains largely the same," Dong said.

The book is a collection of his works from 2006 to the spring of 2025, when he photographed the rare Himalayan red panda in the Xizang autonomous region. "The book contains the highlights of my 20 years of wildlife photography," Dong said.

Li Binbin, an associate professor of environmental sciences at Duke Kunshan University in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, wrote in the book's foreword: "With rapidly evolving imaging technology and readily accessible information, capturing beautiful nature images seems less daunting than before. However, the ability to relentlessly seek out uncharted territories in nature photography, to document and disseminate the biodiversity of China's vast land, and to use imagery to raise awareness of nature conservation — that's where people like Dong Lei are truly rare."

From enthusiast to expert

A nature enthusiast without a formal science background, Dong, 51, started bird-watching in 2003, which gradually transitioned into a career in nature photography.

He studied industrial design at a college in Jiangsu. After graduating, he joined Sichuan University as a teacher of design and photography. Nowadays, he teaches at the School of Design at Southwest Jiaotong University in Chengdu. As an only child, Dong lived according to his parents' expectations: education, marriage and a stable career.

But at the age of 25 lurking beneath the surface of his well-ordered life was "a hint of discontent", he said.

At Sichuan University, Dong found himself with more free time, joining the university's mountaineering association on a trek to Mount Gongga. This became the turning point that led him into the world of nature photography. He enjoyed taking pictures as he walked in the wild.

Around 2004, he immersed himself in wildlife photography. In the early 2000s, it was a new field and relevant visual materials were scarce, mostly found in foreign publications.

"I gradually realized that documenting wildlife through imagery is a crucial way for us to understand nature," Dong said.

From 2006, he began teaching at the China Wildlife Photography Training Camp, organized by the renowned photographer Xi Zhinong. Meanwhile, he embarked on his own project to photograph China's endangered species.

In 2008, he joined Image Biodiversity Expedition, the country's first imaging biodiversity survey institute.

After accumulating substantial first-hand images, Dong and his friends founded swild.cn, a natural image library, hoping to use the power of photography to reveal the vitality of the wilderness in Southwest China.

The Mountains of Southwest China are one of the world's 36 biodiversity hot spots, Dong said. In this region, there are about 12,000 plant species, 29 percent of which are endemic. The abundance of wildlife is equally extraordinary: giant pandas, several species of snub-nosed monkeys and gibbons, snow leopards, takins, white-lipped deer and various pheasants.

"There is a long list of key species that need our documentation," Dong said.

In 2014, he published his first nature photography album, focusing on the biodiversity in the Gaoligong Mountains.

Beyond photography, Dong and his partners gradually evolved toward nature documentaries, beginning around 2015, hoping to showcase the charms of wildlife through more diverse formats.

Over the past decade, he has been involved in the creation of around 10 wildlife documentaries. The mountains of Southwest China remain the central focus of these works.

Of these documentaries, Dong is most fond of *The Glories of the Minya Konka* (Mount Gongga), completed in 2018.

Through precious, on-location footage, the documentary tells the story of Mount Gongga, the highest peak in the Hengduan Mountains of western Sichuan, at 7,556 meters above sea level. It captures the coexistence of snow leopards and leopards, the spectacular giant tree of *Magnolia dawsoniana* and monkey troops seasonally feeding on the flowers, and the courtship of golden pheasants.

In January 2020, the documentary was broadcast on Central China Television and received an award from the National Radio and Television Administration.

Because of these works, Dong is considered one of China's leading nature documentary directors and producers.

Discoveries and memories

Years of fieldwork have led to many unexpected discoveries. In 2007, while visiting the Tangjiahe National Nature Reserve in Sichuan, he rediscovered the rare rusty-throated parrotbill.

In 1886, the Russian explorer Nikolay Przhevalsky toured western China with his expedition team, documenting many species for the first time. The rusty-throated parrotbill, known as Przevalski's parrotbill, was among them.

Ever since the official discovery, enthusiasts from Europe and the United States have been eager to see the bird, but for more than a century no one had seen it.

In the 1990s, there were rumors that some foreign visitors had seen it in Jiuzhaigou in Sichuan, but there was no photo evidence. In 2007, Dong and his mentor, Xi Zhinong, finally photographed it in Tangjiahe.

"I had been bird-watching for three or four years then, and could identify many birds, and I had a field guide with me," he said. "But when I took the photo, I didn't realize it was rusty-throated parrotbill. Who would expect to be able to photograph a bird that hadn't been seen in 120 years?"

In 2018, while taking photos in Gyirong county, Xizang, he documented a new mammal record for China, the Asiatic jackal. "While investigating Gyirong Valley, an animal resembling a fox suddenly appeared in the bushes," he said. "We were able to capture clear photos before it disappeared quickly. The images confirmed the existence of the animal in China."

Both discoveries were significant enough to be published in academic journals, with Dong listed as the first author.

Reflecting on his passion for wildlife photography, Dong explained that it is the vast realm of the unknown that captivates him.

"You might meticulously plan every detail of a trip, only to find yourself unable to capture your intended target, which can be quite disheartening," he said. "Yet, it's often in those moments of unexpected discovery or unforeseen adventure that you find a surprising and profound joy.

"You will definitely not come away empty-handed. You are sure to harvest something. The unpredictability is fascinating."

His encounter with the Nujiang snub-nosed monkeys is a fine example. The monkey was only officially discovered as a species in 2010. It's currently only found in Yunnan and Myanmar, with a population of less than 600.

After learning about the species, Dong and his friends were thinking about photographing the animal. Starting in 2012, they repeatedly visited the animal's natural habitat in the Gaoligong Mountains but without success.

After they heard that the monkeys had been seen near the Pianma Protection Station in the Gaoligong Mountains on Oct 28, 2013, they launched their third attempt.

They started climbing at 3 am, in complete darkness and pouring rain. They had to rely on their hands to climb. "We didn't bring headlamps. When we needed both hands to climb, we had to bite down on the flashlight," Dong said.

They arrived at the destination at 7 or 8 am, when it was bright. However, the forest was quiet. "We were a bit disappointed because the monkeys would be active after daybreak, and it was already quite bright. We worried they had already left," he said.

Undeterred, they split up and searched in different directions. When they returned to camp, it was 9:30 am, and they still hadn't found them. "Our mood was really low, thinking we had wasted our efforts. I even packed my lens into my bag," he said. "It was very cold. The rangers from the patrol station built a fire, and we dried our clothes and warmed ourselves. Just as we were about to give up, the snub-nosed monkeys appeared by the dozen, very noisy!"

Zhang Jinshuo, curator of the National Zoological Museum of China, wrote in his foreword to *My Wildlife Circle of Friends*: "Wherever there is unique biodiversity, no matter how harsh the environment or conditions, he (Dong) can scale its peaks; thus, pursuing the truest side of nature, thereby recording rare endangered species and displaying their elusive natural behaviors."

Due to his increasing commitments in documentary direction and production, Dong finds that his opportunities to photograph wildlife have become limited. However, he said that he remains eager to seize any chance to venture into the wild and capture its beauty whenever possible.











From top: A male blue sheep stands on a slope as Mount Qomolangma looms behind in the Xizang autonomous region. DONG LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY Dong Lei works in the snow at the Wanglang National Nature Reserve in Sichuan province for a documentary. ZOU TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY Two Nujiang snub-nosed monkeys perch on a tree in the Gaoligong Mountains in Yunnan province. DONG LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY A male Sclater's monal stands on a rocky slope of the Gaoligong Mountains in Yunnan. DONG LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY A cluster of *Meconopsis horridula* blooms in front of Mount Qomolangma in Xizang. DONG LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY An Asiatic jackal documented in Gyirong county, Xizang, in 2018. DONG LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY The rusty-throated parrotbill photographed in the Tangjiahe National Nature Reserve in Sichuan province in 2007 is the first confirmed record of this species since its discovery in 1886. DONG LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY Dong works on Mount Gongga. LI BINBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

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IMAGE

Revitalizing villages by attracting young people

Huzhou, Zhejiang province, is where the idea that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets first took root.

In March this year, China's first local regulation specifically designed to encourage young people to develop rural areas was enacted in Huzhou.

By integrating youth-driven rural development into local legal and planning frameworks, the regulation aims to address key challenges and inject fresh energy into rural revitalization.

Since the start of 2025, Huzhou has launched over 2,000 youth-led innovation projects across its rural areas.

These initiatives are giving rise to new business models and lifestyles, all driven by the creativity and ambition of young people.

From the digital nomad community — China's first comprehensive hub of its kind — nestled in the tea fields of Xilong township, Anji county of Huzhou, to a wide range of innovative projects that help boost local incomes, more and more young people in Huzhou are turning their dreams into reality among the green hills and clear waters.

Huzhou will continue to empower rural development through young talent, unlocking new growth drivers to help the youth tap their full potential. This influx of talent is reshaping urban-rural integration, offering a dynamic new vision of balanced growth.

-CHINA DAILY

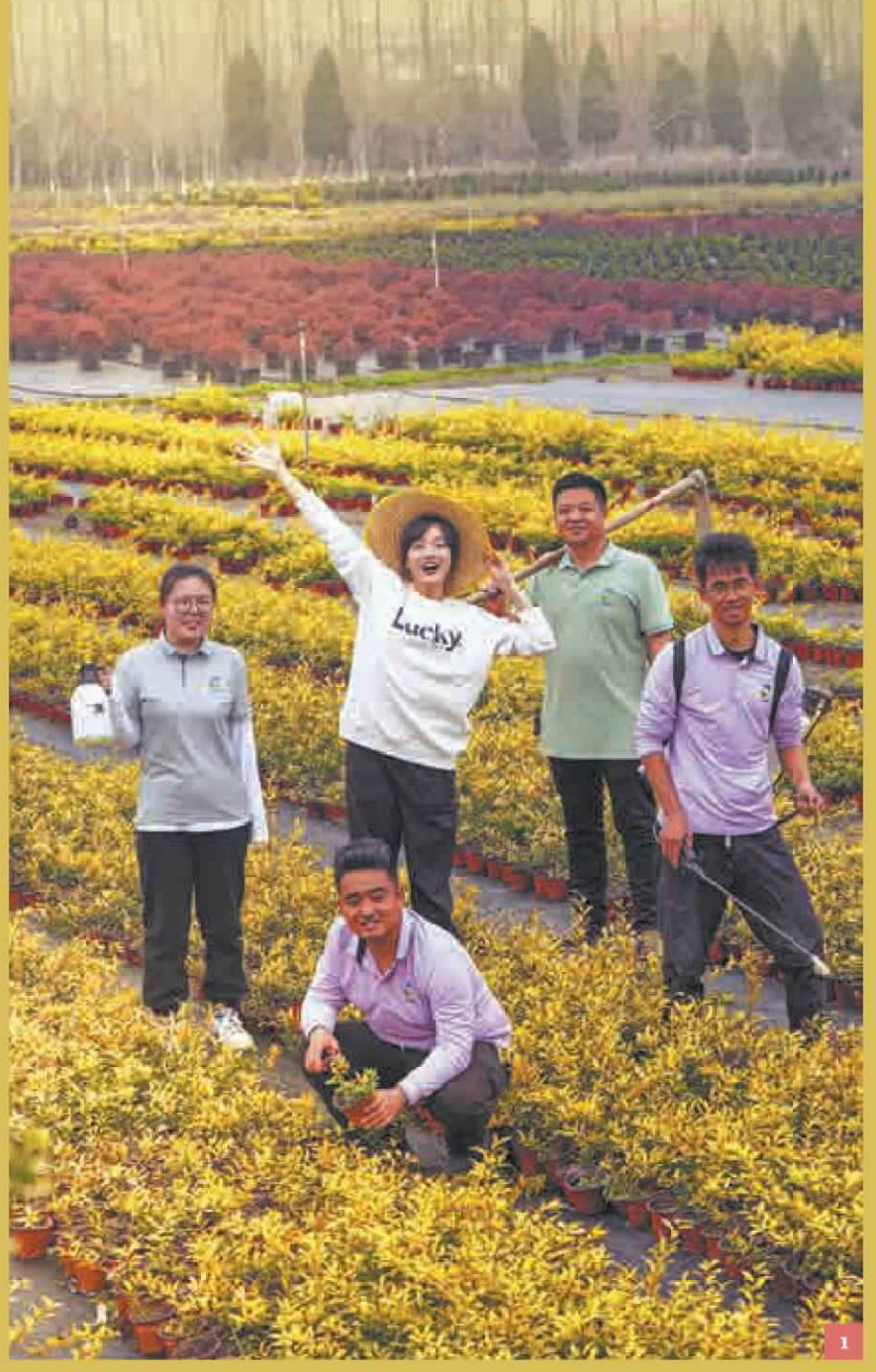


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1. Yu Shifan (second from the left) and her team members work joyfully in the fields in March, 2025.
PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

2. A concert is held in Xiaopu town, Changxing county, Huzhou to celebrate Youth Day on May 4, 2025.
PHOTO BY HE PENGFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

3. A band performs for the crowd at a night coffee venue run by young entrepreneurs on July 6, 2024.
PHOTO BY LI CHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

4. Lu Yingfeng, founder of a hairy crab company based in Huzhou, displays crabs raised using traditional, free-range, all-natural methods in November 2015.
PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

5. Yao Yulin, a bearer of the Huzhou brush-making heritage, goes live to sell Huzhou brushes, ink, paper, as well as inkstones on Dec 29, 2024, with her husband Yang Wen assisting her on the side.
PHOTO BY YAO ZHENQUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



On April 20, four young people come together to map out their response to the expected surge in visitors to their coffee shop over the May Day holiday this year. PHOTO BY SU XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



A coffee shop named Yucun Club, located in Anji county, Huzhou, sees a steady stream of visitors in April.
PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

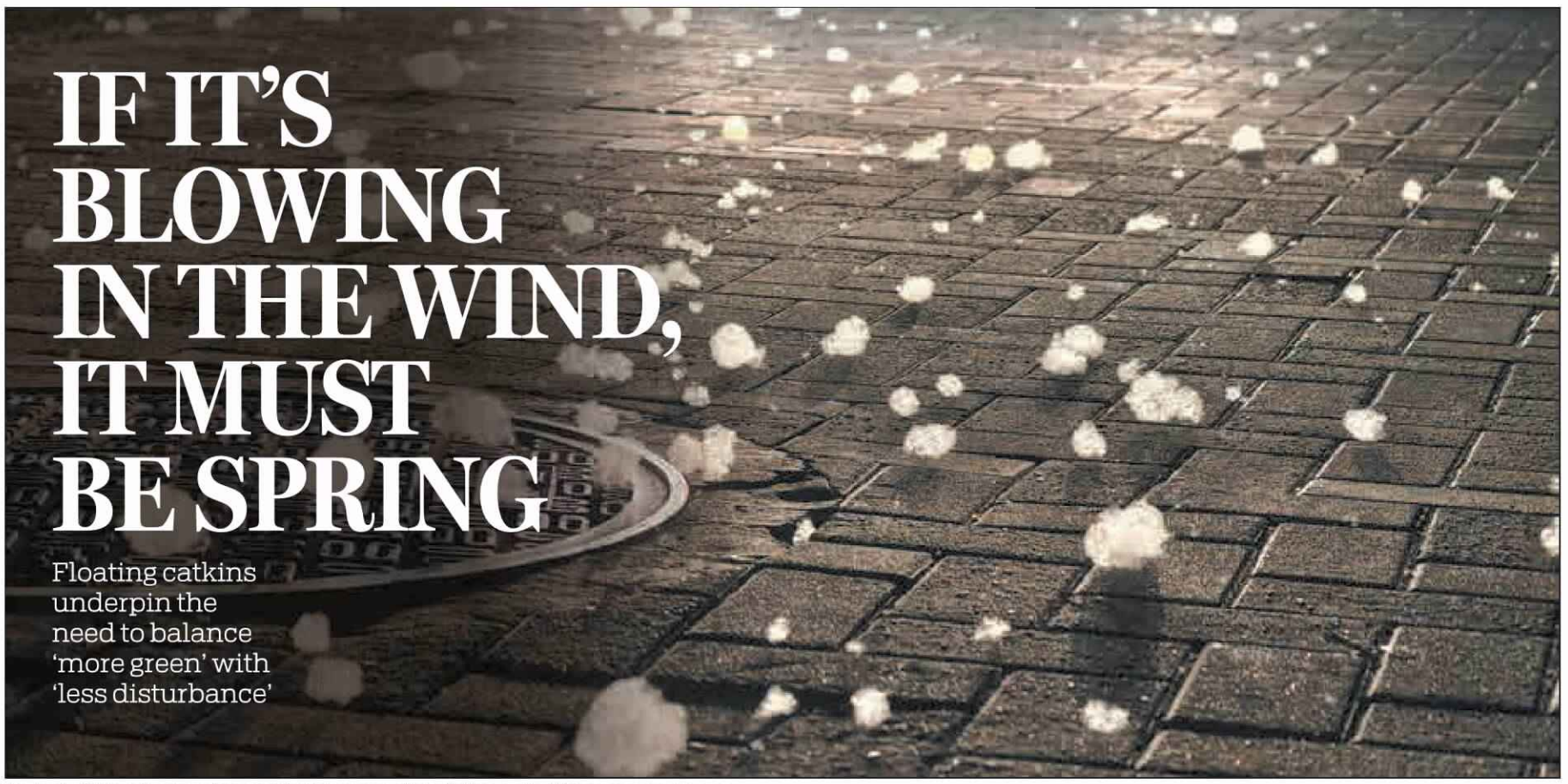


In July, 2025, a rural tech startup conducts drone-based water quality testing and sampling amid the lush green hills of Anji county, Huzhou. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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TREND



IF IT'S BLOWING IN THE WIND, IT MUST BE SPRING

Floating catkins underpin the need to balance 'more green' with 'less disturbance'

Poplar fluff litters the ground in a residential community in Beijing on April 12. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By LI WEI in Beijing
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During the May Day holidays, Beijing is at its most inviting. Parks fill up, greenways hum with people, and spring seems to hit its stride. Yet for many residents, the season brings something else along with the sun and fresh leaves: fine white fluff drifting through the air.

It spins in loose swirls, slips into collars, sticks to camera lenses, and floats through the half-open window of ride-hailing driver Yang Shuquan's car. "Here we go again," he says, brushing it away with a wave of his hand. "Like snow that just hangs around."

From late April into May, as much of the country settles into spring, cities across northern China enter what locals half-jokingly call a season of "spring snow" — the airborne seeds of poplar and willow trees. The phenomenon can last for more than a month.

Yang has been driving in Beijing for years and knows this stretch well. "It's the toughest time of the year," he says. "You can't really open the windows. Once it gets in, your eyes sting, your throat feels off. After a while, it gets on your nerves."

He's hardly alone in this predicament. As temperatures climb, many northern regions move into peak fluff season. Data from the Beijing Municipal Forestry and Parks Bureau show that in 2026, the first wave began on April 6 and is expected to run through late May, roughly 50 days in total. The May Day holidays fall right in the middle of a second surge.

Nature turns into a hassle

What used to pass as part of the natural rhythm has, over time, turned into a recurring urban irritant.

For Hu Honghai, a resident of Changping district in Beijing, the situation is "messy". "You wash your car, and before long it's covered again," he says. "My eyes feel uncomfortable, my throat too. Sometimes I can't even tell if it's a cold or an allergy." He occasionally wears a mask or uses eye drops, though more often he just puts up with it.

That kind of quiet endurance is common. Wang Cheng, a researcher with the Research Institute of Forestry at the Chinese Academy of Forestry, points out that the fluff is part of a tree's natural reproduction cycle and has existed in northern China for centuries. "When it lingers and builds up, it starts to interfere with daily life and even health," he says.

For people who work outdoors or spend long hours on the road, the impact is more immediate. Yang notes that the fluff can affect not just comfort but safety. "If you're not careful, it can clog the radiator," he says. "In serious cases, that can damage the engine." He has installed a protective mesh to keep it out.

Add the cost of allergy relief, and the nuisance becomes something more tangible.

There's also a fire risk. The fluff contains plant oils and ignites easily. A stray spark is enough. There have been cases of piles of accumulated fluff catching fire due to cigarette butts or children playing with fire, with some escalating into larger incidents. Yang recalls lighting some fluff in a courtyard out of curiosity. "I ended up burning my shoe cabinet," he says. "A brand-new pair of leather shoes went with it."

Why it feels worse now?

The issue isn't only how much fluff there is. It's how close it is to where people live. Wang says that in the past, the catkins would drift into farmland, grasslands, forests, and rivers or wetland areas, where they would get trapped and not float in the air.

But urbanization has changed this. In cities, vast expanses of paved surfaces don't trap the fluff, so it keeps flowing back into the air. Wang explains that several factors come into play — the types of trees planted, how densely they are arranged, and the way urban spaces are built.

The age of the trees also matters, Wang emphasizes, with older trees producing more fluff. In the past, poplar and willow trees were often planted for timber and cut down before they ever reached the stage of heavy production of catkins. But with stronger urban ecological protection, they've been left to grow much longer in cities.

Given the discomfort, the first reaction of many residents is simple enough: why not just cut these trees down or replace them? The reality, however, is far more complicated than it seems.

Poplars and willows — especially populus tomentosa — once played a central role in greening China's northern cities. They grow quickly, tolerate harsh conditions, and provide long stretches of shade. Decades on, many of them now stand as towering trees and have become part of the city's ecological fabric.

Cutting them down is far from a simple fix. It would be expensive, ecologically costly, and at odds with the idea of ecological civilization. For many residents, it would also mean losing a familiar piece of the city's green memory and everyday landscape.

Hu puts it plainly: "Cutting them down doesn't seem realistic. But I've heard the city is replacing some of them." This is a common dilemma: people are bothered by the problem, but also recognize how complicated it is to manage.

A more targeted response

This year, though, things feel a little different. Hu says, "It seems better this year. I can see workers out there every night doing the cleanup. It feels like the issue is being taken more seriously. I've seen it covered quite a bit in the news, and my phone even pushes pollen forecasts."

Behind this perception lies a quieter, more systematic response — one that brings together satellites, big data, environmentally friendly agents, and even robotics. Beijing's catkin-control strategy in 2026 marks a shift from labor-intensive spraying and cleaning to a more precise, technology-driven approach.



Visitors walk through drifting poplar and willow fluff at the Palace Museum in Beijing on April 2. YAN XIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY





Workers remove accumulated poplar and willow fluff from the ground using a fluff-collection machine and spray treetops with high-pressure water guns in Beijing on April 9, 2025. YUAN YI / FOR CHINA DAILY

At its core are prediction and targeted intervention. Jiang Yingshu, director of the Science and Technology division of the Beijing Municipal Forestry and Parks Bureau, explains that the city has integrated meteorological big data with ground-based monitoring to build a real-time forecasting platform. It provides street-level risk alerts on a five-tier scale, transforming response from reactive cleanup to proactive control.

A key tool developed this year is an improved eco-friendly binding agent. A non-toxic polymer is sprayed onto tree canopies via high-pressure mist cannons or drones to form a thin "ecological film" that binds the fluff before it disperses. "A single application can reduce catkin release from an individual female tree by more than two-thirds, at a cost of roughly 10 yuan ($1.46) per tree," says Jiang.

If there is no heavy rain, one treatment can last the entire season. Large-scale spraying is carried out during calm periods, with fog-cannon ranges adjusted for different tree heights to maximize efficiency and minimize waste. The agent degrades naturally when it rains and in sunlight. Importantly, it does not affect tree growth or pollute the surrounding environment.

On the ground, new portable suction devices — developed by Lvyou Group — are being deployed to remove accumulated fluff. Unlike conventional vacuum cleaners, which blow the fluff around, these devices enable precise collection without disturbing other debris. Lightweight and easy to operate, they are particularly effective in residential areas and hard-to-clean corners, while also reducing fire hazards.

"Looking ahead, we plan to expand research into automated spraying robots and long-term biological suppression methods," says Jiang.

To manage the surge of visitors during the May Day holidays, Beijing's landscaping authorities have rolled out a targeted plan. In parks, scenic spots and transport hubs, crews will step up high-pressure water spraying, ground wetting and routine cleaning, with more frequent patrols on the ground.

Jiang also reminds residents to take basic precautions — wearing masks and protective eyewear, planning outdoor trips for early mornings, evenings or after rainfall when the fluff is lighter, and avoiding any open flames outdoors.

Technological interventions buy time — but do not solve the root problem. Beijing's approach now combines short-term control with longer-term adjustment. On the mitigation side, traditional measures — spraying, flushing, cleaning, and physical barriers — remain in place. Nighttime spraying, often observed by residents, helps both to knock down fluff and increase humidity, reducing the airborne spread of catkins.

On the structural side, the city has stopped planting female poplar and willow trees — the source of the fluff. Meanwhile, a quiet "tree replacement revolution" is underway. Researchers have collected nearly 400 low- or non-fluff germplasm resources and developed 16 improved varieties. Advances in tissue culture propagation now allow for the rapid scaling of new seedlings, with up to one million produced within two to three years.

Even so, change takes time. Wang suggests a gradual, targeted approach: replace problematic trees in residential areas, schools, and hospitals first; manage tree belts in parks to contain the spread; and leave trees in less populated areas as they are. "At its core, it is still an ecological question," he says. "So it calls for ecological solutions."

Although the fluff itself is not always a strong allergen, it can carry dust, pollen and bacteria, triggering respiratory reactions. In March, the National Health Commission and the China Meteorological Administration jointly launched the country's first weekly pollen forecast.

Li Yi, a senior engineer at the Public Meteorological Service Center of China Meteorological Administration, explains that the system combines numerical weather prediction with expert calibration to help allergic people plan their activities.

But challenges remain. Current forecasts focus on total pollen concentration and cannot distinguish specific types, despite significant differences in allergenicity. Moreover, poplar and willow fluff is not yet included, as its dispersion depends not only on weather but also on tree distribution, surface conditions, and human activity — making modeling more complex.

"With denser monitoring networks and better data integration, more refined forecasts may become possible — distinguishing between pollen types. The aim is to move toward more personalized guidance, helping people decide when and where to go outside with fewer risks," says Fan Keqi, an engineer at the CMA Public Meteorological Service Center.

Living with it

For residents, coping with the fluff often means finding a balance between endurance and adaptation. "It's annoying, but you get used to it," Hu says. "Some people even treat it as part of what makes spring distinctive here."

That attitude reflects the complexity of the issue. Cities need greenery and ecological space. Residents, however, also expect comfort and quality of life. When the two collide, simple trade-offs rarely work.

"We shouldn't reject greening because of the fluff," Wang emphasizes. "The key is scientific planning and fine management to strike a better balance between ecological benefits and livability."

This thinking is gradually shaping policy and practice. From pollen forecasts to monitoring platforms, from new tree varieties to advanced control technologies, efforts are underway to shift from reactive responses to proactive management.

For many, the fluff is just a fleeting episode of spring. With the arrival of rain, the air clears and the white fibers disappear. But for the city, the issue does not end with the season. It raises deeper questions about species selection, urban planning, and ecological governance.

As people head outdoors during the May Day holidays to embrace the city's greenery, the drifting fluff serves as a quiet reminder: Every patch of urban green comes with choices — and trade-offs.

Finding a sustainable balance between "more green" and "less disturbance" may be the real challenge behind this annual phenomenon. It is not just about managing trees, but about how a megacity learns to coexist with nature — and to pursue ecological equilibrium alongside development. Beijing is already in the process of writing that answer.

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BIZ LIFE

Firms enlist AI for intelligent appliances

Smart tech delivers expanded functions and enhanced user experience

By **ZHENG YIRAN** in Shanghai
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Above: A coffee-making robot is displayed at the Appliance & Electronics World Expo 2026 in Shanghai on March 21. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Left: Bear Electric Appliance showcases over 100 home appliances and its AI smart home gadget series co-developed with Baidu Smart Cloud at AWE 2026. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese home appliance companies are teaming up with internet giants to rapidly advance the integration of artificial intelligence, benefiting more consumers.

On March 12, which was the first day of the Appliance & Electronics World Expo 2026 in Shanghai. Baidu Smart Cloud inked a deal with Bear Electric Appliance Co Ltd, a maker of small home appliances based in Foshan, Guangdong province.

According to the agreement, the two parties announced that they will launch an AI strategic cooperation with a scale of 100 million yuan ($14.5 million) in the next three years. Relying on Baidu AI Cloud's big model 5.0 and Baidu Smart Cloud's AI technology capabilities, they will carry out in-depth cooperation around the AI big model and smart home appliance scenarios, and jointly promote the innovation and industrial upgrading of the new generation of AI small home appliances.

As per the deal, both parties will establish a long-term strategic partnership around "AI+Home Appliances+Intelligent Life", fully empowering products and enterprise operation systems through AI technology, and accelerating the home appliance industry's move toward the AI native era.

At the product level, both sides will focus on upgrading AI capabilities around the core categories of Bear Electric Appliance, including small household appliances such as air fryers, health pots, and rice cookers. Based on the Wenxin Yiyan big model capability, the new generation of AI home appliances will have natural voice dialogue, intelligent services, and content ecology capabilities. Through end-to-end voice interaction, low-latency voice control, and natural human-machine interaction will be achieved.

Li Yifeng, general manager of Bear Electric Appliance, said: "We attach great importance to cooperation with Baidu in the field of AI. This is not only a technical cooperation, but also an important opportunity to promote the product upgrade of Bear Electric Appliance Co Ltd. We have a rich range of home appliance application scenarios, while Baidu has leading advantages in large models and AI technology. We hope to collaborate with both parties to truly implement AI capabilities in products and user experience, and jointly explore more innovative possibilities for AI home appliances."

Yuan Foyu, vice-president of Baidu, said: "The combination of AI and home appliances has significant value for both industries. AI cannot just stay at the conceptual level, it must enter real life scenarios to make consumers feel the changes brought by technology in their daily use. Bear Electric Appliance Co Ltd has a strong industrial foundation, and Baidu has leading AI technology capabilities in the fields of big models, AI and cloud computing. The cooperation between the two parties will jointly promote the large-scale implementation of AI in small household appliances."

In the future, both parties will use the Wenxin Yiyan big model as the core technology base, continuously promote the large-scale application of AI technology in the field of smart home appliances and create a new generation of AI small home appliances with understanding, decision-making, and service capabilities so that home appliances can evolve from functional devices to home intelligent life partners, and jointly promote the innovative development of the AI home appliance industry, the two parties said.

Baidu's cooperation with Bear Electric Appliance Co Ltd is not the first case of an internet company joining hands with home appliance companies.

On Feb 12, JD.com officially signed a strategic agreement with Midea, Haier, Hisense and TCL, announcing a sales goal of 180 billion yuan.

According to the agreement, all parties will adhere to the principle of putting customers first, and continue to focus on the four core directions of service experience upgrading, product co-construction and innovation, channel deepening and expansion, and marketing operation coordination, jointly promoting the sales growth of many product categories such as televisions, air conditioning, refrigerators, washing machines, range hoods, stoves, water heaters, and small appliances, and achieving mutual benefit and win-win through resource integration.

The cooperation is not simply about supply and marketing collaboration, but based on years of cooperation, further deepening the collaboration of the entire industry chain. Among them, JD relies on nearly 30,000 JD Malls, JD Electric City Flagship Stores, and Home Appliance Specialty Stores nationwide to provide full channel coverage support from first-tier cities to counties, towns, and rural areas for the four major brands, helping them reach a wider range of consumer groups.

Gree also teamed up with JD, signing an agreement in 2015. In 2024, they had a new partnership, launching AI energy-saving products, including air conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines, water purifiers, heaters, and other new home appliances.

Zhang Jing, air conditioner purchaser of JD, said: "The cooperation between Gree and JD this time is not only a simple business alliance, but also a deep integration of innovation and service between the two industry giants. In the future, both parties will further deepen cooperation and provide consumers with more personalized products and services through cutting-edge technologies such as big data analysis and intelligent logistics."

Lu Qun, sales director of Gree, said: "The series of Gree household appliances products are positioned as healthy, intelligent, and personalized, and are important achievements of Gree's core development strategy of 'good appliances made by Gree'. Gree will deeply cooperate with JD and is committed to providing consumers with a more convenient and reassuring consumption experience."

Guo Tao, individual angel investor and an expert in AI, said: "Internet giants choosing to cooperate with home appliance companies is essentially driven by the two-way demand for technology implementation and scenario monetization."

"From the perspective of internet giants, AI technology requires physical scenarios to realize commercial value. Home appliances, as a high-frequency entry point for households, are an ideal scenario for the implementation of AI big models and internet of things technology," he said.

Furthermore, he said: "By equipping small appliances with 'intelligent brains', technologies such as voice interaction and personalized services can be transformed from concepts to daily experiences, which not only verifies the practicality of the technology, but also accumulates massive user behavior data to feed back model iteration."

At the same time, according to Guo, the home appliance market is large and close to the consumer end. Thus, "collaborating with home appliance companies can quickly transform technology into products, and seize the opportunity in the intelligent hardware ecosystem".

He also noted that traditional products are severely homogenized, and AI is the key to breaking through growth bottlenecks. The technological capabilities of large factories, Guo said, can help household appliance enterprises quickly achieve product upgrades, such as optimizing voice control accuracy through large models, automatically adjusting device parameters according to user habits, and enhancing product premiums and user stickiness.

"And the traffic and channel resources of large factories can also help home appliance companies connect production and sales links, reducing innovation costs," he added.

Expo spotlights key advances in consumer tech

By **WANG YING** in Shanghai
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Becoming an important window into the development of China's consumer electronics industry, this year's Appliance & Electronics World Expo 2026 in March was marked by the deep integration of artificial intelligence across the sector, officials and experts said.

Spanning an exhibition space of 170,000 square meters, the year's AWE displayed tens of thousands of cutting-edge technologies and smart lifestyle solutions to delegates.

"The exhibition offers a panoramic view of achievements made in areas including intelligent terminals, smart mobility, health technology, embodied intelligence, and computing infrastructure, showcasing the latest progress of high-quality development within China's home appliance and consumer electronics industry," said Tao Xiaonian, chairman of the China Household Electrical Appliances Association.

"Just like this year's theme 'Smart AI, Smarter Future' indicated, AI has deeply integrated across the industry. With AI, home appliances are capable of continuous upgrading in functional design, proactive services, multi-device scenario connectivity, and human-computer interaction," Tao said.

According to Tao, breakthroughs in innovative display technologies are blurring the boundaries between the digital world and reality.

For example, smartphones and smart glasses are rapidly emerging as the next generation of personal intelligent devices. Meanwhile, humanoid robots are moving toward commercial applications at an accelerated pace.

As an important part of the light industry, the home appliance sector has achieved impressive results, with retail sales of home appliances exceeding 1.1 trillion yuan ($159.92 billion) in 2025 and hitting a record high, according to Zhang Chonghe, president of the China National Light Industry Council.

"The penetration rate of digital tools in research, development and design has surpassed 85 percent, far above the average level of other industries, making the sector a benchmark for high-end, intelligent and green development in the light industry," Zhang said.

The event also saw the launch of a special committee on household service robots overseen by the China Household Electrical Appliances Association, marking a new phase in ecosystem development for companies across the industry chain.

"The committee addressed common challenges facing the industry, including repetitive data collection, inconsistent technological pathways, and a lack of standards," said Wan Chunhui, deputy secretary-general of the China Household Electrical Appliances Association.

According to Wan, more than 50 companies joined the committee's first batch of members, covering the entire household robotics industry chain, including home appliances, embodied intelligence, companion robots, AI models, AI motion control, chips, new materials, and batteries.

"Leading home appliance companies are taking the lead not only in developing household robot products tailored to specific home needs, but also in providing solutions that upgrade individual smart products into carriers of integrated intelligent services," Zhang said.

According to him, robots for specific scenarios — such as eldercare, cleaning, and companionship — are experiencing rapid growth.

"Producing 55 percent of the world's robots, China is currently the largest robot market globally. Last year, the country produced 18.58 million service robots, a year-on-year increase of 16.1 percent," Zhang said.

Under the central government's guidance of boosting domestic demand, the consumer electronics industry is entering a new phase of growth, as rapid development in the sector continues to blur the boundaries between online and offline consumption, said Yao Yao, head of research for JLL China.

"In Shanghai, the share of newly opened consumer electronics store space among lifestyle stores rose from 21 percent in 2023 to 26 percent in 2025. Leading brands are accelerating their expansion of brick-and-mortar stores, creating technology consumption channels such as immersive experiences and scenario-based marketing, reshaping the connection between consumers and tech products, and effectively boosting in-store consumption," Yao said.



Visitors try out Rokid AI glasses with built-in displays at AWE 2026 in Shanghai on March 13. CHEN LI / FOR CHINA DAILY

For the first time since its inception in 1992, the event set up two venues this year, putting its combined exhibition space at 170,000 square meters.

It consisted of a 140,000 sq m exhibition area at the Shanghai New International Expo Centre, and a newly launched 30,000 sq m space at Shanghai Eastern Hub International Business Cooperation Zone.

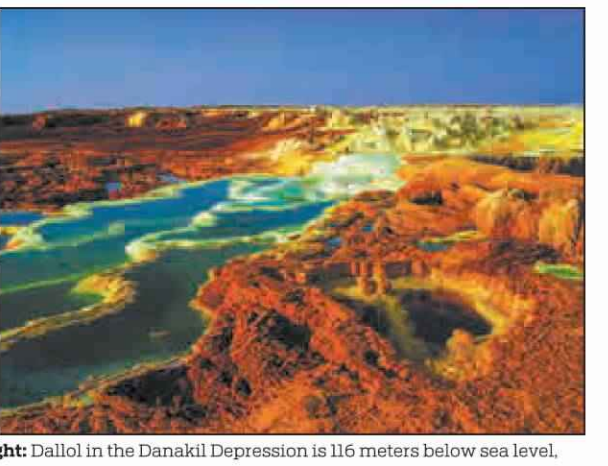
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TRAVEL







Left: Rich wildlife on broad grasslands is among the highlights of traveling in Ethiopia. **Middle:** A golden sunset over Ethiopia's Omo Valley. **Right:** Dallol in the Danakil Depression is 116 meters below sea level, where the active Erta Ale Volcano creates a spectacular array of color when sulfur and other minerals mix with water.

Coffee culture in the cradle of humanity

From incense-laced ceremonies to ancient heritage, Ethiopia is inviting travelers to experience its traditions first-hand — beginning with a cup of Arabica in Chongqing, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Ethiopia's coffee ceremonies, art, music, dance and food are available for visitors to immerse themselves in at the recently opened China-Ethiopia Cultural Tourism and Business Center in southwestern China's Chongqing.

Offering a taste of the African country before visitors even board a flight, the center marks a clear sign of Ethiopia's ambition to attract more Chinese travelers.

"When a Chinese individual participates in a genuine Ethiopian coffee ceremony in Chongqing, they don't just taste coffee; they experience a ritual of hospitality, community and tradition," says Tefera Derbew Yimam, ambassador of Ethiopia to China.

"This sparks curiosity, ignites the imagination, and creates a desire to experience the full, authentic version in its original setting."

As 2026 marks the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges, Ethiopia is positioning tourism as the bridge to turn diplomatic ties into lasting emotional connections with Chinese travelers.

"Tourism is the perfect vehicle because it transcends formal agreements, allowing for direct, immersive and personal engagement," Yimam says, while laying out a vision that goes beyond landmarks and itineraries.

"When Chinese travelers visit, they don't just see landmarks; they experience ancient history, traditional coffee ceremonies, natural wonders, and Ethiopian hospitality firsthand. These tangible experiences forge emotional connections, break down cultural barriers, and create lasting friendships," Yimam adds.

On the ground in Ethiopia, inbound tour operators catering to Chinese visitors have found steadily rebounding interest.

Wen Xin, sales manager of an Ethiopia-based agency serving Chinese travelers, says both the number of visitors and the scale of tour groups are gradually returning to pre-pandemic levels.

However, the shape of travel has shifted.

"Compared with before the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing a clear trend toward smaller groups, with the proportion of large tour groups declining," she says.

The primary demographic remains seasoned travelers, who have already visited many countries around the world.

Wen adds that a niche but growing segment consists of photography enthusiasts, particularly those drawn to Ethiopia's rich birdlife.

For Chinese travelers who do make the journey, the experience often leaves a strong impression, one that has less to do with ticking off landmarks and more to do with moments of unexpected stillness.

Sun Yang, a traveler who documented his Ethiopia trip on Weibo, recently spent a few days in Lalibela, home to the famed rock-hewn churches. He found not just ancient architecture, but also a chance to slow down in ways he had not realized he needed.

"It felt like walking from one state into another. The hotel grounds were dotted with cacti, the air carried a hint of vanilla, and stone steps were scattered with rose petals," he writes.

He is impressed by an elderly man playing the *masinko*, a traditional Ethiopian fiddle also known as a *masenqo*, while waitresses sang and laughed as they worked.

"I suddenly felt a little unaccustomed to this warmth. It was too direct, without any sense of distance."

Ethiopia has marketed itself as "The Land of Origins" — the cradle of humankind and the birthplace of coffee, which the ambassador says are not abstract concepts but experiences designed for contemporary Chinese travelers.



Above: Mursi women of Ethiopia's Omo Valley, where the ancient tradition of wearing lip plates continues to be passed down through generations. **Below left:** The celebration of Timkat is one heritage to Ethiopia and the world. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

He points to the national museum in Addis Ababa, where visitors can stand before "Lucy", the 3.2-million-year-old hominid fossil. But the journey does not end there.

"We offer excursions to archaeological sites in the Omo Valley, where ancient traditions still thrive among indigenous communities, allowing visitors to glimpse lifestyles that echo our earliest ancestors," he says.

"It's about feeling the dust of time beneath your feet and recognizing our shared human journey."

For coffee lovers, Ethiopia has rolled out an immersive route into its southwestern highlands, the heartland of Arabica coffee. Travelers can walk through coffee forests, meet farmers, witness harvesting and processing, and participate in a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony, known locally as, *Buna Tetu* (come drink coffee).

"These experiences transform abstract concepts into delightful, aromatic, and cultural memories," Yimam says.

Sun had the chance to experience this tradition firsthand. One evening, a coffee ceremony was prepared for him. Frankincense was lit, and coffee beans were roasted, ground, and brewed before his eyes.

He was told that in Ethiopia, coffee is enjoyed in three rounds. As he sat watching the smoke rise, he found himself in an unfamiliar space.

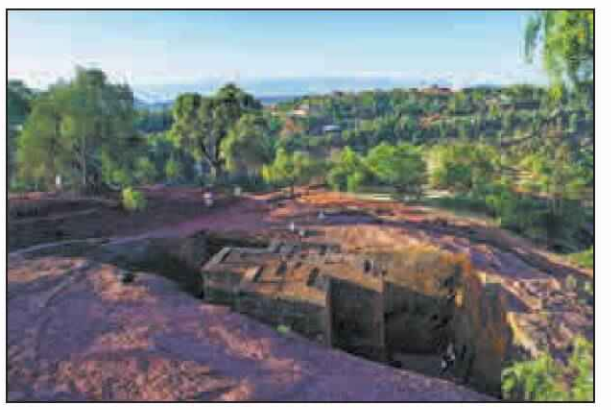
"I suddenly realized I hadn't sat this 'slowly' in a very long time. No phone, no next plan, nothing that needed to be documented," he reflects.

Ethiopian Airlines is launching new domestic routes in 2026 to destinations including Negele Borana, Gore Metu, and Debre Markos.





Above: Tefera Derbew Yimam, ambassador of Ethiopia to China.



Left: The Church of Saint George in Lalibela, an entire place carved downward from a single block of stone, is a UNESCO World Heritage site that continues to inspire wonder and reflection.

According to the ambassador, this is a strategic move to diversify tourism offerings beyond the popular northern circuit while promoting sustainable travel.

Negele Borana, in Oromia, serves as a gateway to Bale Mountains National Park, where visitors can spot endemic wildlife such as the Ethiopian wolf and mountain nyala. Gore Metu offers immersion in rural Ethiopian life, with opportunities to engage with local farming communities and explore waterfalls and lush highland scenery. Debre Markos, in Amhara, is home to ancient monasteries and offers spectacular views of the Blue Nile Gorge.

"These new routes are a testament to our commitment to offering a richer, more varied, and truly unforgettable Ethiopian experience," the ambassador says.

To make Chinese tourists feel welcome, Ethiopia has rolled out concrete measures in recent years.

Yimam notes that training and certification programs are underway for local guides to become proficient in Mandarin, ensuring a growing pool of Chinese-speaking guides is available.

Major hotels, reputable tour operators, and larger souvenir shops in Addis Ababa and other key destinations have increasingly integrated WeChat Pay and Alipay, he says.

Workshops are also held for hotel and restaurant staff members to better understand Chinese customs, preferences and dietary requirements.

For Chinese families planning a trip, Yimam recommends applying for an e-visa in advance rather than relying on visa-on-arrival. "While visa-on-arrival is technically available, the e-visa process offers significantly more convenience, peace of mind, and a smoother entry experience, especially for families," he says, adding that visa-on-arrival can involve longer queues during peak travel periods.

On the connectivity front, Ethiopian Airlines already operates flights from Addis Ababa to several Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou (in Guangdong province), Chengdu (in Sichuan province) and Hong Kong.

The airline has submitted a request to authorities for additional flights on existing popular routes, and is actively exploring new direct routes from secondary and tertiary Chinese cities as part of a long-term growth strategy, Yimam says.

"Our goal is to solidify Addis Ababa's position as the leading aviation hub connecting China and Africa, making Ethiopia the natural first choice for Chinese travelers," he explains.

According to Wen, most Chinese travelers still lean toward more accessible experiences.

"Currently, most people in China have limited knowledge of Ethiopia's history and culture, so they tend to prefer quick, landmark-oriented sightseeing," she says.

"Many visitors take advantage of layovers in Addis Ababa to sample local cuisine and visit museums. The coffee ceremony is also quite popular," she shares.

Wen says her agency is open to exploring new destinations in the future, after conducting thorough research on each route beforehand.

"Much of Ethiopia's tourism resources remain not overly commercialized, and large areas still retain a relatively pristine and natural travel environment, making it an ideal destination to explore," Wen says.

When asked what single experience he hopes every Chinese visitor takes away, the ambassador recalls a memory rooted in everyday life.

"If I had to choose just one personal memory or place that I hope every Chinese visitor gets to experience for themselves, it would be witnessing a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony in a local home, particularly in the rural heartlands," he says.

Visitors can sit on low stools, take in the scent of roasting green coffee beans mingling with frankincense, the rhythmic sound of a pestle grinding beans, and anticipate the coffee brewing in the *jebena* — the traditional clay pot.

"More than that, it's the feeling of being welcomed, of sharing stories, of connecting with people across cultures without needing many words. It's a moment of pure, unadulterated Ethiopian hospitality and tradition."

He emphasizes that this experience, in his opinion, encapsulates the soul of Ethiopia.

"I truly hope every Chinese visitor gets to share in this beautiful, authentic tradition."

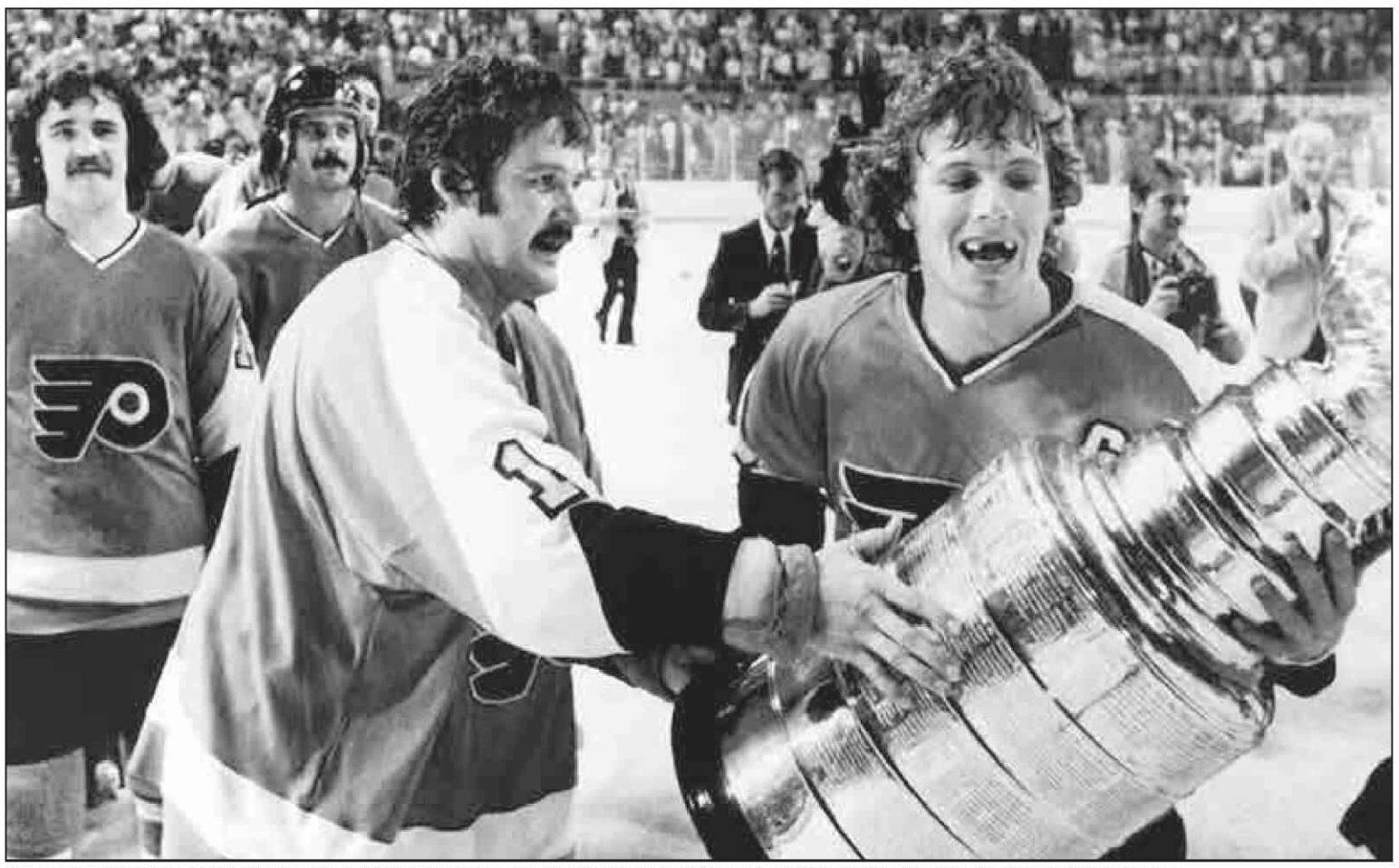
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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:39 PM

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SPORTS

ICE HOCKEY



Bernie Parent (left) and Bobby Clarke of the Philadelphia Flyers carry the Stanley Cup off the ice in Buffalo in 1975 after defeating the Buffalo Sabres. AP

Dentists prove to be the real MVPs

Every squad has one, and these specialists join team doctors and other medical staff at every single NHL game

Jason Schepis was at home with his kids in New Jersey watching the gold medal men's hockey game at the Olympics when he saw some of his handiwork get scattered all over the ice late in the third period of a thriller.

Jack Hughes, the 24-year-old forward for the United States, had just taken a stick to the mouth from Canada's Sam Bennett and, as he explained later, saw at least one full tooth and shards of others lying on the ice.

Schepis knew those teeth, too. In fact, as the New Jersey Devils team dentist, he had repaired those very same chompers before, after Hughes took a high stick in the NHL playoffs a few years ago.

"We did the root canals, fixed it up," Schepis recalled. "Those were his teeth."

Hughes, like hockey players tend to do, shook off the injury, and he went on to score in overtime for a 2-1 win and America's first gold in men's hockey since 1980. His gap-toothed grin became the picture-perfect encapsulation of a sport where missing teeth is a badge of honor and "spittin' chiclets" is so ingrained in the lexicon that it's the name of a popular hockey podcast, not just the tooth-sized candy-coated chewing gum.

To say that hockey players need dentists is something of an understatement. Every team has one, and these specialists join team doctors and other medical staff at every single NHL game, ready to jump into action when the need arises.

"When there is an injury to the mouth, our physicians are like: 'Oh yeah, we're so happy you're here, because we would not have been able to do that,'" San Jose Sharks dentist Mark Nishimura said.

"Sometimes we're really not busy, and other times, when it's bad, it's bad."

It was bad when Nishimura was handed Joe Pavelski's teeth following a puck to the player's jaw during the 2019 playoffs, though that resulted in a goal. Later that year, Keith Yandle lost nine teeth, returned to the game and played 168 more in a row.

Brent Burns took a wayward stick to the face in 2013 that knocked out three of his pearly whites, and, since returning, he has skated in more than 1,000 games in a row. When a puck ramped off his own stick into his mouth in 2006, Chris Clark needed three hours of surgery involving braces, screws and a cadaver bone.

Rink-side surgery

Clark calls hockey dentists "triage doctors," learning about that from his own tooth-losing, palate-fracturing experience with the Washington Capitals.

Longtime Capitals dentist Tom Lenz was there that game and has seen it all, including driving players to his office at night when time is of the essence.

Because a puck or a stick to the mouth almost always causes damage different than the general population, he got nervous in his early days more than two decades ago.

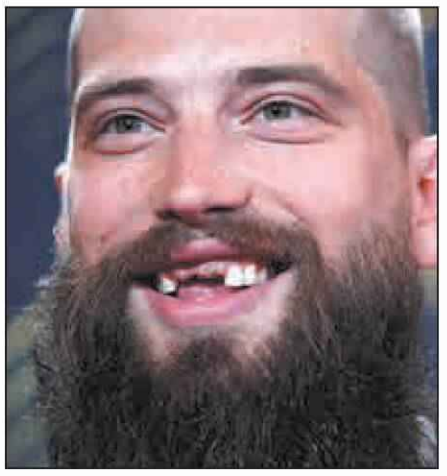
"You never know 'til you get back there, so you always have to be ready to just jump in and take care of it," Lenz said. "It can be a simple chipped tooth. It can be teeth knocked out. It can be jaw fractures. We try to get them stable, out of discomfort — whatever that takes."

That includes dealing with lacerations elsewhere on the faces of players, officials and even coaches. The home dentist, at least in the regular season, is responsible for the visiting team, too, and consults with the other doctors in the building, like when Schepis, in early 2024, ruled out Chicago's Connor Bedard because of a broken jaw.

The playoffs are different, so Schepis was there on the road when Hughes took a stick to the mouth from Jordan Staal in the series opener between the Devils and the Carolina Hurricanes in May 2023.

"They're snapped in half, the nerves are hanging out, the ice is cold (and) he can't breathe because the nerves are hanging," Schepis said. "Just numbed him right up, did the root canals right there, pulled the nerves out. The orthopedic surgeons think it's like miracle work."





Left: Los Angeles Kings defenseman Drew Doughty smiles during an NHL hockey game against the Anaheim Ducks in 2021. **Right:** San Jose Sharks' Brent Burns smiles on the red carpet before the NHL Awards in 2019 in Las Vegas. AP





Above: Jack Hughes (86) poses with his United States teammates after defeating Canada in the men's ice hockey gold-medal game at the 2026 Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics in Milan. **Left:** This combo of file photos shows Hughes on the left celebrating after that gold medal game, and, on the right, smiling before a New York Yankees baseball game at Yankee Stadium in New York, sporting a brand-new set of teeth. AP

A different breed

When Alex Ovechkin took a stick to the mouth in October 2007 that knocked out one of his front teeth, Lenz put in an implant that's also known as a "flipper" with the plan to make a permanent fix once his career is over.

Lenz said Ovechkin wanted it immediately, then lost the implant and his smile without the tooth became part of his look, even if his mother did not approve.

Ovechkin is now league's leading career goal scorer and still playing at age 40.

"Had one made within a day or so because he was so adamant, saying 'I can't go around like this'," Lenz said. "It's so him now that it's going to be strange to see him with all his teeth up there."

Not Hughes, who told Jimmy Fallon that missing teeth definitely won't become his look long term. He has already been fixed up.

Now in his 14th full season in the league, Brenden Dillon wore a mouthguard playing as a kid because he needed braces three times from hockey-related incidents. After going without one with the minors, he got popped in the mouth in his first NHL fight and has worn one since.

"Not a fun part of (the game)," Dillon said. "I don't think (it happens as much in) basketball, football — maybe baseball, a ball here and there maybe — but way more in hockey. Sticks, pucks, the glass, ice — the whole nine yards. It feels like once a game, at least somebody's getting dinged up with something."

High pain tolerance

Schepis, Lenz and other NHL team dentists work in other sports. Lenz said many of the NBA players he works with have never had sutures before.

"Hockey players sometimes will even ask: 'How many is it going to be'?" Lenz said.

"If it's like two or three or so, a lot of the guys will just go: 'Then just suture it. No anesthetic, I don't want to take that. Just suture it and I want to get back out there'."

Nishimura remembers being asked: "Do you want to put these back in?" when Pavelski lost those teeth off a shot from Burns, his teammate at the time. The Sharks beat Vegas 5-2, and it became part of his courageous career.

"Pavs went back, we numbed him up, sutured him," Nishimura said. "He went back out and finished the game. It's incredible. Hockey players, they don't quit. They are a special breed of human beings."

Dillon, now with New Jersey, has had a couple of root canals, a couple of chipped teeth and realizes he should wear his mouthguard during practice, too. Lenz has noticed a decline in facial injuries since visors were made mandatory; only four players, grandfathered in, are skating without one.

Clark wore a visor sparingly in his playing days, but is glad to see the current generation widely adopt it, much like helmets becoming required equipment, because sticks and pucks to the mouth are such a regular occurrence.

"It's sort of part of the deal," Clark said.

So is having a hockey dentist on call. Schepis says he once did a root canal on Jaromir Jagr at 1 am and put in 30-plus sutures for another player when the puck caused damage all the way through his mouth.

"There's a lot of little nuances to sports dentistry compared to regular dentistry, because it's just not standard," Schepis said. "You have to move fast and you have to always move with the player's best intention. But we know they want to be out there. We know the team wants them out there. You always have to be available any time of night."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:39 PM

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SPORTS

SOCCER



Artist Lili Cantero paints a soccer ball with images commemorating Spain's 2010 World Cup victory at Rodilla cafe in Miami's Wynwood Art District last month as part of the launch of the Wynwood United Soccer Ball Art Trail that will showcase hand-painted soccer balls honoring historic World Cup moments. AP

Re-creating the game, beautifully

Artist produces special soccer balls depicting historic World Cup moments to promote tournament

Lili Cantero thinks of soccer as family.

The artist from Paraguay — someone who has built a devoted following in the soccer world, with her work admired by Argentina captain and Inter Miami star Lionel Messi, among others — still has fond childhood memories of gathering with relatives around a radio to listen to matches almost every weekend.

"That's where my love for the game began," Cantero said. "For me, soccer, futbol, is being with family and being with friends. The game is not just a game. It's a culture. It's love. It is family. It is friendship."

And now, it is her work.

Leading up to the start of the FIFA World Cup in June, Cantero will be putting her specialty — painted soccer balls — in 10 different businesses in Miami's Wynwood Art District, a place where warehouses have been converted into galleries and where just about anything can be turned into a mural. It is the heartbeat of the Miami art community, and for Cantero and the marriage of her work and soccer, it seemed a perfect fit.

"I think it's the perfect combination in the perfect moment with the perfect people," said Cantero, who has called Miami home for about two-and-a-half years. "Messi coming to the city was ... an interesting way to grow this sport here, and in the country. Because many kids, they look at him with so many aspirations and dreams and everything, so they think they can play this sport and also to grow in this sport. And I think that's beautiful."

Cantero's approach is simple: she believes soccer, like art, can bring people of different races, different backgrounds, different languages — different everything — together. Her biggest break might have come in 2018, when a pair of soccer boots she designed — adorned by images of Messi and his family — were sent to the soccer legend. Messi posed with them and the image of that moment went viral, suddenly giving Cantero the game's official seal of approval.

Diego Maradona and Pele both knew of her work. Same goes for former Brazil forward Ronaldinho, FIFA president Gianni Infantino and Messi's former Barcelona and Inter Miami teammate Jordi Alba, among many others.



Artist Lili Cantero paints a soccer ball with an image of David Villa to commemorate Spain's 2010 World Cup victory. AP

> "I feel honored to be known for this art and what I do. I think art and soccer have the power to change the world. It changed my life, so I can tell that it's true."
>
> **Lili Cantero,** an artist from Paraguay

The first of the Wynwood series of ball displays was unveiled last month when she revealed one depicting how Spain won the 2010 World Cup.

"I feel honored to be known for this art and what I do," Cantero said.

"I think art and soccer have the power to change the world. It changed my life, so I can tell that it's true. And when you go to the favelas (impoverished Brazilian neighborhoods) and you see, like, the kids playing, thinking the only way that they could do something in life is through soccer, that's art for me."

Wynwood is always bustling; art and fashion dominate the area, and there is no shortage of people working hard to ensure everything stays vibrant.

The World Cup will bring tens of thousands of people to south Florida, and Wynwood wants them to know they're all welcome in the art district.

"We're always promoting the arts, we're always changing the art in the neighborhood, the murals," David Lombardi, the chairman of the Wynwood Business Improvement District, said at the unveiling of Cantero's first ball in the series.

"It's vibrant, it's changing, it's alive, and people want to be a part of it."

Cantero never played the game, but is addicted to it.

She showed up for her first unveiling in a Spain jersey — mindful, yes, of how that nation ousted Paraguay, her homeland, on the way to that title.

Some soccer balls take Cantero days to paint. Others take her just a couple of hours. At the unveiling of the project, she even did some live work — setting up a tablet to her left, looking at an image of Spain star David Villa celebrating a goal during that 2010 World Cup.

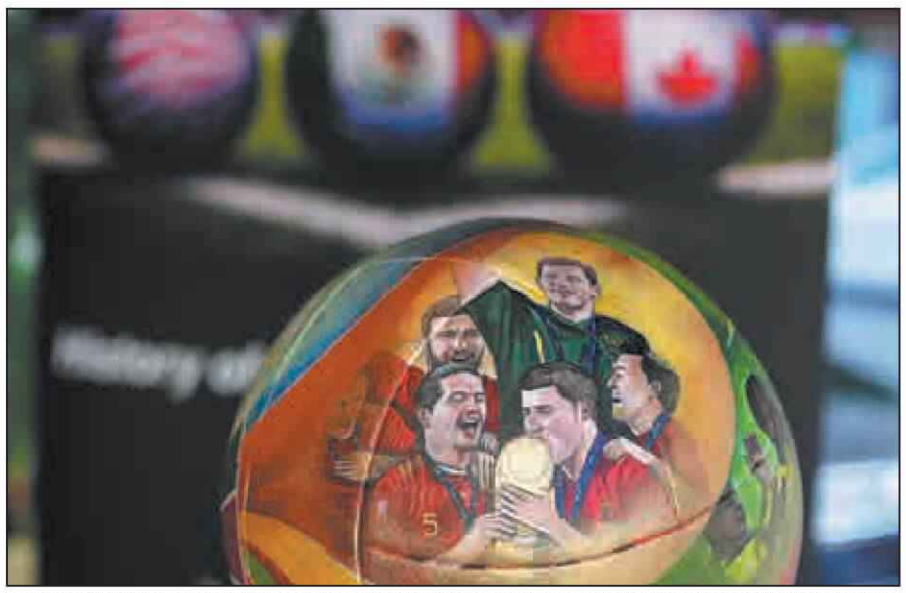
With deft flicks of her right hand, she added that image of Villa, bit by bit, to the back of the ball, oblivious to the crowd that had gathered around to watch her.

Every soccer ball she's designing in this series will depict another World Cup moment.

"I grew up in Paraguay, and everyone tells me you cannot make a living with art. And now, I'm doing this, far away from my country, representing who I am and my roots," Cantero said. "It's been an honor."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA





Left: Artist Lili Cantero (center) is joined by David Lombardi (left), chairman of the Wynwood Business Improvement District, and Beatriz Espartero, Rodilla cafe area manager, at the unveiling of the first piece in a series of painted soccer balls commemorating memorable World Cup moments. **Right:** A soccer ball painted by Cantero that commemorates Spain's 2010 World Cup victory. AP

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:39 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:41 PM



Fashion fusion

Traditional Qiang attire, modernity meet on the runway IMAGE, PAGE 7



Strait standoff

US operation to guide vessels in Hormuz faces threats

WORLD, PAGE 4

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2026

XI'S VISION | YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Xi encourages youths to play greater role

He praises role models' dedication to grassroots, calls for new achievements

By **JI HAISHENG**
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On a summer day back in 1984, Xi Jinping, then Party secretary of Zhengding county in Hebei province, hopped on his bicycle to make a special visit — to greet a group of students visiting from Renmin University of China in Beijing for a field study.

Inside a dormitory room of the county's guesthouse, Xi sat down with the young students shoulder to shoulder on beds, sharing his insights and experiences from working at the grassroots level. The discussion was very engaging and lasted for two hours.

Youths have always been a central concern for Xi. Engaging deeply with young people, he emphasizes the importance of "integrating with the youth" and "becoming one with them".

From his early years at the local level to the present day as China's top leader, Xi has maintained a consistent and close bond with young people through various means, including exchanges of letters and face-to-face interactions.

In particular, he makes it a regular practice to engage with young people around Youth Day, celebrated on May 4. Around this time each year, he visits college campuses, attends youth gatherings or writes back to young students to extend his greetings.

He has consistently highlighted the crucial role of young people, showing unwavering care and support for the younger generation. He continually offers them encouragement and inspiration, while maintaining high expectations for their growth and contributions.

Ahead of this year's Youth Day, which fell on Monday, Xi wrote a reply letter to a group of young role models, commending their dedication in grassroots positions in areas such as sci-tech innovation, rural vitalization, social services and border defense. He also encouraged young Chinese to integrate their personal aspirations into the bigger picture of national development, strive for new achievements in their posts and inject their youthful dynamism into advancing the nation's new journey of development.

This call has been answered by a vast number of young people across the country over the years. Among them is Wang Xuemeng, a young forestry technician at the Saihanba forest farm in Hebei.

After graduating from university in 2018, Wang chose to follow in the footsteps of her grandfather and father to become a forester at Saihanba. Like them, she has woven her youth and ideals into the nation's ecological endeavors.

More than six decades ago, 369 young pioneers, including Wang's grandfather, with an average age below 24, arrived on the barren, windswept plateau with a critical mission: to build an artificial forest farm to halt the southward advance of the Hunshandake sandy land, which posed a persistent threat to Beijing and other northern cities.

Thanks to sustained efforts by generations of foresters, Saihanba has been transformed from a wasteland to a sea of forests — an achievement hailed by Xi as a "miracle". Today, a third generation is carrying this legacy forward.

Wang said that while earlier generations focused on helping the trees survive and thrive, the task of her generation is to protect the forest farm while enhancing its value as an ecological resource.

"Our strength in the three-generation relay stems from the same original aspiration: to safeguard the ecological shield for our nation," Wang said. "For over six decades, generations of foresters have all integrated their personal ideals into the broader mission of China's ecological progress."

See ***Youth,*** *page 2*

Time to celebrate



Students in their last year of senior high school cheer as they walk through a decorated gate during a coming-of-age ceremony in Huainan, Anhui province, on Monday. The day marked China's annual Youth Day. CHEN BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

President's speech on basic research hailed

President Xi Jinping has delivered an important speech in Shanghai at a symposium on strengthening basic research.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, stressed in the speech on Thursday that greater efforts and more concrete measures should be taken to strengthen basic research, enhance China's capacity for original innovation, and further solidify the foundation for building the country's strength in science and technology.

Some of those who attended shared their views with Xinhua News Agency on the implementation of the guiding principles of the symposium.

They said that Xi's important remarks provided a clear direction for achieving high-level self-reliance in science and technology, and for building China's strength in science and technology. They vowed to take pragmatic steps to strengthen basic research, enhance original innovation and boldly pursue new scientific heights.

Ding Kuiling, president of Shanghai Jiao Tong University and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said that Xi's remarks have boosted confidence and motivation for advancing basic research.

"We will focus on the country's major strategic needs, grasp the latest trends in basic research, promote the transformation of research paradigms, implement the plan for breakthroughs in basic and interdisciplinary research, and integrate independent sci-tech innovation and talent training with the strengthening of basic research," Ding said.

Calling Xi's remarks a "mobilization order" for strengthening basic research, Liu Chenli, president of the Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology of the CAS, said that China has entered a stage of development in which it must pursue breakthroughs at the source and explore paths in uncharted territory.

"Only by mastering the capabilities to make breakthroughs in basic research can we truly hold the initiative in competition and development," he said.

The symposium holds great significance, as this year marks the start of the country's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30).

Zhang Xi, president of Jilin University and a CAS academician, noted that through successive five-year plans, China has made considerable progress in basic research with remarkable original achievements, and has cultivated a large pool of outstanding young talent dedicated to the field.

"After the symposium, I will lead my colleagues and students to continue strengthening research on new materials to provide sci-tech support for promoting high-quality development," Zhang said.

Huang Sanwen, president of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and a CAS academician, said that basic agricultural research serves as the "master switch" that generates source technologies and guides the development of the agricultural industry.

"Only by deeply understanding the life cycles of plants, animals and microorganisms can we efficiently cultivate new varieties, discover new methods for pest and disease control, and expand the applications of agricultural products," Huang said.

Tan Zhemin, president of Nanjing University and a CAS academician, said that once a breakthrough is achieved in basic research, it opens up entirely new frontiers of understanding, drives transformative technological innovation, and profoundly reshapes the way people live and work.

Wang Xiaoyun, chief engineer at China Mobile and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said she was deeply impressed by Xi's emphasis on promoting the deep integration of industry, academia, research and application led by enterprises, as well as on smoothing the innovation chain spanning basic research, application development and commercialization of achievements.

She pledged to strengthen market-oriented applied basic research, take application needs as the fundamental starting point, pursue interdisciplinary integration and cross-sector innovation as major breakthrough drivers, and consolidate industry-academia-research collaboration as an essential underpinning.

XINHUA

A colorful tribute



Tourists visit an exquisite flower bed in the shape of Mu Guiying, an iconic character of Peking Opera, at the China National Botanical Garden in Beijing on Monday. Re-created from an award-winning chrysanthemum flower bed display last year, the artwork integrates seasonal flowers with the signature makeup style of Mu, a female general. NIU YUNGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Privately backed nuclear plant a crucial milestone

By **ZHENG XIN**
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The operation of Unit 1 at the San'ao Nuclear Power Plant in Zhejiang province represents a watershed moment for China's energy sector, as the unprecedented inclusion of private capital in national nuclear infrastructure is seen as providing a critical clean energy boost for the Yangtze River Delta's accelerating shift toward an AI-driven and digital economy.

Managed by China General Nuclear Power Group, or CGN, the country's first privately backed nuclear power project and the region's first Hualong One unit officially began generating electricity last week.

The milestone unit is expected to generate over 9 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, meeting the daily production and residential power demands of more than 1 million residents, while supplying the zero-carbon baseload power required to sustain energy-intensive data centers, the company said.

The San'ao project marks a historic milestone for China's energy sector, as it breaks the traditional model of exclusive State investment in nuclear power, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Nuclear power requires massive upfront capital and features a long investment cycle. By bringing in private enterprises, the project proves that mixed-ownership models can inject new financial vitality and operational efficiency into national strategic infrastructure, while allowing private capital to share in the long-term dividends of the country's green transition, he said.

See ***Nuclear,*** *page 2*

GIG ECONOMY, DIGITAL PLATFORMS TEAMING UP TO RESHAPE WORK

Transformation driven not by traditional corporate hiring, but by millions of young users experimenting with flexible, task-based employment models

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**
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The country's young people are rewriting the rules of work — turning hobbies, side gigs and digital platforms into viable careers, and in the process are reshaping the labor market from the ground up.

A decade ago, a chance encounter quietly set Lane Lu on that path. Newly married and looking for extra income, the resident of Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, stumbled across repair-service listings on Xianyu, the country's leading secondhand marketplace.

Lu posted a listing on an impulse. What followed surprised him.

"I never expected so many people would reach out," he recalled. "Not just from my city, but from all over the country — there was even someone from South Korea."

The barriers were minimal — no deposits, no storefront, just a smartphone and a willingness to try. Lu, who had always enjoyed tinkering with gadgets, took what felt like a small, almost naive step into a niche that would ultimately generate more than 200,000 yuan ($29,280) a year.

See ***Gig,*** *page 3*

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:41 PM

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NATION



Residents of Wang Fuk Court return to their homes to collect their belongings on Monday, the last day of the first round of homecoming, after a deadly fire last year. EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY

Citywide efforts ease retrieval of Wang Fuk Court belongings

First round of collections concludes, authorities continue to help residents

By ATLAS SHAO in Hong Kong
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The first round of belongings collection efforts by residents of Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po concluded on Monday, with more than 6,000 people briefly returning to their fire-damaged homes.

The 15-day operation, which began on April 20, granted residents of the seven fire-hit buildings a three-hour window to return to their homes and retrieve their remaining belongings. Residents of the only building spared from the fire, Wang Chi House, were given a 90-minute opportunity in December to go back to their apartments.

The government said on Monday night that a total of 6,265 people from 1,674 households went for the retrieval, and the process was smooth and in order.

Many brought back photo albums, paintings, necklaces and other items with financial and emotional worth.

A cross-sector support campaign has been mobilized by city authorities and community-level workers, offering timely relief to displaced residents, including assistance from police, district care teams, volunteers, on-site social workers and psychologists, as well as volunteer drivers.

> "A household moved over 100 bags of items, and the care teams helped them transport these items till after 8 pm. Many residents have responded that volunteers and the various departments helped them a lot during the process."
>
> **Lo Hiu-fung,** district councilor of Tai Po district

Among the initiatives is a facility named "Wang Fuk living room". Operated by the nonprofit organization AidVengers Federation, it was launched to support displaced residents with services such as traditional Chinese medicine treatment, free Cantonese-style soups and drinks, as well as various recreational activities.

On Monday, a 74-year-old Wang Fuk Court resident surnamed Wong could be seen chatting animatedly with a volunteer at the living room initiative.

Wong, who relocated to the suburb of Kai Tak, told China Daily that the facility has provided helpful services. As he still buys food in Tai Po, he comes to the living room from time to time to chat with neighbors and join activities.

Reflecting on his visit to fire-ravaged homes, Wong said volunteers provided a lot of help in communicating with the government to provide a more suitable time slot for him.

"I'd taken over 10 bags of items downstairs on that day, and the Civil Aid Service and a senior-level police officer had helped me a lot with moving them," he said.

Yip, a 20-year-old volunteer working at the living room initiative, was chatting with Wong. "I started to provide help soon after the outbreak of the fire and have continued till now," he said.

Rody Choi Cheuk-hin, chairman of the AidVengers Federation, said, "All items at the living room initiative are supported by kind people, organizations, volunteers and neighbors."

Lo Hiu-fung, a district councilor of Tai Po district, highlighted the dedicated citywide efforts implemented during the operation's planning phase.

Government departments provided flexible, dedicated arrangements during the process, Lo said.

District Services and Community Care Teams, for example, helped to distribute supplies and transport items, and assisted residents in registering for the collection operation.

"One time, a household moved over 100 bags of items, and the care teams helped them transport these items till after 8 pm. Many residents have responded that volunteers and the various departments helped them a lot during the process," Lo added.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government announced on Monday that the property owners and residents of Wang Fuk Court will be exempted from the final tax payable for the year of assessment 2025-26 in order to ease their financial burden.

Authorities also said they will arrange a second round for the collection of belongings by residents, starting with Wang Chi House in mid-May.

Roys Zhang contributed to this story.

'Star of Pakistan' honoree leverages AI to aid patients

By LI YINGQING and **YAN YUJIE** in Kunming

Chinese surgeon Pan Xiangbin, recently honored with Pakistan's "Star of Pakistan", aims to further leverage advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence to extend life-saving care to more patients worldwide.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari presented Pan with the award in Changsha, Hunan province, on April 26, in recognition of his cross-border work providing heart surgeries for children.

Pan dedicated the honor to his team, describing it as a reflection of the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and Pakistan.

According to Qassim Naveed Qamar, an official of the Sindh provincial government in Pakistan, Pan has become a well-known figure in Pakistan, given his ability to perform the complex procedures he specializes in.

In January 2025, Pan, a deputy director of China's National Center for Cardiovascular Diseases, led a team to Pakistan to treat children with congenital heart disease. They performed a series of free surgeries, with patients recovering well.

One of the patients, Afrah Amir, described the doctors as "angels from a distant land" who gave her a chance at a better future.

"For my daughter and me, no friend has ever been as supportive in our time of need as the Chinese doctors," the girl's mother said. "They are truly our friends."

The positive outcomes were made possible by a minimally invasive technique developed by Pan's team, known as the percutaneous and non-fluoroscopic procedure. Using ultrasound imaging instead of traditional X-ray guidance, the method allows doctors to treat heart conditions through blood vessels without open-heart surgery, while avoiding radiation exposure for both patients and medical personnel.

First included in a United Nations project in 2023 to improve access to cardiovascular treatment in developing countries, the procedure has since been adopted by more than 1,000 hospitals across over 60 countries, benefiting more than 200,000 patients.

Pan said China's medical assistance goes beyond sending doctors abroad.

"Our surgical vehicles can reach remote villages, bringing cardiac procedures directly to patients' doorsteps," he said. "More importantly, we are willing to share these technologies with local doctors so they can treat even more people."

During their time in Pakistan, his team also trained around 200 local medical workers.

Now, Pan is looking to push those efforts further by integrating AI and robotics.

In April, using a domestically developed surgical robot system, his team in France carried out a fully ultrasound-guided, robot-assisted mitral valve repair on a patient thousands of kilometers away — marking a new step in remote, high-precision cardiac care.

"We will use AI and other advanced technologies to improve efficiency and save more lives," Pan said.

China's medical outreach, he added, is also evolving in another direction — bringing patients to China for treatment.

At Fuwai Yunnan Hospital of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences in Kunming, where Pan serves as executive director, children from neighboring countries have received life-saving surgeries as part of international programs such as the China-Cambodia "Love Heart Journey".

According to Chea Munyrith, president of the Cambodian Chinese Evolution Researcher Association, many young patients treated there return home sharing their experiences, helping more families learn about available care — and in some cases even inspiring them to begin learning Chinese.

Pan said the hospital's growing regional role reflects the progress of China's medical system, which now not only serves domestic needs but is increasingly able to compete internationally and support other countries.

Contact the writers at yanyj@chinadaily.com.cn



Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari (right) awards the "Star of Pakistan" to Pan Xiangbin on April 26 in Changsha, Hunan province. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Youth: Younger generation a bridge for intl friendship

From page 1

Such commitment is widespread among China's young people today. Beyond the story of Saihanba, it is reflected in various forms — from young scientists at the forefront of national research and athletes competing on the world stage, to volunteers teaching in less-developed western regions and university graduates driving rural vitalization in their hometowns.

Zhang Jun, secretary of the Shanxi Provincial Committee of the Communist Youth League of China, noted that more than 15,000 university graduates from the province have joined the national Go West volunteer service program. Zhang encouraged more young volunteers to step up and play a part in serving the western regions and working at the grassroots level.

Pledging further guidance and support, Zhang said Shanxi will create more opportunities, improve the recruitment and training process, and enhance job matching, so that more aspiring young people can gain experience, realize their potential, and contribute their youthful energy to advancing Chinese modernization.

According to an article in China Population News, people age 14 to 35 accounted for about 26 percent of China's total population in 2025, and their number is projected to remain at approximately 350 million by 2030 and stay above 210 million even by 2050.

The article noted that China is poised to maintain a sizable youth population for the foreseeable future, and this dynamic demographic profile will, in turn, provide favorable conditions for sustained and healthy socioeconomic development.

For President Xi, this dynamic generation is not only a vital force driving national progress, but also a bridge for international friendship and an envoy for people-to-people exchanges.

This vision is being translated into action through a series of concrete initiatives. In 2023, Xi announced a plan to invite 50,000 young people from the United States to China for exchange and study programs over the following five years, and more than 40,000 young people from the US have participated so far, opening a window for them to understand the real China and building a bridge to carry forward the friendship between the two peoples.

In 2025, China and Vietnam co-launched the Red Study Tour program, through which Vietnamese youths will visit China to trace the historical footsteps of the two countries' revolutionary forebears and strengthen the bonds of friendship. Furthermore, China has established Luban Workshops in numerous countries, including many in Africa, providing vocational skills training and creating sustained platforms for practical exchanges and cooperation among young people.

In January 2024, Xi replied to a letter from representatives of Kenyan students and alumni at Beijing Jiaotong University. Jamlick Mwangi Kariuki was one of the writers.

Xi places great importance on Africa's youths, creating many opportunities for them to grow and contribute more to their nation's development and China-Africa friendship, Kariuki told Xinhua News Agency.

After completing his undergraduate studies in China, Kariuki returned to work on the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway, a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative in Kenya. He later returned to China for postgraduate studies.

Kariuki also encouraged more Kenyan youths to study in China, emphasizing the critical importance of cultivating professionals with an international perspective for Kenya's development.

Yang Dian, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Sociology, was quoted by China Youth Daily as saying that it is crucial to expand platforms for international youth exchanges and cooperation.

He said that global public goods, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative, have provided young Chinese people with opportunities to engage on the world stage. Through these platforms, he said, young people can enhance mutual understanding, build friendships and grow together via mutual learning.

Yang also called for leveraging such cooperation frameworks to increase exchange programs, which he said will help foster a global perspective and strengthen the younger generation's cross-cultural communication skills.

Zhu Xingxin in Taiyuan contributed to this story.

Nuclear: Project to provide massive green energy support

From page 1

As the region accelerates its shift toward an artificial intelligence-driven and digital economy, intermittent renewables like wind and solar alone cannot sustain the immense, 24/7 power requirements of massive data centers, experts have said.

The San'ao project provides the critical, zero-carbon baseload power required to keep China's premier tech hub running smoothly without compromising the nation's dual-carbon goals, according to Lin.

Xing Yiteng, deputy director-general of the department of development and planning at the National Energy Administration, said that energy investment maintained robust growth in the first quarter of this year.

Furthermore, private enterprises deepened participation in key national energy research initiatives during the first three months of the year, he said.

According to CGN, since the inception of the mega-project, the company has collaborated with approximately 2,000 private enterprises, achieving multiple breakthroughs in independent core technology, intelligent engineering construction and innovative financing models.

Geely Technology Group holds a 2 percent stake in the project, setting a benchmark for the participation of private capital in major national energy infrastructure.

In addition, the project has localized 24 key pieces of core equipment for the first time, including the main steam relief control valves and nuclear-grade pressure and temperature switches, showcasing the robust competitiveness of China's entire nuclear power industry chain.

As global energy landscapes shift and the demand for AI computing power undergoes explosive growth, the Yangtze River Delta requires massive, uninterrupted energy support.

"The region has the nation's most vigorous demand for computing power and the most complete industrial supply chain, creating an urgent, sustained need for stable, clean and efficient baseload electricity," said Lin.

Once all six units in the San'ao project are fully operational, their combined annual power generation capacity is expected to exceed 54 billion kWh. This output is equivalent to reducing standard coal consumption by over 16.35 million metric tons and cutting carbon dioxide emissions by nearly 50 million tons annually, according to CGN.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:41 PM

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COVER



A customer looks at secondhand mobile phones at a Xianyu shop in Wuhan, Hubei province in January. SUN XINMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Gig: Used goods hot on Xianyu portal

From page 1

Today, Lu splits his time between two worlds. By day, he works as a consultant at an elderly health service institution. By night — and often into the wee hours — he repairs home appliances, troubleshoots electronics and installs electric vehicle charging equipment.

The turning point came in 2019. His own Philips electric toothbrush, worth more than 1,000 yuan, broke down. Instead of replacing it, he took it apart — and realized the fix was straightforward. That moment reframed his approach. He formally listed small-appliance repair as a service on Xianyu.

"Everything broken at home comes to me," he said. "During busy days it's normal for me to work until 2 am."

For Lu, the work is about more than income. He sees it as a quiet countercurrent to disposable consumption — extending the life of devices that might otherwise be discarded. A water flosser that costs just a few dozen yuan to repair, he noted, can be made to last for years.

"Every time I repair something, the sense of accomplishment is incredibly real."

The side business has also reshaped how his family views his career. His parents, who once favored the stability of a traditional job, have come around. "My dad thinks it's great. He says I've finally found a way to show my value," Lu said.

Lu's trajectory is increasingly mirroring a broader structural shift, as digital platforms blur the boundaries between hobby, freelance work and entrepreneurship — and redraw the contours of the modern labor market.

A recent report by the China New Employment Research Center examining emerging career trends said the country's youth are moving away from the pursuit of stable, long-term jobs toward a more fluid model of "multiple roles and identities". Instead of a single career trajectory, younger workers are assembling portfolios of income streams — part freelancer, part creator, part entrepreneur.



Shoppers examine items on display at a Xianyu store in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. FANG DONGXU / FOR CHINA DAILY

This shift is occurring against the backdrop of the rapidly expanding platform economy, which has absorbed more than 200 million flexible workers in recent years, according to official data. Platforms such as Xianyu are increasingly functioning as innovation ecosystems. They incubate new forms of employment and serve as a testing ground for emerging technologies and business models, said the report.

As spending patterns move from pure material acquisition toward experiences and personal growth, new categories of digital services have emerged. The report identifies three fast-growing segments on Xianyu — personal development, emotional companionship and skill monetization. Orders across these categories are expanding at annual rates exceeding 100 percent.

The so-called "emotional economy" is among the fastest-growing. Orders for emotional companionship services — including consultation, praise sessions and personality analysis — rose more than 107 percent last year. Sellers are increasingly positioning themselves as therapists, coaches or advisers, monetizing empathy and communication skills in ways that would have been difficult to scale in traditional offline settings.

At the same time, skill-based services are proliferating. In 2025, nearly 19.6 million sellers offered services ranging from photography and design to tutoring and home renovation on Xianyu. Generation Z accounted for about 41 percent of those sellers, while millennials contribute roughly a third — underscoring the platform's central role in youth employment, said the report.

Income levels remain modest on average, with active side-hustle participants earning around 4,317 yuan annually. Yet the aggregate impact is significant, particularly as a supplementary income source. More importantly, the data suggest that these activities are not merely casual experiments. A survey of over 1,200 platform users shows that more than 40 percent derive at least 30 percent of their monthly income from side gigs, while roughly 30 percent spend upward of 30 hours a week on platform-related work — effectively treating it as a second job.

The implications for China's labor market are substantial. Nearly 80 percent of surveyed users say they plan to develop their platform-based activities into long-term ventures, according to the survey.

Platforms such as Xianyu are also emerging as alternative training grounds, where users refine skills, test business ideas and build customer networks before committing to larger-scale ventures. The report recommends that universities and policymakers recognize this shift by incorporating verified side-hustle experience into academic credits or professional evaluations, effectively legitimizing digital labor as a formal component of career development.

The scale of participation is striking. According to platform data, more than 8 million female users on Xianyu now earn over 10,000 yuan per month. On average, female users posted 16 listings each last year, with strong activity in categories such as collectibles, rental services, artificial intelligence tools and home renovation.

Women, in particular, are playing a major role in shaping the platform's evolution. Many are leveraging interest-based communities to identify niche markets and build loyal customer bases. Some focus on reselling collectibles, while others provide specialized services ranging from AI customization to interior design.

The growing services highlight a broader redefinition of value creation in the country's digital economy. Skills that were once considered peripheral — emotional intelligence, community-building and niche expertise — are becoming monetizable assets.

Whether through selling discounted movie tickets, organizing group purchases or launching entirely new service categories, users are steadily pushing the boundaries of what digital marketplaces can offer.

Linda Liu, a frequent user of Xianyu, bought a sought-after concert ticket at a premium on the platform in March. "When the ticket arrived, it turned out to be a great seat, and the seller even packaged it with a thoughtful kit," she said. "It felt like we valued the same thing. It was definitely worth it."

'One-person companies' taking economy by storm

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**

China's startup landscape is being reshaped by a fast-growing class of businesses powered not by teams, but by individuals armed with artificial intelligence.

Known as "one-person companies", or OPCs, these ventures are emerging as a defining feature of the country's digital economy, prompting local governments to rethink how entrepreneurship is supported and scaled.

The numbers underscore the shift. As of mid-2025, China had more than 16 million one-person limited liability companies, said a report by the Zhongguancun Talent Association.

In the first half alone, 2.86 million new OPCs were registered, up 47 percent year-on-year and accounting for nearly a quarter of all new businesses. The surge reflects how AI tools — from code generators to content engines — are dramatically lowering the cost of starting and running a company.

Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, is positioning itself at the forefront of the trend. The eastern tech hub recently moved to formalize the model, with Shangcheng district unveiling one of the country's first policy frameworks aimed specifically at OPC development.

The district's new measures, released in early March, lay out a blueprint for building AI-focused OPC communities, offering everything from subsidized office space to computing resources and funding support.

Hangzhou's push reflects broader ambitions to cement its status as a national center for AI innovation. As the core district of the provincial capital, Shangcheng has been cultivating what they describe as a "tropical rain forest" innovation ecosystem — a dense network of startups, capital and infrastructure designed to accelerate emerging industries.

"We will allocate no less than 100 million yuan ($14.65 million) annually to support OPCs in growing from creative individuals into 'one-person unicorns'," said Chen Gang, a senior official in the district's technology, economic and information bureau.

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>
> **Chen Gang,** an official from Shangcheng district's technology, economic and information bureau in Hangzhou

The policy framework is structured around the full life cycle of OPC development.

Early-stage founders will gain access to move-in-ready workspaces, streamlined administrative services and living support.

As ventures scale, the focus shifts to mentoring, resource matching and scenario-based testing opportunities. More mature companies will be guided toward financing channels and integration into industrial supply chains.

Infrastructure is a central pillar of the plan. Shangcheng will provide more than 20,000 square meters of low-cost office space near key hubs, with subsidized workstations available for up to three years. The district is also building a unified AI services platform, bundling models, computing power and development tools into a membership system.

Financial backing is being scaled up in parallel. A dedicated OPC fund with a target size of 1 billion yuan will focus on early-stage and hard-tech projects, while urban scenarios — spanning consumption, tourism and public services — will serve as testing grounds for new applications. The district is also introducing a talent evaluation system that will annually identify top OPC founders and award up to 200,000 yuan in incentives.

By 2026, Shangcheng aims to establish 10 OPC communities, incubate 100 AI enterprises and attract 1,000 founders.

The local push mirrors similar efforts elsewhere in China. In Beijing, Zhongguancun-based initiatives are exploring "AI OPC-friendly communities" by integrating resources from universities and alumni networks. Shenzhen, Guangdong province, has set targets to build more than 10 OPC communities by 2027, each designed to create concentrated clusters of AI-driven startups.

Industry participants said the model is already reshaping how companies scale.

At Honghub, a Hangzhou-based OPC community, more than 1,300 projects have applied since its launch in late 2025, with a select group of startups now operating within the network. Some have expanded from single founders to teams of dozens, while others generate tens of millions of yuan in revenue with just a handful of employees.

Even so, structural challenges remain. The country's financial and regulatory systems are still geared toward traditional enterprises, leaving OPCs with limited access to tailored credit evaluation and financing channels.

Asset-light founders often struggle to secure loans without collateral, while the model itself raises questions about how companies sustain growth and retain talent as they expand.

Despite these hurdles, policymakers and investors are betting that OPCs will become a core component of the AI economy.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:41 PM

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WORLD

Rallying against revisions



Protesters rally in Tokyo on Sunday against Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's agenda, holding placards opposing constitutional revisions and military expansion during a Constitution Memorial Day demonstration that organizers said drew about 50,000 people. PHILIP FONG / AFP

Standoff deepens in Hormuz

US denies claim Iran struck military vessel after announcing 'guiding' plan

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE
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A United States Navy vessel reportedly came under Iranian missile fire near the Strait of Hormuz on Monday after it ignored warnings to halt, but the US military denied that any warship had been struck.

Iran's semiofficial Fars News Agency reported that two missiles targeted the US frigate as it sailed near Iran's Jask Port and attempted to navigate the strait. The outlet added the vessel failed to continue its voyage and was forced to withdraw from the waters.

The reported attack came hours after Washington unveiled a new operation to guide stranded commercial ships through the strait, following Tehran's warning against the US military approach or entry into the waterway.

"We have told these countries that we will guide their ships safely out of these restricted waterways, so that they can freely and ably get on with their business," US President Donald Trump said on Sunday.

Operations would begin on Monday, he said, threatening that any Iranian interference would trigger a forceful US response.



Self-service kiosks stand idle at a Spirit Airlines check-in area at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport in Florida on Sunday after the US carrier halted operations, citing surging fuel costs. CRISTOBAL HERRERA-ULASHKEVICH / EPA

US media outlets The Wall Street Journal, CNN and Axios highlighted Trump's chosen word of "guide" rather than "escort" to describe how the so-called Project Freedom will work, though Trump gave few details. Axios quoted a US official as saying that US Navy ships will be "in the vicinity" to prevent Iranian attacks on the commercial ships.

In response, Iran said all maritime passage through the strait must be coordinated with its military.

"We warn that any foreign armed force — particularly the aggressive US military — will be targeted and attacked if it attempts to approach or enter the Strait of Hormuz," Ali Abdollahi, chief commander of Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, told state broadcaster IRIB.

Iran has enforced tight control over the strait since the war began on Feb 28, disrupting global oil, gas and fertilizer supplies, while the US has maintained a parallel naval blockade on Iranian ports.

Stranded ships

According to maritime intelligence firm AXSMarine, more than 900 commercial vessels were stranded in the Persian Gulf as of April 29, down from over 1,100 recorded when the conflict started.

US Central Command said it would support the effort with 15,000 military personnel, more than 100 land and sea-based aircraft, along with warships and drones.

The vital waterway has remained largely blocked since late February, cutting off the transit of 20 percent of the world's oil and gas and fueling a steep rally in global energy prices. A ceasefire took effect on April 8, and one round of direct US-Iran peace talks has since been held in Islamabad, Pakistan, yet both sides remained deadlocked over core demands.

Global equity markets edged higher on Monday, while crude oil prices were little moved, having surged back above $100 a barrel last week.

Raman Kapoor, an oil tanker captain whose vessel is stranded in the Gulf, told Al Jazeera that no ships were likely to attempt crossing the Strait of Hormuz under current conditions.

"No ships would want to show their courage and pass through the strait unless it is officially declared safe to transit," he said, adding that while his vessel was able to restock in fuel, food and water, other commercial ships were not able to.

Meanwhile, Iranian state media said Washington had delivered its response to Tehran's 14-point proposal via Pakistan, and that Iran was reviewing it. There was no immediate confirmation from Washington or Islamabad of the US response.

"At this stage, we do not have nuclear negotiations," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei was quoted by state media as saying.

Observers said the proposal to delay nuclear talks until a later phase would appear at odds with Washington's repeated demand that Iran accept stringent restrictions on its nuclear program before the war can end.

Shi Guang in New York and agencies contributed to this story.

Asia-Pacific urged to act together, build deeper ties

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
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The Asia-Pacific needs to "act together to develop together" by strengthening cross-border connections to bolster resilience and inclusive growth, says Asian Development Bank President Masato Kanda.

"The decisions we make at this new crossroads will secure the future for the next generation," Kanda told the opening session of the bank's 59th annual meeting on Monday in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

"In this fragmented world, traditional and isolated development responses will fail. To survive and thrive in this new era, we must build deeply connected and resilient systems," he said, adding that shocks today travel rapidly across borders and hit communities that are least able to absorb them.

To address these challenges, the ADB pledged on Sunday to back $70 billion by 2035 for new energy and digital infrastructure, aiming to build regional systems that will strengthen shared security and resilience in the Asia-Pacific.

"Energy and digital access will define the region's future," Kanda said, announcing the launch of the Pan-Asia Power Grid Initiative and the Asia-Pacific Digital Highway.

"By linking power grids and digital networks across borders, we can lower costs, expand opportunity and bring reliable power and digital access to hundreds of millions of people," he said.

The $50 billion power grid initiative will link national and subregional grids, allowing renewable energy to flow across borders. The $20 billion digital highway program aims to narrow infrastructure gaps and support AI-driven growth.

The power grid plan marks a shift from country-to-country links to a regional power market. By 2035, the ADB aims to integrate about 20 gigawatts of renewable energy across borders, connect 22,000 circuit-kilometers of transmission lines, improve energy access for 200 million people, create 840,000 jobs, and cut regional power-sector emissions by 15 percent.

The digital highway initiative aims to provide first-time broadband access to 200 million people and faster, more reliable digital connectivity for another 450 million by 2035. It is expected to cut connectivity costs in remote and landlocked areas by about 40 percent and help create 4 million jobs.

Economic impact

Also in Samarkand, finance ministers and central bank governors from ASEAN+3 met on Sunday, discussing the economic impact of the Middle East situation and underscoring the need for stronger regional unity.

ASEAN+3 comprises member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and their three East Asian dialogue partners — China, South Korea and Japan.

"ASEAN+3 entered 2026 from a position of relative strength ... however, the escalation of conflict in the Middle East has amplified downside risks to the regional outlook significantly," said a statement released after the meeting.

With growth expected to moderate and inflation to rise, finance leaders underscored the importance of upholding multilateralism and strengthening regional unity and cooperation in addressing shared challenges.

At a sideline event, Yasuto Watanabe, director and CEO of the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office, said the region has become more interconnected, with deeper integration and stronger regional demand. It now accounts for 28 percent of global demand, making ASEAN+3 the world's largest market, he said.

"Today, we are navigating what many describe as 'changes unseen in a century,'" he said, noting heightened global uncertainty and growing structural challenges.

Embassy event brings Shaanxi to Washington

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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The aroma of freshly made *biangbiang* noodles mingled with the rhythms of Tang Dynasty music as the Chinese embassy in Washington welcomed more than 7,000 visitors on Saturday.

Part of the annual "Around the World Embassy Tour", the event this year transported attendees to Northwest China's Shaanxi province, offering a vibrant window into the "cradle of Chinese civilization" and the opportunities of an opening China.

In keynote remarks, Chinese Ambassador to the United States Xie Feng highlighted the province's historical weight.

"Shaanxi is like a river, carrying the continuity of Chinese civilization," Xie said. "As a saying goes, 'To understand 5,000 years of Chinese history, visit Shaanxi'."

He noted that 14 dynasties once established their capitals there, nurturing cultural treasures from the Terracotta Warriors to Xi'an drum music.

Fast-forward to the present, Shaanxi is emerging as a hub of future growth, he said, describing the province as a "frontier of China's opening-up" with a key role in the Belt and Road Initiative and a leading presence in high-tech industries.

"A more prosperous China will surely be an anchor of peace and a harbor of stability in a turbulent world," he said. "A more open China will bring strong momentum and vast opportunities for shared development of all countries."

Shaanxi is helping renew the China-US friendship through local-level exchanges and people-to-people ties, Xie said, adding that the province and its cities have established 13 sister-city partnerships with US counterparts.

He cited the 14th China-US Tourism Leadership Summit in Xi'an in 2024 and a joint performance by Utah's One Voice Children's Choir and Chinese students beneath the city's ancient wall in 2025 as evidence of a sustained public appetite for exchange and cooperation.

After more than 50 years of diplomatic engagement, China-US relations have reached another crossroads, he said, urging both sides to draw lessons from history, focus on steady and sustainable development, and seek "a right way" to coexist in the new era.

Fan Weibin, vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the Shaanxi Provincial People's Congress, said the province is expanding cooperation with the US in trade, culture, tourism, education and other sectors, and welcomed more US people to experience Shaanxi firsthand.

A highlight of the open house event was a performance of Xi'an drum music, known as a "living fossil" of Chinese music. Musicians in Tang Dynasty (618-907) attire played drums, flutes and chimes, while a vibrant *yangko* dance brought to life the folk traditions of northern Shaanxi.

The audience responded with enthusiastic applause and cheers, enjoying this direct encounter with musical and dance traditions passed down for centuries.

The embassy grounds were transformed into a lively showcase of culture and heritage. Visitors tried their hand at painting *shehuo* masks and explored ancient murals through virtual reality.

Stalls featuring cultural products and other goods from local Shaanxi companies drew large crowds, with long lines forming for regional delicacies.

Flavor of Chang'an

Among the exhibitors, Lu Zhiqi of Shaanxi Ziqi Food Company said he was proud to bring local flavors to Washington. "We hope visitors can taste the flavor of Chang'an (Xi'an's ancient name) — and of China — through our traditional delicacies," he said.

Lu added that the company combines traditional techniques with digital production lines to produce additive-free products tailored to US market trends.

Ralph Winnie Jr, director of the China program at the Eurasia Center, said such events underscore the value of cultural diplomacy.

"People-to-people exchanges and relationship building are very important to break down cultural barriers and promote understanding," he said.

David Harrison, a high school teacher from Virginia, said, "I've seen the Terracotta Warriors in books, but the craftsmanship here makes it all feel so real."

The technology displays highlighted China's rapid change and inspired him to bring his students to visit, he said.

Briefly

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Suspected outbreak of rare hantavirus kills 3

Three people have died and three are ill after a cruise ship was hit by a suspected outbreak of hantavirus, a rodent-borne virus that can cause fatal respiratory illness, authorities and media reports said on Sunday. Netherlands-based Oceanwide Expeditions said in a news release that it was "managing a serious medical situation" on a polar expedition ship, which was off Cape Verde, an island nation in the Atlantic west of Africa. The cruise departed from Argentina about three weeks ago with around 150 passengers and stopped in the Antarctic and other locations on its way to Cape Verde, according to media reports. A Dutch Foreign Ministry spokesperson confirmed that two Dutch passengers had died, but gave no further details.

OIL MARKETS

7 OPEC+ countries to hike production in June

Seven countries in the OPEC+ grouping of oil-producing countries say they have decided on a modest increase in production starting in June as part of a commitment to "market stability". The decision from the seven countries — Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria and Oman — to raise production by 188,000 barrels per day comes after they held a virtual meeting on Sunday. The increase is part of adjustments to the additional voluntary production cuts first announced in April 2023. The voluntary adjustments could be returned gradually, either in part or in full, depending on market developments, the group said.

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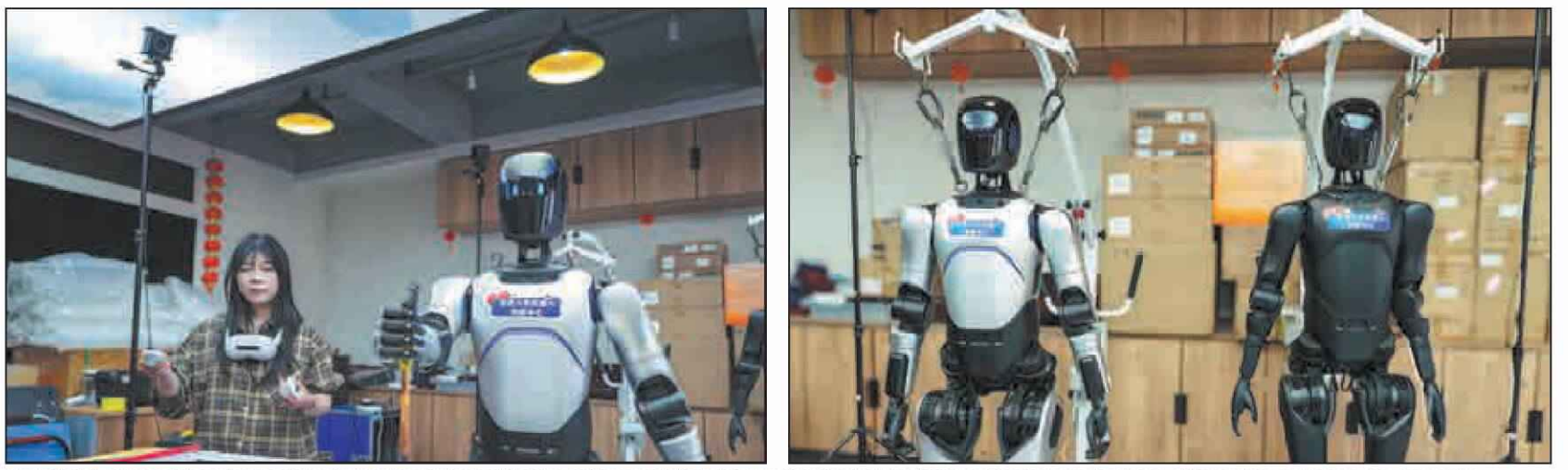
CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No.1820

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:41 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:41 PM

PEOPLE



From left: A humanoid robot poses for a photo with a trainer at the Gansu Humanoid Robot Innovation Center. Two humanoid robots are displayed at the center. WU YUEXUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Trainer teaches robots like kids in a kindergarten

Through trial and error, Kang Xiaolong continues to learn alongside his humanoid students. The goal is to make robots interact better with people.

By **MA JINGNA** and **HU YUMENG** in Lanzhou

In a lab in Lanzhou, Gansu province, a humanoid robot sways slightly as engineers gather around One engineer demonstrates a movement, arms stretching out and body leaning in, while another tweaks parameters on a computer. The motion is recorded, translated into code and sent back to the robot, which attempts to follow the command.

This is part of a typical day for Kang Xiaolong, a robot trainer at the Gansu Humanoid Robot Innovation Center, one of the largest robot training hubs in Northwest China.

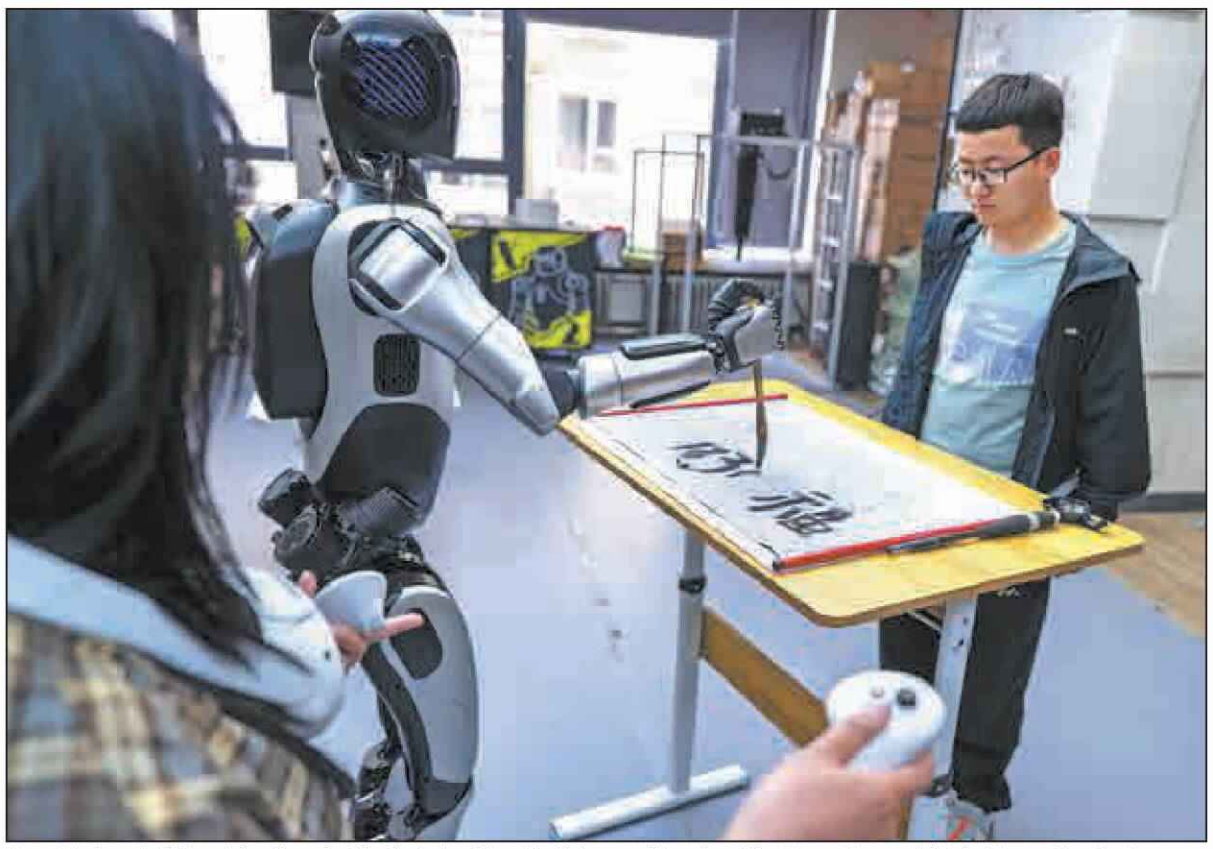
"It's a bit like teaching kindergarten kids," Kang said. "You guide them step by step, again and again, until they get it."

Kang, 31, graduated from Lanzhou University in 2020 with a degree in electronic information science and technology. He began his career in control software, working across fields such as new energy and industrial sensors, before joining the innovation center in 2025. The work was stable, but something was missing.

"Robotics is something new and exciting," he said. "It brings together mechanical engineering, electronics, software and AI models. You must continue to learn, but that's also what makes it interesting."

Training a robot is far from straightforward. A single movement can take days to refine, he said. The process often begins with a human demonstration, sometimes captured through motion-tracking systems. Engineers then retarget the motion — adapting it to the robot's proportions and mechanical limits — before testing it in a simulation.

Only after that do they try it on a real machine.



Kang Xiaolong (right) watches the robot that he trained to write Chinese calligraphy at the Gansu Humanoid Robot Innovation Center. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"We always have someone standing behind the robot, ready to support it," Kang explained. "If something goes wrong, we immediately hit an emergency stop. These machines are expensive and fragile."

Even with precautions, unpredictability is part of the job. "If you're not careful, you might get bumped or kicked," he said with a laugh. "So far, I've been lucky."

Kang's team focused on training robots for performances and public events — one of the more mature applications in the industry. But beyond commercial use, he is particularly interested in something more ambitious: blending robotics with local culture.

"In Northwest China, we have rich cultural resources," he said. "We want robots to reflect that — maybe through regional dances or dialects."

The idea of teaching robots to dance is appealing, but also technically demanding. Some styles, such as the iconic "playing the pipa behind the back" pose from Dunhuang murals, require fluidity and subtle expressions that robots still struggle to replicate. Limitations in joint flexibility and hardware design make certain movements difficult, if not impossible.

"Even if a robot can copy the shape of a movement, capturing the 'spirit' is much harder," Kang said.

Despite these challenges, progress is visible. Compared with earlier models, today's humanoid robots are more agile and expressive. In some cases, Kang said, their movements can look almost human. "It's not about replacing humans," he explained. "It's about teaching machines to work with us better."

Beyond the lab, the robots are increasingly meeting the public. Children are often the most enthusiastic, drawn to the machines' interactions.

Some even pose surprisingly profound questions.

"We've had kids ask if robots can solve the Goldbach conjecture," Kang said, "or even how a robot defines the unknown if it knows everything."

For him, the most rewarding moments come when the robots that he has trained step into the real world and are met with genuine delight. "It does feel like watching something you've taught being appreciated," he added. "It's not just about the technology, but how it can bring people happiness."

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Railway engineer becomes a model worker through grit and global experience

By **ZHANG XIAOMIN** in Dalian, Liaoning
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For Lu Xiaofan, being awarded the title of model worker in 2022 in Liaoning province was not just a badge of honor. It was a reminder to push himself harder, sharpen his skills and rise to greater responsibilities.

Since 2014, when he graduated from college, Lu, 33, has worked in a variety of posts at the Dalian branch of China Railway No 9 Group. Looking ahead, he hopes to take a more active part in the company's overseas projects.

"Our company has accumulated extensive construction experience and completed many projects abroad, offering employees plenty of room to grow," said Lu, who is currently working as a legal affairs officer at a mining construction site in Guizhou province.

His entry into the industry was not driven by a childhood dream but by pragmatism.

Looking back, he said, "It turned out to be a perfect fit. This job has made me a person who can stay focused, endure hardship and communicate well with others."

Lu's journey into overseas projects began in 2018.

After four years in his first frontline position as a bridge test engineer, he rose to become the lead of a quality control circle for a bridge project in Dalian.

He was then assigned to the company's project management department in Belarus, where he took part in six construction projects and, for three of them, served as the on-site Chinese technical lead.

On a road project north of the China-Belarus Industrial Park in Minsk Oblast, he proposed an improvement to the originally planned well-point dewatering method based on studying the terrain and soil conditions, comparing years of weather data and investigating the rainwater treatment station's storage and reuse capacity.

"Such improvements ensured construction quality, saved costs and eased schedule pressure," Lu said.

The overseas stint, he said, deepened his understanding of the world. Beyond technical skills, his business communication abilities improved significantly.

"I knew very little about Belarus before going there, only its name," he said. He also found that local employees had limited knowledge of Chinese people and companies, and sometimes held prejudices.



Lu Xiaofan reviews project blueprints at the construction site of the Minsk Arena on Prospekt Pobediteley in Minsk, Belarus. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lu made a point of engaging with his local colleagues, visiting museums and communities in his spare time and by participating in public welfare activities.

"Since the project ended, many of my coworkers and I still keep in touch on WeChat. We send each other blessings on important holidays," he said.

After returning to China in 2021, Lu worked in the engineering management department of the Dalian branch of the railway, focusing on overseas project management and contributing to technological innovation.

He later participated in a project in Tonghua, Jilin province, taking charge of early-stage planning and review.

There, he conducted regular analyses and adjusted operational strategies to ensure strong economic returns.

He also took on the coordination duties for several overseas projects and helped compile a country-specific policy manual for the company's overseas engineering and technical management systems.

With the company pushing for differentiated, high-quality development and a stronger global footprint, Lu has set his next goal — mastering construction and production techniques for overseas mining projects.

"There is no end to learning," he said. "Only by striving can you move forward."

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READ



Brewing success across Southeast Asia

Chinese tea-based beverages attract new fans by adding tropical fruit flavors and adapting to local tastes and trends

By **YANG WANLI** in Bangkok
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As Chinese tea beverages embark on their journey to global prominence, Southeast Asia has emerged as the first destination for many leading Chinese brands.

The combination of Chinese tea with the vibrant flavors of tropical fruits results in an innovative and health-conscious offering that captivates consumers in the region.

"The beverage market in Southeast Asia is characterized by its diversity and openness, coupled with a rich supply of fresh fruits and a rapidly expanding consumer base, presenting Chinese brands with ample opportunities for integrated growth and future prospects," said Chen Zhiyu, Thailand regional director of ChaPanda.

The Chinese tea chain, established in Southwest China's Sichuan province in 2008, has rapidly expanded into overseas markets over the past two years. It now operates in South Korea, Thailand, the United States, France, and Australia. As of March, it had about 70 overseas branches, with 40 percent in Southeast Asia.

In 2024, the brand entered Thailand — the first stop of its overseas expansion. "The tropical country has great consumption power for cold beverages all year round. Although there are a variety of fruit smoothies available (in Thailand), a combination of light Chinese tea and fresh fruit is a new track," Chen said.

Southeast Asia's coffee and tea market reached $9.9 billion last year, marking a 52 percent jump from $6.5 billion in 2021, as rapid outlet expansion, digital ordering, and broader consumer adoption fueled growth, according to the Singapore-based business information company Momentum Works.

The region's market potential is widely recognized by many Chinese brands. Back in 2018, Mixue opened its first overseas store in Hanoi, Vietnam. So far, it operates more than 4,700 stores outside China with Southeast Asia remaining its core overseas market.

The Chagee brand, meanwhile, has followed a more measured approach. After entering Malaysia in 2019, it has expanded to 196 stores in the market. In Singapore, it operates 22 outlets, including at Changi Airport and the National University of Singapore.

In Indonesia, operations have been carried out through a joint venture with a subsidiary of the local retail group Erajaya, with halal certification secured to better align with local consumer expectations.

Several brands have also emerged as key players in this trend. After the COVID-19 pandemic, brands such as Heytea, ChaPanda, and Naisnow expanded their presence across the region.

Fruit teas are among the top sellers for most of the brands. "The popularity of fruit teas, light milk teas, and vegetable teas suggests that consumers are increasingly aware of the health benefits. This mindset is (evident) among young (consumers) and the middle class," said Fei Cheng, general manager of Naisnow International Business Department.

Health consciousness

In Thailand, the tea industry encompasses diverse segments, from traditional Thai iced tea to premium organic varieties, driven by health-conscious consumers and bubble tea adoption (94 percent among people aged 20 to 29), according to a report by a local Thai company, Iconic Research.

It revealed that Thai consumers increasingly view tea as a wellness beverage, substituting it for sugary sodas and energy drinks. This health consciousness directly fuels growth in the Thailand organic tea sector and the green tea market.

The research showed that 62 percent of tea drinkers actively pursue healthy eating, making them receptive to messaging about functional benefits and clean ingredients. Generation Z leads this wellness movement, seeking products aligned with health and sustainability values.

Naisnow entered the Thai market by opening its first overseas branch in Bangkok in December 2023.

The brand highlights a healthy lifestyle by offering a wide range of high-fiber and vitamin-rich options made with a mixture of Chinese teas and fresh fruits.

Moreover, the trend of reducing daily sugar consumption is also supported by local authorities. On Feb 11, Thailand's Department of Health launched a major initiative to cut the default sugar content in "normal sweet" beverages by half of their original recipes.

In line with the preferences of local consumers in Thailand, Chen revealed that ChaPanda had initially increased the sugar content of its drinks by 15 percent from the level in the Chinese market to meet the average sweetness level of Thai beverages.

"But as more consumers nowadays are becoming more aware of health, we have reduced the sugar content ... while trying to explore more recipes with healthy ingredients," Chen said.









From top: Thai customers enjoy beverages at a Naisnow outlet in Bangkok's CentralWorld mall in March. A staff member prepares a fruit tea at a ChaPanda outlet in Bangkok's Siam Square. Exterior of the Naisnow outlet at CentralWorld. A Chinese zodiac-themed Year of the Horse pendant at the outlet. Chinese desserts at the outlet.
PHOTOS BY YANG WANLI / CHINA DAILY

In addition, the brand uses local halal milk to make milk-based beverages to meet the demands of Muslim customers.

"(To appeal) to local consumers, we also make (region-specific) costumes for the brand's mascot panda. For example, the panda will be dressed in a gentleman's style in France. In Singapore, the mascot will cosplay as the Merlion, while in Thailand it will have a beach-style outfit," Chen said.

The proliferation of Chinese tea beverage outlets across Southeast Asia does more than introduce these unique flavors to a new audience. It also provides a glimpse into the depth and diversity of Chinese traditions on the world stage.

"When I traveled to China, I particularly enjoyed drinking Heytea and Chagee. The reason why I like going to China is that the people there are very friendly, the scenery is particularly spectacular, and each place has its own unique charm," said Paullar, a 31-year-old Thai.

"Apart from tea, I also really like Chinese cuisine. Chinese traditional customs and delicious food make me enjoy every trip to China very much," she added.

Beyond drinks

Beyond business expansion, Chinese tea beverage brands are also integrating social responsibility into their global strategies.

In Singapore, Chagee opened a "silent store" employing hearing-impaired staff members, complete with accessible facilities. This initiative demonstrates a commitment to inclusive employment, while offering a practical example of how brand operations can contribute to local communities.

Mixue emphasizes local hiring and talent development. In Malaysia, the brand employs over 2,900 local staff members and has trained more than 4,000 personnel to date.

To that end, the company has experimented with culturally themed product launches, linking drinks to national celebrations or local design elements.

In August 2025, to commemorate Singapore's National Day, Chagee introduced a new orchid-flavored beverage, the "Orchid Biluochun Milk Tea" inspired by Singapore's national flower, the Vanda Miss Joaquim.

Most recently, it partnered with the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Singapore Tourism Board to launch "Garden of Senses: A Tea Reverie", an immersive, multi-sensory tea culture exhibition. This marks a landmark collaboration and is ACM's first in-depth curatorial partnership with an international brand.

By the end of 2025, Chagee's overseas membership in the Asia-Pacific region had grown 177 percent from a year earlier, with 61 percent of members under the age of 30, demonstrating the brand's strong value recognition among local youth.

Fei from Naisnow said Chinese tea-based beverages are a cultural icon for many foreign consumers, and the company seeks to serve as a gateway for the world to explore Chinese culture.

Apart from providing popular Chinese desserts as options beyond drinks, Naisnow has also integrated the brand with Chinese cultural elements and developed many related products.

"For instance, to celebrate the Year of the Horse, we collaborated with designers to make small pendants. The gifts symbolize this year in the Chinese zodiac — a spirit of progress and perseverance. They also provide another look at Chinese culture," Fei said.

Chinese tea, together with other cultural trends such as toys, the creative industry, and costume dramas that go viral among the younger Thai generation, combines commercial objectives with social contributions, said Arphon Thiragun, a lecturer at the School of Sinology at Mae Fah Luang University.

Over the past decades, she said Chinese culture has influenced Thai people through multiple cultural forms. For example, Hong Kong movies and the iconic musical style of Teresa Teng are unforgettable memories for many elderly Thai people. Such cultural exchanges are now evolving into more creative and vivid forms.

She cited examples such as the popularity of the cute fashion accessory Labubu from China and the Thai mascot Butterbear — both are widely loved by consumers from China and Thailand.

"Now, such cultural exchanges create mutually beneficial outcomes for business operators and consumers. In particular, deepened cultural exchanges are shaping the image of the world in the minds of younger generations and have sparked their enthusiasm for exploring different countries and their cultures. This will lay a solid foundation for a deep understanding of the world," she added.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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IMAGE



Models from China and abroad showcase Qiang ethnic clothing at the 2026 New York Fashion Week Asia-Pacific Wuxi Show on March 20.

Eastern beauty meets global fashion

On March 20, dozens of top global brands and international haute couture designers graced the runway at the 2026 New York Fashion Week Asia-Pacific Wuxi Show, held at the Nianhua Bay in Wuxi, Jiangsu province.

Throughout the event, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) elements stood out as a major highlight.

Garments made using ICH techniques such as Su embroidery, Miao embroidery, and Qiang embroidery, appeared one after another on the runway.

The Qiang people, often called "the ethnic group living among the clouds," have a long history in China, well known for distinctive cultural, culinary, and sartorial traditions.

Chen Shijiang, a young Qiang lady from Baixi village, Maoxian county, in Sichuan's Aba Prefecture, amazed the audience with her collection, showcasing the beauty of traditional Qiang attire to the world.

Some reporters visited her studio to hear the story of her deep connection with Qiang clothing.

Chen, now a fourth-generation inheritor of her family's Qiang embroidery legacy, told the reporters that the Qiang people believe that all things have a spirit.

"We use clothing as a medium to pass on the good fortune and symbolism found in rivers, mountains, flowers, birds, and insects," she added.

She said that her collection displayed in this show reinterprets traditional Qiang clothing with a contemporary design language, honoring tradition while embracing modernity.

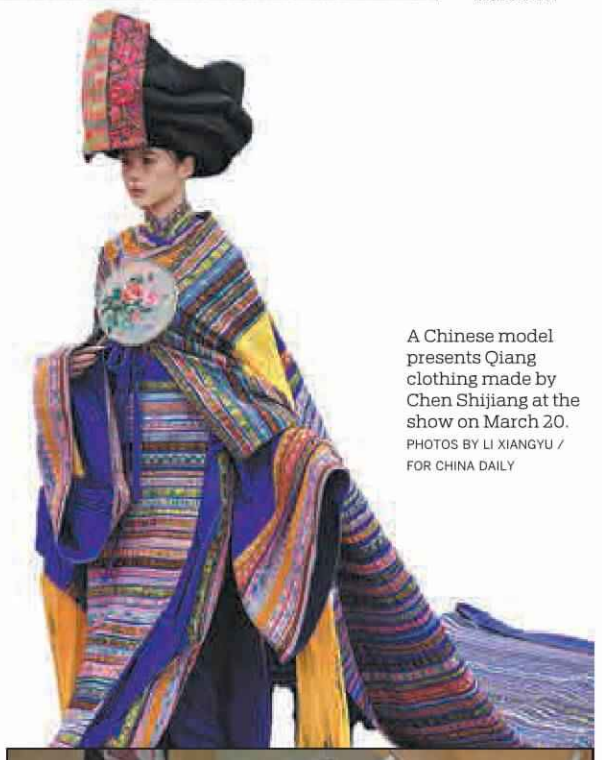
Her work blends intricate patterns and fluid tailoring with Qiang ICH techniques, bringing traditional wedding attire to life on the fashion stage.

Her pieces have been exhibited in countries such as Italy, the UK, and Switzerland, and have also been featured in international cultural exchange events.

-CHINA DAILY



Che Yuanlong, a Qiang man from Sichuan's Aba prefecture, models the Qiang garment made by Chen Shijiang at the show on March 20.



A Chinese model presents Qiang clothing made by Chen Shijiang at the show on March 20.
PHOTOS BY LI XIANGYU / FOR CHINA DAILY



Chen Shijiang attends a fashion industry exchange at the 2026 New York Fashion Week Asia-Pacific Wuxi Show on March 20.



Chen Shijiang (right) and her mother embroider a piece of Qiang clothing together at Chen Shijiang's studio on March 12.



Chen Shijiang arranges a traditional Qiang headpiece at her studio located in Baixi village, Maoxian county, in Sichuan's Aba prefecture on March 12.



Chen Shijiang's mother (right) helps Chen to adjust the traditional Qiang attire on March 11.



Chen Shijiang discusses Qiang embroidery patterns with her team members before the show starts on March 20.

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TREND

'Silent riders' thrive, show resilience in digital era

Workers with impairments are overcoming barriers, redefining what inclusive employment looks like.



Sun Jingjing (right), a hearing-impaired Meituan delivery rider, communicates with Gu Xinru, a sign language instructor who helps Sun become familiar with the work, at a delivery station in Shanghai.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By **LI SHANGYI**
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Clockwise from top left: Two job seekers exchange information using sign language at a special job fair in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, on March 11. The event was dedicated to providing opportunities to people with disabilities. WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE A job seeker communicates with a recruiter at a booth during a job fair in Taiyuan on March 11. WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE A sign in the back seat of a DiDi ride-hailing car in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Nov 24, informs passengers that the driver is hearing-challenged. ZUO DONGCHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY An employment seeker with hearing difficulties communicates via text on a mobile phone while applying for a position at a job fair in Chaozhou, Guangdong province, on Feb 22, 2024. CHEN YIHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Zhao Lei, 38, has a hearing impairment and has worked as a ride-hailing driver for five years. When passengers book a ride, the app notifies them before they call Zhao, encouraging them to switch to text-based communication.

As a driver with a hearing impairment who is registered on DiDi, a major ride-hailing platform in China, Zhao said in sign language that the job provides him with a stable income and allows him to make ends meet.

Beyond ride-hailing services, people with hearing difficulties are also finding new opportunities in China's on-demand delivery sector. "Without delivery jobs, most people with hearing impairments could only work in factories," said Sun Jingjing, a 34-year-old delivery worker for Meituan in Shanghai, an on-demand service platform.

Although challenges remain, improvements in speech-to-text functions and AI communication tools are opening new possibilities. For this "silent" group, the app-based service economy is creating new horizons.

New forms of employment

Zhao, from Heilongjiang province, became a ride-hailing driver in 2021 after his startup venture failed. Once he had saved enough money, he bought a car and registered with DiDi.

Now an experienced driver covering about 300 kilometers a day, Zhao knows the city's roads so well that the map is largely in his mind. He often shows his driver's license to passengers to ease any concerns.

Yet for a driver with hearing impairments, the biggest challenge remains communicating with passengers by phone.

"When there's a traffic jam, I need to let the passenger know it will take a few more minutes," he explained. "In other cases, I have to call the passenger if I arrive early."

Over time, Zhao has developed his own ways to bridge this gap. In such situations, he may ask a passerby to help make the call or use AI-powered text-to-speech tools to generate voice messages.

Since May last year, DiDi has introduced a feature that notifies passengers before the trip if their driver has a hearing impairment, encouraging them to use text-based communication. During the ride, the app also provides guidance to passengers, such as gently tapping the driver on the shoulder in urgent situations.

In recent years, many people with hearing impairments like Zhao have entered the ride-hailing industry. Zhao is part of a group chat with more than 100 drivers with hearing impairments, where they exchange experiences and advice.

Under current regulations in China, people with hearing impairments can apply for a small-car driver's license if they meet specific hearing requirements, such as being able to hear car horns from different directions, with the help of assistive devices. After passing the necessary tests, they are also eligible to work in the ride-hailing sector.

While a small number of passengers may have doubts, most are understanding. "Some even use sign language to say 'thank you' to me," Zhao said.

Ride-hailing drivers and delivery workers represent new forms of employment that have emerged with the growth of internet technologies and the digital economy. As of March, more than 80 million people were engaged in these flexible jobs, including 12 million delivery workers and nearly 7 million ride-hailing drivers.

Compared with traditional job options for people with disabilities, these roles offer not only more equal access but often higher pay.

Last year, more than 10,000 people with hearing impairments worked as delivery workers for Meituan.

In Shanghai, a Meituan delivery station on North Sichuan Road established a dedicated branch for workers with disabilities in the autumn of 2024. The station also employs a sign language instructor to support daily communication with its 17 employees with hearing impairments.

Before becoming a delivery worker, Sun, who is originally from Henan province, spent four years working at an electronics assembly factory. The job was exhausting, she said, and paid only 2,000 yuan ($292.6) to 4,000 yuan per month.

She described on-demand delivery work as more equitable, noting that people with hearing impairments are not discriminated against and can perform just as well as others.

When Sun began working as a delivery rider in October last year, she was unfamiliar with the delivery system and the electric motorcycle, earning only about 3,000 yuan a month.

With guidance from more experienced colleagues at the station, she gradually improved. She now completes more than 1,200 orders per month, and her income has risen to around 8,000 yuan.

In December 2024, Meituan upgraded its accessibility features for delivery workers with hearing impairments. The updated system includes functions such as speech-to-text conversion and AI-powered voice calling.

While making deliveries, Sun wears a vest labeled "Silent Rider". When people notice it, they will often step in to help her find her way if she is lost.

Excellence in silence

Yang Haobing, 30, is another "silent rider" at the station. He ranks among the top performers in both order volume and income, completing around 1,300 to 1,500 deliveries each month and earning more than 10,000 yuan.

Since becoming a full-time delivery rider for Meituan in October 2024, Yang has made it clear that he does not want to be treated differently because of his hearing impairment. He holds himself to higher standards than those of other riders, which in turn motivates those around him.

Yang attributes his success to diligently memorizing routes and frequently exchanging tips with fellow riders. "I like this job, not only because of the income, but also because it allows me to get to know the city while riding," he said.

When he first arrived in Shanghai in 2019, Yang worked as a chef. Compared with kitchen work, he said, delivery work offers more practical, worldly experience. Now, he and his girlfriend are working hard in Shanghai and plan to get married once they have saved enough money.

According to Yang, many people with hearing impairments are doing delivery work through referrals, since on-demand delivery offers higher incomes, and people with hearing impairments can do just as well as others.

Gu Xinru, a sign language instructor at the Meituan delivery station, described these riders as energetic and resilient, noting their strong work ethic and ability to overcome challenges.

Zhao, the ride-hailing driver, has also received many positive reviews from passengers. Some praised his steady driving and efficient, well-chosen routes. Even in heavy traffic, reviewers noted that he adjusted course quickly. Many passengers also offered tips as a gesture of appreciation, according to Zhao.

Now, Zhao's monthly income can reach over 15,000 yuan.

Still, communication remains Zhao's biggest concern. Although he uses text-to-speech tools to make phone calls, he noted that "typing simply isn't as fast as speaking, and when responses are delayed, passengers can become anxious. Some even hang up as soon as they hear the AI-generated voice." He added that regional dialects can further complicate speech-to-text conversion.

Zhao said he hoped the app would introduce more accessibility features.

While hearing-impaired drivers and delivery riders work hard to overcome communication barriers, companies such as DiDi and Meituan have also introduced accessibility features on their apps, drawing on feedback from users.

According to DiDi, the company has held multiple meetings with these drivers and users to better understand their key challenges and practical needs. In May last year, it launched features such as call notifications and an in-trip communication card, with pilot programs rolled out in six cities. A total of 50 hearing-impaired drivers from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou in Guangdong province volunteered for the trial, including Zhao.

Based on data from 120,000 test orders, the prompt notifications successfully encouraged about half of the passengers who attempted to call hearing-impaired drivers to switch to text-based communication. The in-trip communication card was also viewed 50,000 times.

After noticing the sign indicating a driver with hearing impairments, many passengers were initially surprised and shared their experiences online. Some even searched for basic sign language on the spot and used it to thank the driver at the end of the ride.

"The car is very quiet, without music or conversation," one social media user wrote. Others described the experience as moving and inspiring, saying they were touched by the drivers' hard work.

Gu, the sign language instructor, often helps these delivery riders handle communication issues with customers. In one case, a delivery rider received a negative review from a customer who complained about an "impolite response". Gu later contacted the customer to explain that the rider could not hear and that his text replies might seem abrupt. After learning the situation, the customer sent a long message to apologize.

Gu said many customers shift from being critical to offering tips once they realize the rider has hearing impairments. She added that delivery work provides more opportunities for interaction, helping hearing-impaired individuals better integrate into society.

In June last year, the General Office of the State Council issued a three-year action plan for promoting the employment of people with disabilities (2025-27), which emphasized stronger support for flexible employment among people with disabilities.

The plan also calls for further leveraging the role of the platform-based digital economy. In addition, support for the employment of people with disabilities will be incorporated into the evaluation criteria used to assess internet companies' fulfillment of their social responsibilities.

"Though those delivery workers cannot hear, they can feel the wind, smell the flowers, and be greeted on the street," Gu said. "Fairness is not about giving them special treatment, but about allowing them, like anyone else, to support themselves through their own efforts."

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BIZ LIFE





Visitors gather at booths of Chinese TV manufacturers — TCL and Hisense — during the CES 2026 at the Las Vegas Convention Center on Jan 7. PHOTOS BY DEECEE CARTER / MEDIA PUNCH VIA IPX

TV makers putting on big show abroad

Domestic brands ramping up for global share, with Mini LED tech narrowing gap with sector leaders

By LI JIAYING
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Chinese television brands are increasingly taking over the overseas operations of foreign peers, as the industry moves toward deeper integration and higher-end competition.

This trend has been highlighted by a series of recent deals. Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based Skyworth Group recently reached a long-term strategic cooperation agreement with Japanese multinational electronics manufacturer Panasonic.

Under the deal, Panasonic will transfer the operation of its TV business in the United States and Europe to Skyworth. The Chinese company will take full responsibility for joint research and development, manufacturing, sales, marketing and after-sales services for Panasonic-branded TVs in these regions, while the two sides will also collaborate on high-end OLED products.

"In the face of intensifying global competition, Panasonic's competitiveness in Europe and the US has weakened, while Skyworth, with its experience in overseas channel operations, is seeking to rapidly expand into mid-to-high-end markets," said Yang Liu, a senior analyst at research and advisory company Sigmaintell Consulting.

Yang added that as competition in the TV market becomes increasingly saturated and supply chain costs continue to rise, integration models combining "technology, supply chain, channels and scale" are likely to become a key trend.

"By leveraging technology for market access and channels for business expansion, Chinese brands are expected to steadily increase their global influence," Yang said.

Similar moves have been seen across the industry. In January, domestic home appliance heavyweight TCL, which floated in Hong Kong, announced plans to establish a joint venture with Sony, in which TCL will hold a 51 percent stake and Sony 49 percent, to take over the latter's home entertainment business, covering the full chain from R&D to sales and customer service.

Skyworth acquired the operating rights for Philips-branded TVs in North America last year, and earlier acquired German TV brand Metz. In 2017, Hisense acquired a 95 percent stake in Toshiba's TV business, forming TVS Regza.

These developments point to the growing global competitiveness of Chinese TV brands. Data from market research institute AVC Revo show that global TV shipments reached 264 million units in 2025, with Samsung, TCL, Hisense, LG and Xiaomi ranking as the top five vendors.

Notably, TCL's shipments surpassed 30 million units for the first time, narrowing its gap with Samsung to within 5 million units.

"Whether through JVs or brand licensing, competition in the global TV sector has increasingly evolved into a contest between Chinese and South Korean players," Yang said.

At the same time, weakening demand in the domestic market is accelerating Chinese manufacturers' push overseas. AVC Revo's data show that China's TV sales fell to 27.63 million units in 2025, the lowest level on record. Research firm Omdia's analysis also indicates that as government subsidies ended and consumers had already brought forward purchases, shipments in China in the fourth quarter of 2025 dropped 25.3 percent year-on-year.

The slowdown has weighed on domestic revenues. According to TCL's annual financial results filed with the Hong Kong bourse, the company's domestic TV business generated HK$17.2 billion ($2.2 billion) in 2025, down 9.7 percent year-on-year, while Skyworth's domestic revenue in the TV sector fell 7.4 percent to 11.78 billion yuan ($1.73 billion). Hisense's TV unit also recorded a 5.14 percent decline in domestic revenue.



Consumers check out Mini LED televisions at a shopping center in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, on Feb 21. JIN PENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

> "Mini LED TVs have become a major focus of the industry over the past two years. The technology is likely to play a significant role in helping Chinese manufacturers compete in the high-end segment."
>
> **Wang Xianming,** director of TV industry chain research at market intelligence firm Runto

Against this backdrop, overseas markets have become a key growth engine. TCL's overseas TV revenue rose 15.7 percent to HK$47.5 billion in 2025, while Skyworth's overseas revenue increased 21.8 percent to 9.885 billion yuan. Hisense's overseas revenue reached 29.23 billion yuan, accounting for more than half of its total.

Behind the revenue growth is a shift toward higher average selling prices and improved product mix, industry experts said.

"As Chinese players increasingly expand their global footprint, future competition between Chinese and South Korean brands will focus on the mid-to-high-end segment, which South Korean brands have long dominated," said Wang Gang, a home appliances analyst at Sinolink Securities.

A report by Sinolink Securities noted that while Chinese brands' global shipment share rose from 10 percent in 2015 to nearly 30 percent in 2025, their average prices still lag behind South Korean competitors by $200 to $300.

This gap, however, is beginning to narrow. Data from global research firm Counterpoint Research show that the combined share of TCL and Hisense in the global premium TV market rose from 22 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023 to 39 percent in the first quarter of 2025, while South Korean brands have seen a continuous decline since 2024.

"Chinese brands have shown strong agility in their growth strategies over the past year," said Matthew Rubin, principal analyst of TV Set Research at Omdia.

Rubin noted that even though accessing the US market is more challenging now, major Chinese brands have adjusted supply chains to meet new requirements, mainly through positioning profitability as a bigger priority.

As premium models remain the main driver of profitability, Chinese manufacturers are increasingly focusing on high-end display product profiles. TCL said in its annual financial statements that the average selling price in North America rose more than 20 percent in 2025, driven by larger screen sizes and premium products such as Mini LED TVs.

Similarly, Hisense reported that shipments of its Mini LED TVs grew more than 26 percent year-on-year, and it ranked first globally in ultra-large TV segments of 98 inches and above, as well as 100 inches and above, with shares of 30.3 percent and 57.1 percent, respectively.

Skyworth also said its cooperation with Panasonic will focus on high-end technologies such as OLED, Mini LED, smart system integration and image processing algorithms.

According to Omdia, global Mini LED TV penetration rose from 3.1 percent in 2024 to 6.1 percent in 2025, with TCL ranking first globally with a 31.1 percent share after a 118 percent surge in shipments.

"Mini LED TVs have become a major focus of the industry over the past two years," said Wang Xianming, director of TV industry chain research at market intelligence firm Runto.

Wang noted that global Mini LED TV shipments reached 7.85 million units in 2024, surpassing OLED TV shipments of 6.12 million units for the first time. In 2025, that lead widened further and the trend is expected to continue in the coming years.

"The technology is likely to play a significant role in helping Chinese manufacturers compete in the high-end segment," Wang said.

Zhang Hong, deputy general manager of Sigmaintell's large-display division, said competition in the premium Mini LED segment has evolved into differentiated technology paths between Chinese and South Korean brands.

"Chinese manufacturers are pursuing multiple approaches, with Hisense focusing on RGB-Mini LED and TCL positioning its flagship products around SQD-Mini LED, while South Korean players such as Samsung and LG continue to adopt a dual-track strategy centered on both OLED and Mini LED technologies," Zhang said.

China's vacuums sweep into overseas markets with high-tech prowess

By LI JIAYING

As their global market share continues to expand, domestic robot vacuum brands are no longer seen as budget alternatives, but are increasingly setting the pace in performance and user experience in the global market.

From Dreame's X50 Ultra robot vacuum being named in Time Magazine's Best Inventions of 2025 — the only robot vacuum on the list — to Chinese brands dominating Amazon's best-seller rankings, the rise of Chinese robot vacuum players is becoming increasingly visible to global consumers.

According to a report released by market intelligence IDC in March, global shipments of home cleaning robots reached 32.72 million units in 2025, up 20.1 percent year-on-year. Notably, Chinese manufacturers — including Roborock, Ecovacs, Dreame, Xiaomi and Narwal — took all top five spots in terms of global shipments.

"Chinese manufacturers played a central role in driving the steady growth of the global robot vacuum market in 2025, supported by ongoing product innovation, stronger channel execution and the continued release of demand," said Zhao Siquan, a senior analyst at IDC China. "Going forward, competition will increasingly center on AI capabilities and ecosystem integration, with technological innovation becoming the key differentiator."

The shifting market dynamics are also reflected in the fortunes of traditional players. iRobot, a US pioneer in the robot vacuum industry, filed for bankruptcy late last year and agreed to be acquired by one of its Chinese suppliers, Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based Picea Group.

In a post-bankruptcy interview, iRobot CEO Gary Cohen said the company had fallen about four years behind Chinese competitors on product innovation.

"Driven by breakthroughs in laser navigation, AI-based visual recognition, multi-sensor fusion and embodied intelligence algorithms, Chinese robot vacuum brands have moved ahead of traditional incumbents such as iRobot in overall product intelligence," said Jiang Han, senior analyst at market consultancy Pangoal.

Driven by a dual strategy jointly powered by technological innovation and scenario adaptation, Chinese industry players are able to tailor products to different household layouts and flooring conditions across markets, thereby forming differentiated competitiveness, Jiang said.



A visitor tries out Dreame's vacuum during a home appliance expo in Shanghai on Aug 1. SHI JUE / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Take the European market as an example, where wall-to-wall carpeting is common in many households. While the 'mop-lifting' function has been introduced as a solution, its limited lifting height means that long-pile carpets can still get wet," said Meng Jia, president of Dreame's robotic vacuum division.

To address the challenge, the manufacturer developed a detachable mop function specifically for carpeted homes. In vacuuming mode, the mop remains at the base station, and is automatically installed only when mopping is required, Meng said.

> "The ability to respond swiftly to these pain points is key to gaining a competitive advantage."
>
> **Meng Jia,** president of Dreame's robotic vacuum division

"The ability to respond swiftly to these pain points is key to gaining a competitive advantage," he added.

Another common frustration in everyday homes targeted by the Chinese brand is the difficulty of cleaning corners, where traditional robot vacuums often leave gaps of around 5 centimeters along edges, Meng explained.

In this regard, the manufacturer developed a bionic robotic arm that extends the mop to reach edges and mimic human cleaning, reducing gaps to less than 0.1 cm. Its robot vacuums equipped with this feature have sold over 7 million units as of late April.

According to Meng, such strong product capabilities have given Chinese brands the confidence to compete in the global high-end segment.

"With globally pioneering technologies such as the bionic robotic arm, embedded base station and binocular 3D vision-based obstacle avoidance, our flagship models are priced close to premium home appliances in markets such as Western Europe and North America, yet have still become a preferred choice among local consumers," he said.

The strategy has also translated into market performance. In 2025, Dreame's robotic vacuum cleaners ranked first in market share across 30 countries and regions, with its share exceeding 40 percent in 18 markets including Germany, Sweden and Poland. The company's revenue from the segment also doubled in 2025, marking its sixth consecutive year of 100 percent growth.

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TRAVEL







Left: Fishermen tend circular fish cages on Lake Victoria in Busia, Kenya. Aquaculture sustains local livelihoods along the lakeshore. VICTOR RABALLA / CHINA DAILY **Center:** Tourists unwind at dusk beside Lake Victoria in Kisumu, Kenya. LI YAHUI / XINHUA **Right:** The Kit Mikayi rock formation rises dramatically from the landscape in Seme, Kisumu, a towering stack of naturally balanced stones. VICTOR RABALLA / CHINA DAILY

New life beckons for Lake Victoria

As the first light touches the horizon, the area awakens, weaving tales of tradition and transformation on Kisumu's shores

By **VICTOR RABALLA**
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In Kisumu's Dunga Beach on the shoreline of Lake Victoria in Kenya, the day begins before the sun even rises.

It's a place where morning clouds drift lazily over horizons that seem endless and where human life remains deeply intertwined with the water and sky.

As both tourists and locals gather at daybreak, the first light slowly reveals a searing energy. Wooden boats, anchored shoulder-to-shoulder, rise and fall to the tunes of the tide, almost as if the lake is breathing.

Here, fishing is more than an economic activity; it is a culture, identity and living inheritance passed from one generation to the next.

At this landing site just 5 kilometers from the central business district of Kenya's third-largest city, entire communities revolve around the catching, drying, selling and feasting of fish, mainly Nile perch and tilapia.

"See that dock over there?" gestures Lillian Ochieng', a long-time fish trader from the region. Her gaze sweeps across a cluster of small canoes returning from night expeditions, their silhouettes cutting through the mist like returning ghosts of the water.

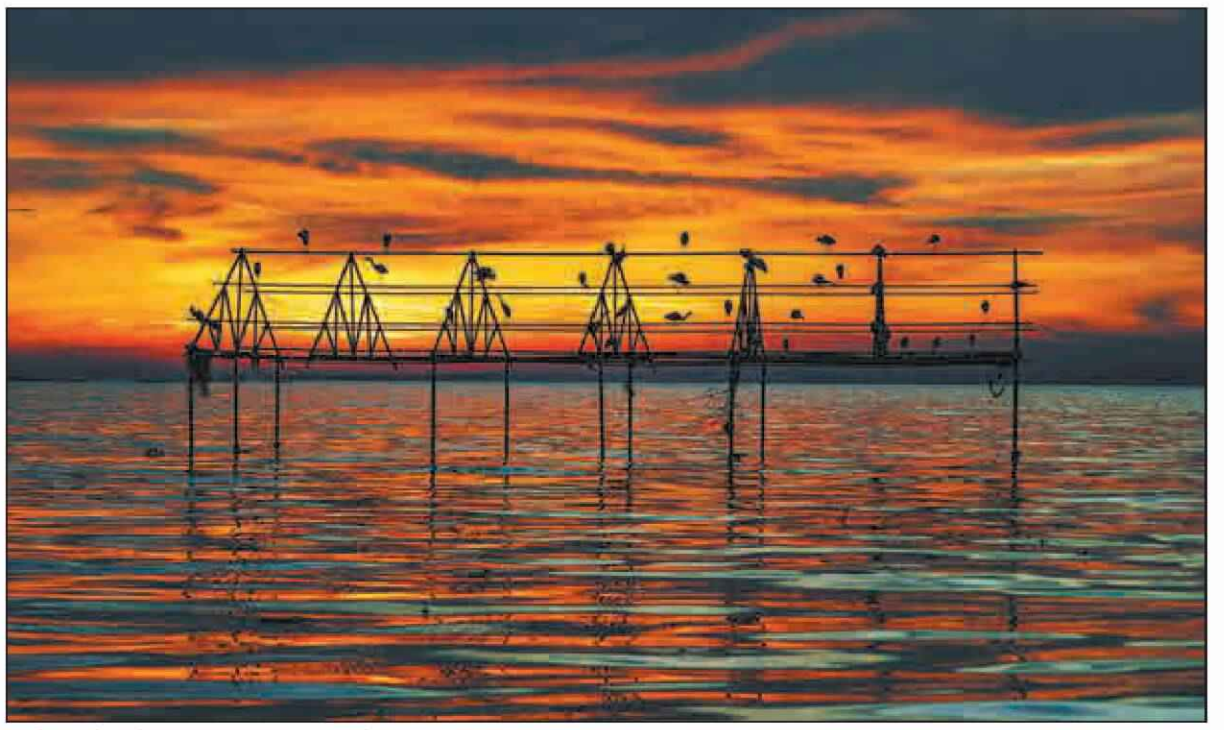
She pauses, a faint smile crossing her face, as though balancing years of memory against the weight of the present moment.

"My grandmother stood on this same shore," she said softly. "She learned how to smoke fish here, my mother learned how to sell fish here and it is now my turn. We laugh, we argue, we survive ... and we come back again tomorrow ... this is part of our lives."

The soft creaking of timber, the distant calls of fishers and the gentle slap of water against wooden hulls blend into a rhythm that belongs to the shores of Lake Victoria, second in size only to North America's Lake Superior among freshwater lakes.

Sprawling across roughly 68,800 square kilometers, this shared water resource between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania delivers breathtakingly consistent sunrises and sunsets, moments so serene and spectacular that they seem to pause the world in quiet admiration.

In that gentle surrender, time itself appears to loosen its grip — until the watch on your wrist feels unnecessary — as if the lake has its own way of reminding you that some moments are not meant to be measured, only lived.



Birds perch and rest on structures over Lake Victoria in Kisumu, Kenya. XIE JIANFEI / XINHUA

Region of possibilities

Beyond Lake Victoria's enduring legacy as a fishing hub, Kisumu is quietly stirring to life as an emerging tourism destination. This is not only propelled by the allure of the lake but as a gateway to some of the region's most iconic safari destinations.

Just beside the lakeshore lies the serene Kisumu Impala Sanctuary, where wildlife roams against a stunning lakeside backdrop. Nearby, Ndere Island offers a tranquil escape, rich in birdlife and framed by sweeping panoramic views of the lake.

Visitors also have the opportunity to enjoy fishing boat excursions and immerse themselves in local homesteads and traditional fishing communities, with a visit to the Kisumu Museum offering insight into the region's cultural heritage and history.

Further afield, the iconic Kit Mikayi rises dramatically from the ground, steeped in Luo folklore and symbolizing a polygamous family structure.

The monument's name means "stone of the first wife". It's not just a natural wonder, but a towering stack of massive rocks, rising around 40 meters high. The rocks are naturally balanced on top of each other, forming an impressive structure.

You can even climb parts of it for views of the surrounding countryside. It's also considered a sacred site for prayers, rituals and spiritual gatherings.

To the south, the bird-rich Dunga wetland and the flamingo-dotted Lake Simbi Nyaima offer rare ecotourism experiences, drawing nature enthusiasts into a quieter, more intimate encounter with the region.

For Vivian Kobe, founder and managing director of Viba Explore Tours, the magic of Lake Victoria lies not just in its beauty, but in its untold stories.

"When visitors come here, they expect to see water," she says. "But what they discover is an entire way of life: fishing communities, birdlife, islands, culture. Lake Victoria is not just a destination, it's an experience layered with history and human connection."

Kobe has spent years curating immersive travel experiences, from sunrise boat rides at Dunga to cultural tours through villages and island excursions across the lake.

She believes the region is only beginning to scratch the surface of its tourism potential. "We're now seeing more travelers looking for authentic, slower experiences," she says. "Lake Victoria offers exactly that, unfiltered, intimate and deeply rooted in community."

Just beyond the bustle of Dunga Beach lies the fragile, thriving ecosystem of the Dunga wetland, a 500-hectare stretch of papyrus plants, water channels and birdlife that has quietly become one of western Kenya's most remarkable ecotourism sites.

Hesborne Okoth Owino, the site and species coordinator at Dunga Wetland Swamp Boardwalk, says the wetland hosts 156 bird species, including endangered and migratory varieties.

The wetland offers a rare glimpse into biodiversity, from the elegant gray crowned crane to the elusive sitatunga antelope, that continues to draw nature lovers from Europe, the United States and, increasingly, China.



Fishermen dock their boats along the shores of Dunga in Kisumu, Kenya. VICTOR RABALLA / CHINA DAILY

> We are witnessing a noticeable rise in Chinese visitors at Sarova Imperial (Hotel), a clear sign of growing international interest in Kisumu and the wider Lake Victoria region, which is prompting us to adjust our offerings to better meet their expectations."
>
> **Duncun Mwangi,** managing director of Sarova Imperial Hotel in Kisumu, Kenya

"Between 6 am and 9 am, you can record up to 60 bird species in a single session at Dunga Boardwalk," Owino says. "It's one of the most rewarding birding experiences in the region."

The boardwalk is a sightseeing spot built over a wetland swamp filled with papyrus reeds. The raised wooden walkway stretches into the lake area, creating the enchanting illusion of walking on water, immersed in the stillness and beauty of nature all around you.

Even more fascinating is how human activity subtly intersects with nature. Fish cages scattered across parts of the lake have begun influencing bird migration patterns, occasionally attracting flamingos. But a quiet transformation is underway. The rows of floating fish cages that dot sections of the lake stand as symbols of a new economic frontier.

In Busia County, entrepreneur Peter Odongo has embraced cage culture fish farming, turning the lake into a controlled yet thriving production system.

"The lake has always fed us," Odongo says.

"But now we are learning how to work with it differently, more sustainably, more predictably."

Fish farming is rapidly gaining ground as pressure mounts on dwindling wild stocks among the more than 40 million people who depend on the Lake Victoria basin, whose expansive shoreline stretches across the three East African countries.

For investors and local communities alike, it represents both opportunity and adaptation: an evolution of tradition in the face of modern challenges.

City in transition

Back on land, Kisumu's skyline tells another story, one of growth and ambition. Hotels, apartments and new infrastructure projects signal rising investor confidence.

Duncun Mwangi, managing director of Sarova Imperial Hotel, says the lakeside city is poised for a tourism breakthrough.

"We're seeing gradual expansion in tourism offerings, from water buses to safari vessels, that allow visitors to experience the lake in new ways," Mwangi says.

Improved infrastructure — including the Standard Gauge Railway extension to Malaba, linking the coastal city of Mombasa to Uganda's border — could boost travel patterns and promote domestic tourism around Lake Victoria, he says.

Air travel to Kisumu remains relatively expensive and limits tourist inflows, he says.

To adjust to the growing number of global visitors, Sarova Group of Hotels has tapped into its experience to develop Asian cuisine, among other major international culinary offerings, to ensure a diverse and globally appealing dining experience.

"We are witnessing a noticeable rise in Chinese visitors at Sarova Imperial, a clear sign of growing international interest in Kisumu and the wider Lake Victoria region, which is prompting us to adjust our offerings to better meet their expectations," Mwangi says.

Abhishek Sharma, general manager of Acacia Hotel in Kisumu, says the ongoing upgrades of the Kisumu International Airport could see growing demand for premium experiences tied to the lake for guests who take direct and chartered flights.

The Kenyan government has initiated works on a runway extension, construction of a modern cargo terminal with cold storage to support fish exports, and improved air traffic and operational systems.

Sharma says Acacia Hotel has established an independent travel desk to assist guests who want more than accommodation, conferencing and dining.

"From lake tours to cultural sites ... and tour drives around the neighboring towns, our facility offers a complete and immersive experience for every traveler," he says.

At a regional level, Charles Kataro, CEO of Lake Victoria Tourism Association, underlines the need to tap into the growing interest from Chinese travelers in the region.

"Chinese travelers are increasingly seeking less crowded, experiential destinations, which plays strongly in Western Kenya's favor," Kataro says.

The association has started to capitalize on the Chinese market by collaborating with tour operators and online travel agents, leveraging digital platforms such as Douyin — China's TikTok, introducing familiarization trips for Chinese influencers, and aligning the destination with Belt and Road-related travel narratives.

Kataro, who envisions a bold future for the lake, is also championing the introduction of cruise tourism that would connect Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania into a seamless regional travel circuit.

"Lake Victoria can become a regional tourism hub," he says, imagining a lake that no longer divides borders but links experiences across them.

That vision is beginning to take shape, with the Kenya Tourism Board working with stakeholders to co-create new strategies of promoting the region, from city hotels in Kisumu to island lodges scattered across the lake's vast waters.

Board member Victor Shitakha says cruise tourism is expected to spark activity across key ports, including Kisumu; Tanzania's Mwanza, Musoma and Bukoba; and in Uganda, Entebbe, Port Bell and Jinja.

For Malcolm Ormiston, founder of WaterBus, which connects more than 10 communities across the lake region through flexible routes, the network is expected to expand as demand grows.

"Offering improved rural transport, ensuring fast, safe and comfortable journeys, the service carries more than 1 million people per year," Ormiston says, adding that the locally built vessels support regional industry.

While the water buses primarily serve as a transport solution, moving passengers and goods between landing sites and islands, the fleet is transforming mobility and tourism across Lake Victoria.

The vessels also offer sunset cruises, island excursions, bird-watching trips and relaxation cruises, opening up new opportunities in the region.

Operators say the water buses are "the cleanest way to travel the lake", generating 95 percent fewer hydrocarbons per passenger per hour compared with small two-stroke outboard engines commonly used on canoes in commercial passenger operations.

To reshape the urban life of the city, which was founded in 1901, Kisumu identified the lakefront area as a key asset and proposed its development as an extension of the central business district.

Under Governor Anyang' Nyong'o, the Kisumu Lakefront Development Corporation was established to drive this transformation, guided by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

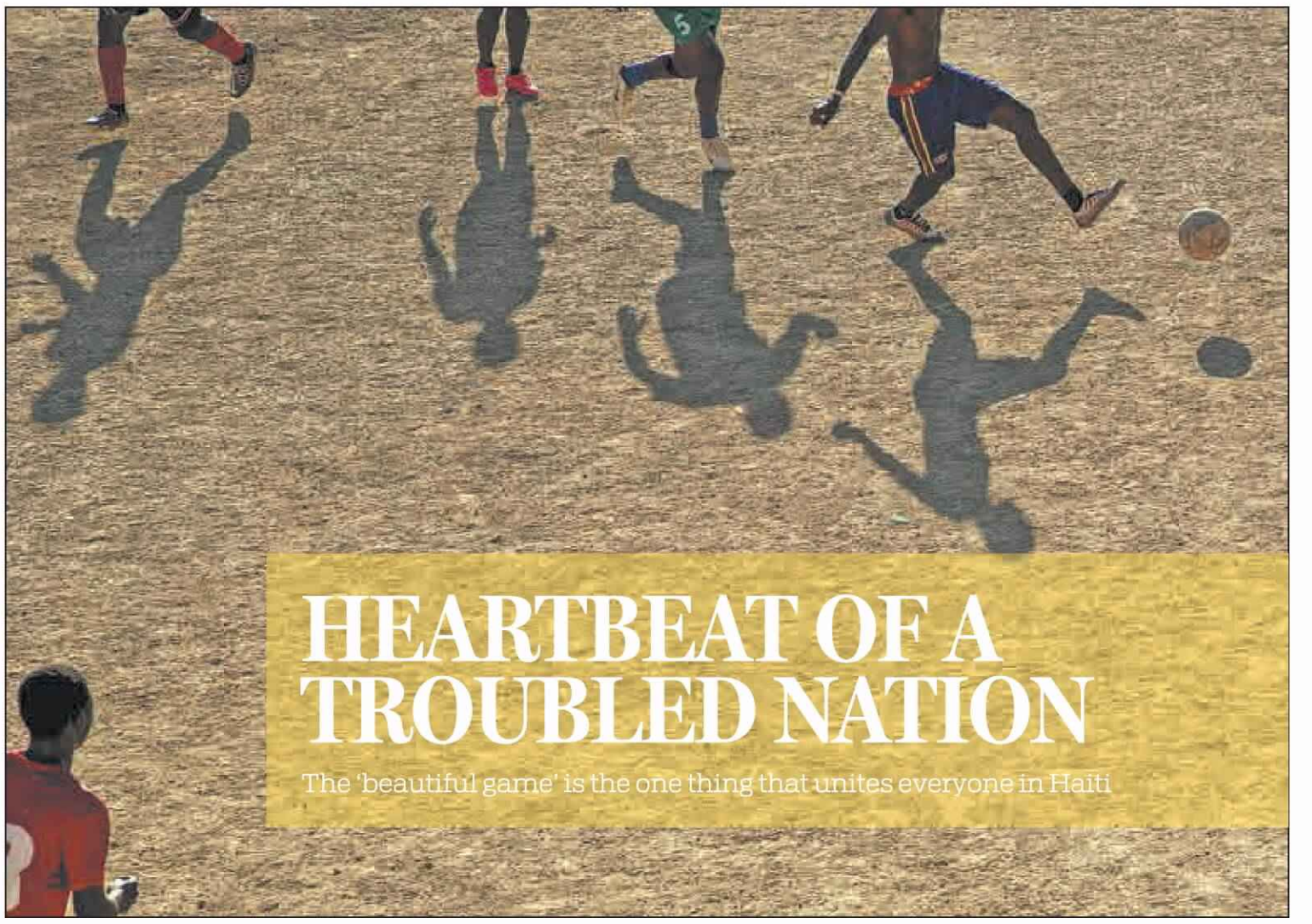
By turning the waterfront into an accessible and visually striking public space, Lake Victoria is fast becoming Kisumu's defining asset, recasting the city as a modern waterfront hub where nature, tourism and commerce converge.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:41 PM

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SPORTS

SOCCER



HEARTBEAT OF A TROUBLED NATION

The 'beautiful game' is the one thing that unites everyone in Haiti

People play soccer in Petion-Ville, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on April 12. The Haitian national team has qualified for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, reaching the Finals for just the second time in its history. Soccer is the most popular sport in Haiti. ALL PHOTOS BY AFP

On a street in a suburb of Port-au-Prince, a dozen teenagers using stones for goalposts are immersed in a Sunday game of soccer as traffic winds around them.

Haiti has many problems, including political instability, poverty and crime, but through it all, the heart of the nation beats for soccer.

Haiti's qualification for this summer's World Cup has come as a breath of fresh air for the poorest nation in the Americas, the nearly 12 million people of which have long grappled with gang violence that has caused a humanitarian crisis.

"Soccer is hope and love. It inspires pride and passion," said Salome Sandler Tally, founder and coach of the women's section of Aigle Noir AC, a professional club based in the Haitian capital.

"Qualifying for the World Cup is something special for a country that loves soccer so deeply."

The Grenadiers, as Haiti's team is known, made their only previous appearance at the Finals when it was held in West Germany in 1974.

"It is incredible to have achieved this 52 years later," Tally said.

'Pagan ceremonies'

In early April, the cash-strapped government allocated 264 million gourdes ($2 million) for the national soccer team as a qualification bonus and to help pay for World Cup preparations.

Haiti will face Brazil, Morocco, and Scotland in Group C. Its games will be played in the United States, which is co-hosting the tournament with Mexico and Canada from June 11-July 19.

In its World Cup qualifying campaign, Haiti did not play a single match on home soil.

The nation's main venue — the Sylvio Cator Stadium — has been closed since February 2024, as it is located in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood controlled by gangs, as is about 90 percent of the capital.

But the "beautiful game" is played everywhere by people who are barefoot, in flip-flops or in sneakers. They have matches on asphalt, dirt or worn-out artificial turf — in neighborhood leagues, interschool competitions and tournaments involving both professional and amateur clubs.

Patrice Dumont, a former senator and sports columnist, said that in Haiti, a deeply religious nation, summer holiday leagues "are sites of pagan ceremonies that would make even the most devout fanatics blanche" — an apparent reference to the charged atmosphere at the matches.

"You see them in every community — provided there is space — ranging from three-a-side matches to full 11-a-side games, always drawing massive crowds of spectators," he said.

Evens Lezin, a 49-year-old amateur player, said qualification for the World Cup will give "hope" to Haiti's youth.

"We can move forward, but it requires discipline," he said.

"Nowadays, many young people are delinquent. They struggle with alcohol, they smoke and they lack healthy recreational pursuits, but soccer can offer an escape."

In every conversation

The topic of soccer finds its way into every conversation. It bridges generational and social divides, and is talked about in restaurants, supermarkets, in living rooms and over the airwaves.

"Soccer is probably one of the few spaces for socialization still accessible to a large segment of the youth. It is the quintessential conversation starter," said soccer fan Marc Donald Orphee, 35.

Even though the majority of the men's and women's national team players play abroad, that has not diminished the public's devotion to the national side.

Pierreline Nazon, 18, a star of the women's under-20s team, compares herself to Melchie Dumornay, a Haitian midfielder for OL Lyonnes, a top French team.

Nazon spoke to reporters as she took time out from a training session in the hills above Petion-Ville, a suburb of the capital spared from violence.

"My dream has always been to play soccer — to be like Melchie, and even to surpass her," she said.

"I know I will achieve this. That is why I keep training, seizing every opportunity to play, even though the situation in Haiti is difficult."

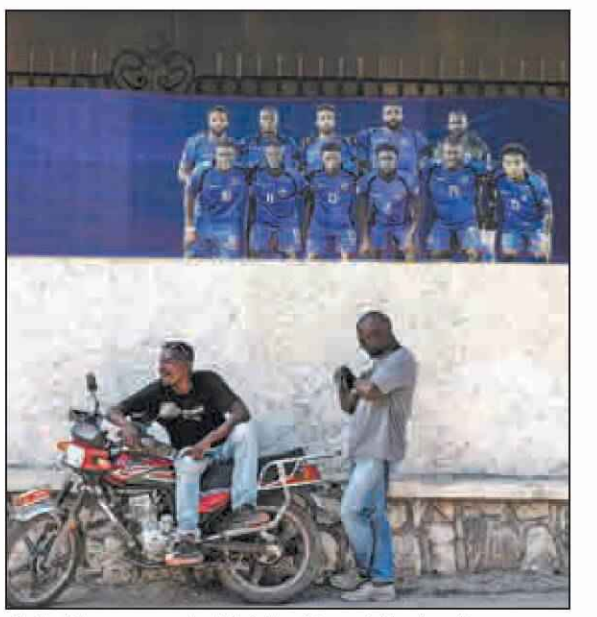
AFP











In Haiti, soccer is played everywhere, by people who are barefoot, in flip-flops or in sneakers; in matches on asphalt, dirt or worn-out artificial turf, for neighborhood leagues, interschool competitions and tournaments involving both professional and amateur clubs. A quintessential conversation starter, it bridges generational and social divides.

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SPORTS

BASKETBALL



After suffering two ACL tears in consecutive years, including one in a World Cup final, 31-year-old Wu Tongtong has returned to the court and rebuilt herself into one of the most complete guards of the 2025-26 Women's Chinese Basketball Association (WCBA) season, earning both regular-season MVP and assists leader honors, as well as re-establishing herself in the national team setup. AGENCIES





WALKING TALL ONCE AGAIN

Two career-threatening ACL injuries couldn't keep WCBA MVP Wu Tongtong down

Few setbacks are more cruel for an athlete than reaching the peak of their career only to be forced off the world stage by a torn ACL.

For Wu Tongtong, that ordeal came twice.

For the 1.75-meter guard, defined less by physical stature than by resilience, the challenge was not only to return, but to rebuild.

After suffering two ACL tears in consecutive years, including one in a World Cup final, the 31-year-old returned to the court and rebuilt herself into one of the most complete guards of the 2025-26 Women's Chinese Basketball Association (WCBA) season, earning both regular-season MVP and leading assists honors.

Setbacks

Just a few years ago, though, Wu's career appeared to be unraveling.

In the final of the 2022 FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup in Sydney, Wu, one of China's best-known all-around guards, combining a sturdy frame with reliable shooting range, suffered a devastating ACL tear in her left knee, along with severe meniscus damage.

For many athletes, such an injury can seriously alter — if not permanently end — a career.

After surgery and rehabilitation, she initially responded with optimism. The forced pause, she believed, might offer some balance after years of nonstop competition between national team duty and the WCBA.

"People always have ups and downs," she said. "I could rest, spend time with family, reset and come back."

Her recovery from the first surgery progressed smoothly, reinforcing her belief that a return to form was within reach.

Then came the second blow.

In June 2023, during a training session as she neared a comeback, Wu tore the ACL in her right knee.

"I hadn't even officially returned to the court, and I went down in the same way again," she said. "That made me feel desperate."

Before the injuries, Wu had rarely been sidelined.

Coaches and trainers consistently praised her physical condition. But, after the second tear, uncertainty replaced expectation.

Walking became difficult. Daily life, once effortless, required assistance.

Watching others play from afar, she was forced to confront an unfamiliar identity as an athlete separated from the game.

Struggle

Wu, who grew up in Fuxin in Northeast China's Liaoning province, had shown athletic promise from an early age. She ran fast, skated well and drew attention from multiple sports programs, with coaches from different disciplines trying to recruit her.

But when her father asked what she wanted to pursue, the girl's answer was immediate: basketball.

"At the time, I didn't have big ambitions like making the national team," she said. "I just loved playing."

That love supported her as she left home at a young age to pursue basketball, and it also became her anchor through the darkest period of her career.

To shorten the recovery timeline, Wu made a bold medical decision during her second surgery, opting for an artificial ligament implant.

Doctors warned that it would carry greater risk and long-term uncertainty than traditional reconstruction using the body's own tissue.

"If I didn't do it, I would face another long recovery period," she said. "Basketball has given me so much. I was willing to give something back."

The road back, however, was grueling.

In training, she sometimes struggled with basic movements, even simple jumps onto a 10-centimeter platform that children could complete easily.

Repetition bred doubt, and there were moments when she questioned whether she would ever return to the elite stage.

Driven more by inner resolve than external examples, Wu leaned into solitude during rehabilitation, spending 438 days away from competition while rebuilding herself physically and mentally, step by step.

"I always place responsibility on myself," she said.

"As long as I am still here, and mentally strong, I can face anything."

Rebirth

Her return began quietly, without fanfare.

Last season, she left Shanxi Flame after nine years and joined Xinjiang Magic Deer. The transition coincided with her ongoing physical rebuilding and a team still trying to find its shape.

The turning point came in the offseason, when she trained under former China women's national team head coach Zheng Wei with the Guangdong squad for China's 15th National Games. Immersed in high-intensity competition throughout the summer, she went through a physically demanding, but transformative period that gradually restored both her fitness and confidence, ultimately helping her team win the title.

By the 2025-26 WCBA season, Xinjiang had emerged as one of the league's surprise contenders.

Led by veterans including Wu, Wang Xuemeng and Zhang Qifang, the team steadily advanced through the season and into the semifinals.

Wu played a central role, averaging 17 points and 8.9 assists per game, while serving as both the primary initiator and offensive organizer.

"I thought I would improve, but I didn't expect these awards," she said. "It's an affirmation. I'm grateful to my teammates."

Before each game, her primary wish is simply to come through unscathed, but once the ball is tipped, caution disappears and competitive instinct takes over.

"I've made peace with the injuries," she said.

"If you keep dwelling on the past, you're wasting the present version of yourself."

The injuries have also reshaped how she sees her role. Once focused mainly on her own performance, she now sees herself as a connector and mentor.

On the sidelines, she often breaks down tactical details for younger teammates and emphasizes injury prevention, urging them to value their bodies.

As Chinese women's basketball continues to evolve, and younger players rise through the system, Wu acknowledges that her national team role may be changing. Instead, she is focused on something simpler and harder to lose — her love of the game.

"Anyone who truly loves something should have something to pursue," she said. "If someone has gone through similar difficulties as me, I hope they can stand back up, too."

XINHUA

> "I've made peace with the injuries. If you keep dwelling on the past, you're wasting the present version of yourself ... If someone has gone through similar difficulties as me, I hope they can stand back up, too."
>
> **Wu Tongtong,** WCBA MVP on suffering, and recovering from, two consecutive ACL tears



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Recycling boom

Middle East unrest reshapes plastic supply landscape

ASIA FOCUS, PAGE 4



Foreign hosts in Hainan FTP help sell to world

BUSINESS, PAGE 10



Slow living revival

Youth embrace traditional crafts, rituals to counter digital fatigue

Z WEEKLY, PAGE 14

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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2026

XI'S VISION | GOVERNANCE PERFORMANCE

Village fostered new philosophy of development

Recasting of relationship between growth and environmental protection resonates still

By **ZHAO JIA**
zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

More than two decades ago, Yucun, a village in Anji county of East China's Zhejiang province, was known for what locals called the "stone economy". Quarrying and cement production brought income and made Yucun one of Anji's better-off villages, but the prosperity came at a heavy environmental cost: Hills stripped bare, waterways polluted and the air thick with dust.

Yucun began shutting down its quarries, a decision that sharply reduced village income. The choice that the village faced was stark: Keep quarrying, or seek a different future — one built around ecological restoration.

At that crossroads, Xi Jinping, then Party secretary of Zhejiang province, visited the village in August 2005. After hearing briefings from local officials, he endorsed the shutdown as a wise move and said growth should not come at the expense of the environment, because such growth is not development.

He also put forward a concept that would later become widely cited: "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets."

The idea was rooted in a concrete local choice rather than abstract theory, and it soon reached far beyond one village. It resonated not only because it recast the relationship between environmental protection and economic growth, but also because it challenged the GDP-centered view of governance performance that prevailed at the time.

Qian Kunfang, then Party secretary of Anji county, recalled that in an era when "GDP first, even industry first" prevailed, economic indicators were the most direct yardstick for judging local officials. He said that if officials failed to deliver results, they were effectively putting their political future at risk.

In that context, Xi's endorsement of Yucun's shift sent a clear message: Restructuring the economy and protecting the environment were not a retreat from development, but a different understanding of what real development — and real governance performance — should mean.

Two decades later, that shift is being reinforced through a Party-wide education campaign on fostering and practicing a correct view of governance performance.

For Xi, the commitment to high-quality development should become an important part of officials' correct view of governance performance.

Speaking on Jan 20 at a study session for principal officials at the provincial and ministerial levels, Xi said that such a view requires officials to proceed from reality, follow objective laws, and rely on sound decision-making and hard work to deliver results that stand the test of practice and history and are recognized by the public.

In 2023, during the annual two sessions meetings of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies, Xi warned against taking a hasty, resource-depleting or GDP-only path, saying that this was why the new development philosophy must be firmly established.

The environmental field has been one of the most visible areas where that philosophy has taken shape. Xi has repeatedly emphasized that "to protect the environment is to protect productivity, and to improve the environment is to boost productivity".

Yucun offers a concrete example of how that principle works on the ground. Yu Xiaoping, deputy Party chief of Yucun, said the village has stayed true to its ecological foundation while developing agritourism, cultural tourism and educational tourism programs based on local conditions, turning ecological gains into a driver of common prosperity.

According to Yu, in 2025, the village's collective economic income reached 17.22 million yuan ($2.52 million), per capita income among villagers stood at 74,800 yuan, and the village received 1.25 million tourist visits. Yucun distributed 3.17 million yuan in dividends that year.

To some foreign observers, China's green transition has also become a test of how governance performance should be understood — not by short-term output alone, but by long-term public benefit.

David Ferguson, a British translator, said that people-centered development is the overarching theme of the new development philosophy, which advocates innovation, coordination, green development, openness and shared prosperity. "Green development, one of President Xi's priorities, is about giving people a beautiful living environment and handing it down to their children and grandchildren."

See ***Growth,*** *page 3*

Historic win



Wu Yize of China poses with the trophy after beating Shaun Murphy of England in the finals of the World Snooker Championship 2026 in Sheffield, United Kingdom, on Monday. Wu became the second Chinese to win the title after Zhao Xintong's triumph last year. LI YING / XINHUA

Rush to return



Passengers check in with their ID cards on Tuesday at the Jiaxing South Railway Station in Zhejiang province. Tuesday marked the last day of the five-day May Day holiday, and destinations across the country witnessed a sharp increase in travel traffic. JIN PENG / FOR CHINA DAILY **Editorial, page 6**

All-out rescue urged after fireworks blast

By **CHEN MEILING** in Beijing and **HE CHUN** in Changsha

President Xi Jinping demanded a prompt investigation and proper handling of the aftermath following an explosion at a fireworks plant in Central China's Hunan province on Monday, stressing that those responsible must be held accountable.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made an instruction ordering strengthened risk screening and hazard control in key sectors, enhanced public safety management, and efforts to safeguard people's lives and property.

Authorities across regions and departments must draw profound lessons from the accident and reinforce responsibility for workplace safety, Xi stressed.

Premier Li Qiang, who is also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, urged efforts to strengthen workplace safety in key industries and sectors and resolutely prevent the occurrence of major accidents.

Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing led senior officials from relevant departments to Liuyang, a county-level city under the provincial capital Changsha, on Tuesday to guide emergency rescue and response efforts following the explosion.

Zhang stressed the need to spare no effort in searching for the missing, treating the injured, and advancing the investigation and rectification of risks and hidden dangers in key industries and sectors.

He also called for intensifying the crackdown on illegal and noncompliant activities in the fireworks and hazardous chemicals industries. Violations — including overstaffing, excessive use of gunpowder, operations beyond the licensed scope, production exceeding designed capacity, and unauthorized alteration of workshop usage and production processes — must be severely penalized.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, will establish an accident investigation team to look into the case.

The explosion occurred at around 4:40 pm on Monday at the plant of Huasheng, a fireworks manufacturing and display company. As of late Tuesday, it had caused 26 deaths and had left 61 people injured.

Officials said at a news conference in Liuyang on Tuesday afternoon that on-site rescue operations had been basically completed, with efforts being made to treat the injured, prevent secondary disasters and inspect fireworks producers in the city, which have all halted operations as of 7 pm on Monday.

Before the conference, all participants observed a moment of silence for the victims.

Chen Bozhang, deputy Party secretary and mayor of Changsha, said that the Changsha Party Committee and the municipal government expressed deep condolences and offered sincere apologies to the victims' families, as well as the injured, other affected people and the whole of society.

Chen said that more than 1,500 personnel from multiple departments have been mobilized to carry out emergency rescue, medical treatment and other related work.

"Personnel verification is underway. The person in charge of the company has been detained by police," he added.

Ding Weiming, Party secretary and political commissar of Changsha's fire and rescue team, said that responders faced major challenges — a high risk of repeated explosions and harsh site conditions.

A large quantity of finished and semifinished products on site reignited sporadically, keeping the blasts going, Ding said, adding that gunpowder stored nearby could not be quickly moved, posing a threat to rescue workers.

Meanwhile, the plant's walls, pillars and roof had largely collapsed, burying victims and blocking access to the scene, he said.

Ding noted that fire trucks and remote-controlled water cannons will be used to protect the two intact but highly hazardous on-site gunpowder depots.

Liu Jiayong, secretary of the Party Leadership Group of the Changsha Health Commission, said that among the 61 injured, 55 have minor injuries and were in stable condition after receiving treatment, while six were in a critical condition and were receiving targeted treatment.

Dai Shuiwen, mayor of Liuyang, said, "We have closed fireworks plants and launched comprehensive safety inspections and rectification campaigns across all sectors simultaneously, in order to close regulatory loopholes, hold companies fully accountable for safety and raise overall safety standards."

Liuyang is a major fireworks manufacturing hub in China, accounting for about 60 percent of the domestic market and roughly 70 percent of the nation's exports.

Contact the writers at chenmeiling@chinadaily.com.cn

WORLD WATCH
By Dennis Munene

Zero-tariff policy to advance Africa's renaissance

China has expanded zero-tariff treatment to all 53 African countries that have diplomatic relations with it, a move that will reinvigorate the African renaissance dream and marks a major shift in China-Africa cooperation.

From May 1 this year to April 30, 2028, China will grant zero-tariff treatment — in the form of a preferential tariff rate — to 20 African countries that have established diplomatic ties with China and are not classified as least-developed countries. This builds on China's existing zero-tariff policy for 33 least-developed countries in Africa, which took effect in December 2024. Together, these 53 African countries will enjoy zero-tariff access to a consumer market of over 1.4 billion people — one of the largest in the world.

The zero-tariff policy presents a rare opportunity for China and Africa to upgrade trade, remove barriers and foster more open markets. It will also help Africa revitalize its industrialization and unlock agricultural potential, as well as modernize and standardize agricultural production and agri-processing. With zero tariffs in place, Africa is poised to attract Chinese investment and expand production capacity in mining — a sector that has long been a global supplier of critical minerals such as copper, cobalt and lithium — to drive the growth of local manufacturing industries.

See ***Policy,*** *page 6*

YUM CHA: GREETING THE DAY THE GUANGDONG WAY

Cantonese chefs help ensure traditional morning repast continues into the present

By **LI YINGXUE** and **LI WENFANG** in Guangzhou

At daybreak in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, the city seems to stir itself awake to a single call — "water's boiling, tea is perfect".

In the teahouses, bamboo steamers rise and cups are rinsed in practiced rhythm. Here, nothing dispels the night's fatigue quite like *yum cha*, or morning tea — "one pot of tea, two dim sum dishes".

China Vibes — FOOD —

For Patrick Parsons, Lord Oxmantown and heir apparent to the Earldom of Rosse in Ireland, this time-honored Lingnan ritual is not only a window to a different culture — one in which he has immersed himself for more than two decades, and shared with his Chinese wife of 22 years — but a deeply felt part of everyday life.

On Parsons' personal *yum cha* menu, *har gow* — delicate shrimp dumplings — takes pride of place.

"The wrapper is translucent, the texture is excellent. I love shrimp, and these are done beautifully," he said, adding that *siu mai*, or pork dumplings, is another favorite.

See ***Teahouses,*** *page 3*

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Vol.8 — No. 1821

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

INDEPTH

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM



Students from an equestrian school train at the arena of Tanlun Equestrian Town in Yihuang, Jiangxi province, on Dec 13. WAN XIANG / XINHUA

New generation saddles up for equine success

Equestrian sports sector spurred on by growing professionalism, popularity

By YANG FEIYUE
yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Kong Linghai's workday begins at six in the morning. He feeds and grooms his horses, cleans their stables, and then saddles them.

For the 28-year-old horse riding instructor at Mingyang Equestrian Club on the outskirts of Harbin, Heilongjiang province, these seemingly routine tasks are trust-building rituals with the animals in his care.

"Horses are living creatures and you have to understand their nature before you can communicate with them," he said.

Since Kong graduated from the Inner Mongolia Agricultural University with a degree in sport horse training and management six years ago, he has worked his way up from apprentice to instructor, cutting his teeth at equestrian clubs in Beijing and Harbin and teaching more than 6,000 students.

His trajectory reflects a broader shift, in which professionals with university and college equine training like Kong are becoming increasingly sought after in a country undergoing cultural changes in the relationship between humans and horses.

China is home to 3.6 million horses and more than 2,000 equestrian clubs, according to government data, and the sector's market size reached 21 billion yuan (about $2.9 billion) by the end of 2023. The figure is expected to surpass 60 billion yuan by 2030, according to the market consultancy iiMedia Research.

Lured by the thrill

When Huang Ying first saw a horse in late 2024, he was in his first semester at Hejun College in Huichang county, Jiangxi province. Before that, the 19-year-old's world revolved around basketball.

Then, the horses arrived at the college's newly built equestrian center. "When I saw them for the first time, I was amazed by how gentle and calm those large animals were," he recalled.

The first time he was given an opportunity to try horseback riding, he recorded the moment on his phone. "The horse's back was so high, and I was terrified. I was afraid of falling off. I was telling the people below to hold it steady," he said.

The thrill lured Huang into spending the following weeks mucking out stables, mixing feed, and hauling hay — work the college requires all equestrian students to do before they are allowed to mount a horse. It was during those hours of shoveling and sweeping that he began to consider a new path.

As Huang engaged in the stable chores, he formed a bond with the horses and chose to become an instructor after the faculty pointed him to equine career possibilities that also included training as a professional rider, farrier or stable manager. "I'm patient. I wanted to teach others, the way I was taught," he said.

In addition to his affinity with horses, he saw a career advantage in choosing equestrian sports.

"Basketball, soccer and badminton are too popular. There are too many people competing for those jobs. For someone like me, at a vocational college, going up against graduates from top-tier sports universities, I probably wouldn't stand a chance," he said.

Yu Hui, Huang's instructor at Hejun College, said the teaching objective is to train a new generation of industry professionals equipped with technical and management skills and formal credentials.

"Before, the equestrian coaching industry in China was dominated by people who were rough around the edges," Yu said candidly. "They might have known how to ride, but they lacked education."

A graduate of Wuhan Business University's horse racing and management program, Yu spent a decade working as an instructor in commercial equestrian clubs before joining the college in 2022, when the equestrian program was established.

He rose from apprentice to head instructor, specializing in youth education, show jumping, competition horse training, and instructor development.

The shift from club instructor to university instructor, he said, required a fundamental rethink of his role.

At the clubs, his students were children ages three to 16, brought by parents with specific goals of improving posture, or acquiring a riding credential to boost applications to Western universities, where equestrian skills are sometimes viewed favorably.

His teaching philosophy at the college follows a sequence: from understanding the horse and mastering the technique, before learning to work with people on a professional level. The top priority is treating horses with respect, he added.

"Equestrian sports are about equality between human and horse and any form of abuse is unacceptable," he noted.

This philosophy has already made an impact on students like Huang. "You have to be gentle with a horse. You can't shout at it or lose your temper. Horses can sense your emotions. If you approach them with anger, they'll lose trust in you. They might bite or kick," he said.

Huang learned to read the animal through subtle physical cues, such as the tilt of an ear, a shift in its stance and the rhythm of its breathing.

He recalled one horse in particular that was prone to becoming spooked and bolting. "I was scared. I thought, if I get seriously hurt from this, what happens to my career?"

Instead of backing away, he sought advice from his instructors, and over time, the horse began to trust him. "There's a sense of conquest, a sense of accomplishment, when you earn that trust," he said.

Grabbing the reins

Over the years, Kong Linghai has found increasing security with his equine career, and is a rarity among his peers for holding a formal university degree.

"When a horse is acting up, a trained professional will understand the animal's nature and apply systematic knowledge to address the issue. Someone without that background might resort to harsher, more forceful methods," Kong said.

The details matter when it comes to teaching in a real setting such as parents worrying about their child's safety, he said.

Kong recalled one incident, when a mother thought the horse was too big and "wild" for her son. He didn't change the horse. Instead, he observed the boy's riding skills and concluded that the problem wasn't the horse's temperament, but how the youngster was handling the reins.

He taught the child to adjust his grip and timing. Soon, the boy went from barely controlling the horse to riding it with ease. The parents went from constant complaining to full acceptance. "That's what specialized knowledge can do," Kong said.

Wang Yonghao, who runs Mingyang Equestrian Club in Harbin, said, "Instructors with formal education are far more capable overall than those who learned on the job".

Riders from the Inner Mongolia or the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous regions may have excellent riding skills, but they often lack the theoretical foundation and broader competencies that a formal education provides, he added.

Wang also views his equestrian club as part of a broader shift in how equestrian sports are being marketed in China.

Before opening the club in November 2025, Wang spent years in the field of culture and tourism, running a trail-riding camp in the vast Hulunbuir grassland in the north of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

He noticed a recurring pattern where many young people wanted to learn to ride but were put off by the cost of traditional equestrian clubs.

"Under the conventional model, lessons are expensive. Many families and young adults simply can't afford the tuition, even if they're drawn to the lifestyle," Wang said.

He set out to create something between a full-service club and a tourist attraction.

Mingyang sits on a 50,000-square-meter plot about 20 to 30 kilometers from downtown Harbin. It combines riding lessons with trail rides, camping, fishing, a petting zoo, and photo shoots. The aim, Wang said, is to "make equestrian sports more accessible — less remote and exclusive — so ordinary people can enjoy".

A casual ride costs 70 to 80 yuan per hour, while a structured lesson for a child runs from 300 to 400 yuan. A crash course designed for beginners costs around 900 yuan for enough sessions to learn basic control to ride independently.

In Beijing or Shanghai, comparable training would cost two to three times as much.

Four months after opening, the club's popularity exceeded Wang's expectations. "On weekends and holidays, we're fully booked," he said.

With 19 horses and four full-time instructors, the club can handle about 40 to 50 riders a day, plus family members who accompany them. On busy days, around 200 people come through the gates.

"What we're seeing is a shift. Equestrian sports are moving from being an elite pursuit to something more mainstream," he added.

Wang said the way forward involves continuing to bridge the gap between elite equestrian culture and the broader public.

"In a city of about 10 million people, only a few clubs offer serious instructions. That tells you how much room there is to grow," he said.

Rising enrollments

Yu, the instructor in Jiangxi, said the growth in demand is reflected in enrollment numbers.

When Hejun College launched its equestrian program in 2022, it admitted just over 20 students. By 2023, the number had grown to more than 40. By 2025, nearly 200 students were enrolled in equestrian studies.

Yu said the college now boasts one of the largest equestrian facilities in Jiangxi, with a 40-by-50-meter indoor arena and a 30-by-40-meter outdoor training area, a two-story stable with 40 stalls, and a fleet of 19 horses, including one warmblood used for competition. A second, larger venue is under construction nearby, designed to host major competitions.

The curriculum combines practical stable work with theoretical courses on horse nutrition and care, stable management and equine anatomy.

"The most important attraction for students is job placement," Yu said. "Our first-time employment rate is over 95 percent, with more than 90 percent of graduates entering equestrian-related fields," he said.

The college has partnerships with more than 200 equestrian clubs across China, many in first- and second-tier cities where the industry is growing fastest. Some students receive job offers before they graduate. "The market has a huge appetite for skilled talent," Yu said.

The growth of Hejun's program reflects a broader policy push. In 2020, China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the General Administration of Sport jointly issued the national equestrian industry development plan (2020–25), which explicitly called for integrating the equestrian industry with tourism, culture, and animal husbandry.

The plan envisioned a complete industrial chain, from breeding to sporting events management, and signaled that equestrian sports were no longer niche hobbies but a recognized economic sector.

Zhao Chunjiang, director of the equine research center at China Agricultural University in Beijing, sees the trend as part of a larger pattern.

Equestrian sports and their competitive levels are closely tied to a country's economic development, Zhao said. As incomes rise in China, he expects participation to grow accordingly.

The benefits extend beyond physical fitness, he said. Working with horses builds willpower and resilience, and the sport's inherent emphasis on etiquette can add a refined quality to a person's character that is increasingly valued in contemporary society, Zhao explained.

Yet he acknowledges that barriers remain. Equestrian sports demand high-quality facilities and well-trained horses. They're still a niche activity in China, not yet as widespread as in Western Europe, he added.

Zhao argues for innovation in business models to broaden participation, along with greater domestic breeding of sport horses to reduce costs and improve animal welfare.





Left: A teenager trains at an equestrian training center in Shenyang, Liaoning province, on Feb 10. ZHANG WENKUI / FOR CHINA DAILY **Right:** Children interact with a horse during a New Year's horse racing event in the Sandu Shui autonomous county in Guizhou province on Jan 1. YANG WENBIN / XINHUA



A horse-riding performance takes place during the opening ceremony of the 7th Beijing International Garden Festival in the capital on April 28. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

TOP NEWS

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

Threats, strikes test fragile Mideast truce

US, Iran trade charges over Hormuz control, UAE reports attacks on its energy facilities

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE
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Tensions were reignited in the Middle East on Tuesday as the United States and Iran traded charges over the Strait of Hormuz and the United Arab Emirates came under Iranian missile and drone attacks, threatening a fragile ceasefire that has held for more than three weeks.

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, speaker of Iran's parliament, accused the US of undermining regional security and the security of global shipping and energy transit with its moves to end Iran's hold on the strait.

Ghalibaf warned that Tehran will respond to such provocations. "We know full well that the continuation of the status quo is intolerable for America, and we have not even started yet," he said in a social media post.

The latest escalation came after the UAE reported Iranian attacks on Monday for the first time since the truce was declared on April 8. The close US ally confirmed it was targeted by 12 ballistic missiles, three cruise missiles and four drones — all launched by Iran.

"These attacks constitute a dangerous escalation and unacceptable violation, posing direct threats to the UAE's security, territorial stability and civilian safety," the UAE's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

One Iranian missile hit an energy facility in the constituent emirate of Fujairah, leaving three Indian nationals injured, while a drone attack targeted a tanker operated by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Co, a state-owned oil giant, authorities said.

A senior Iranian military official did not deny the strikes, but emphasized that the Islamic republic had "no preplanned program to attack the oil facilities in question".

"US officials must end their ugly behavior of using force in a diplomatic process and stop military adventurism in this sensitive oil region, which affects economies around the world," the official was quoted as saying by Iranian state television.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei accused the UAE of backing and cooperating with the "aggressors" against Iran, saying that all regional countries have hopefully "learned the necessary lessons from the developments that occurred during these 50 days".

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly demanded that Iran fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic maritime corridor through which about one-fifth of global crude supplies were transported before US and Israeli forces launched strikes against Iran on Feb 28.

Iran has, however, vowed not to relinquish control of the strait, which is its core geopolitical leverage.

Trump claimed that US forces had "shot down" seven small Iranian military boats. A US admiral earlier said that six such vessels were destroyed, but Iran denied it all. Instead, it said a US naval frigate was hit, a claim that has been denied by the US military.

Authorities in South Korea confirmed on Monday that its cargo vessel HMM *Namu* suffered an engine room explosion and fire while navigating the strait, but said no crew members were injured.

Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday that the ongoing events in the strait prove "there is no military solution to this political crisis", and he praised Pakistan's sustained mediation efforts.

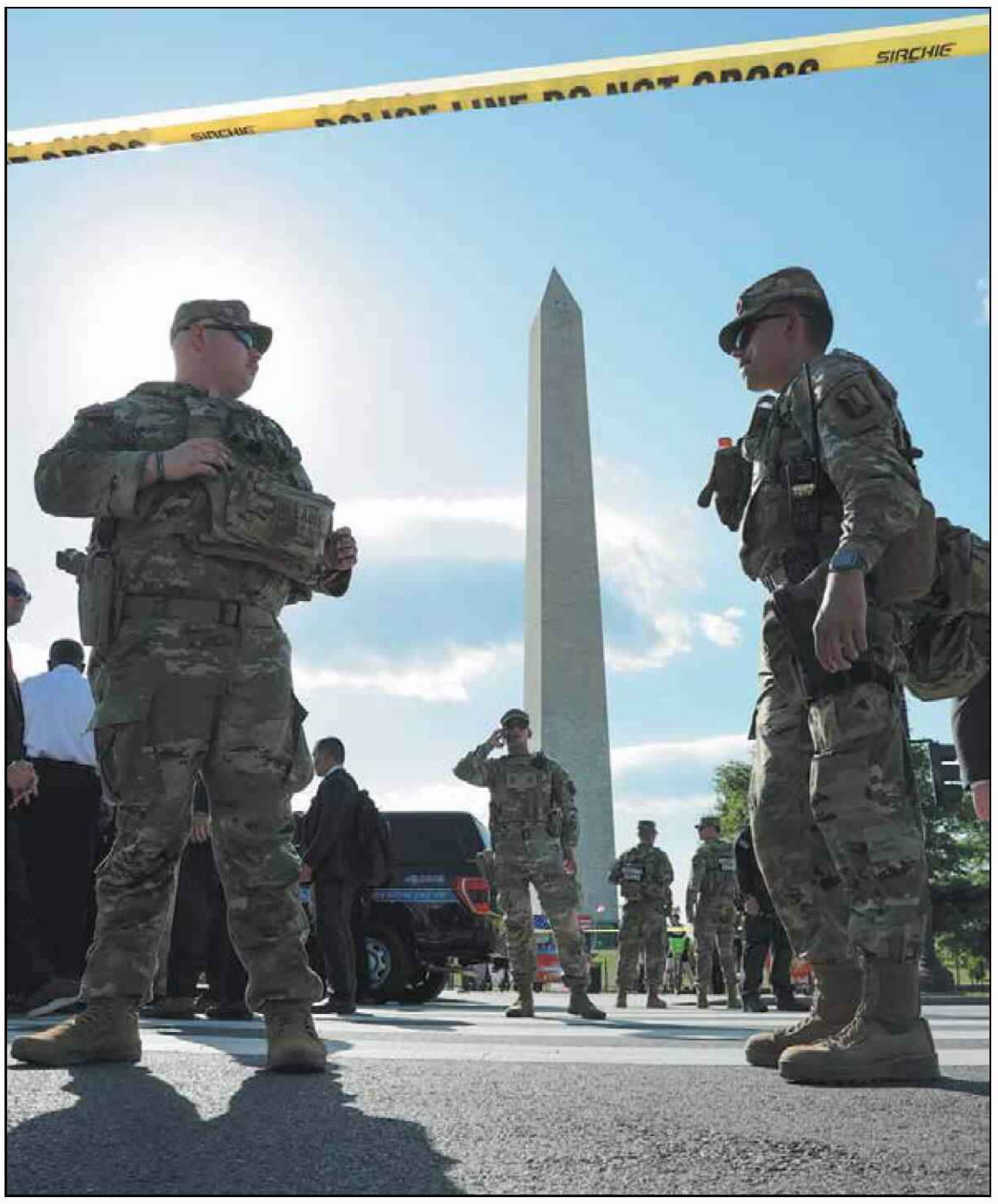
"The US should be wary of being dragged back into a quagmire by ill-wishers. So should the UAE. Project Freedom is Project Deadlock," he wrote on social media, referring to the plan announced by Trump to "guide" stranded ships from "neutral countries" out of the Persian Gulf.

Saudi Arabia joined calls for de-escalation of the Middle East situation on Tuesday, urging diplomatic means to reach a settlement. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz urged Tehran to return to the negotiating table and stop weaponizing regional energy transit, echoing appeals from French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Oil prices retreated slightly on Tuesday after surging on Monday. Brent crude, the international standard, fell $1.14 to $113.30 per barrel. Before the Iran war began in late February, it was trading near $70.

The Strait of Hormuz is a thoroughfare for global supplies of not just oil, but also fertilizers and other commodities. As it has remained virtually closed since the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran, global prices have continued to rally.

Shooting in Washington DC



Law enforcement officers stand guard near the scene of an officer-involved shooting on Monday in Washington, DC. The United States Secret Service said a man spotted carrying a gun in the vicinity of the White House by plainclothes agents was shot by law enforcement after he opened fire on them near the Washington Monument. The incident led to a brief lockdown at the White House. JONATHAN ERNST / REUTERS

Growth: Green efforts benefit world

From page 1

Amery Browne, former foreign minister of Trinidad and Tobago, said China's experience challenged the assumption that material progress must come at the expense of the environment.

What impressed him, he said, was that ecological protection had been given priority, while renewable energy and related advances could also contribute to global efforts to tackle climate change and other shared challenges.

China's green industries are also reshaping global markets. Its renewable energy products are exported to more than 200 countries and regions, meeting over 80 percent of global demand for photovoltaic components and 70 percent for wind power equipment, and helping countries around the world — particularly developing nations — gain access to clean, reliable and affordable energy.

China has also remained the world's largest producer and seller of new energy vehicles for 10 consecutive years.

Beyond the environmental field, the same decision-making logic has shaped other areas of governance.

It can be seen in targeted poverty alleviation, which rejects one-size-fits-all remedies, and in the development of new quality productive forces, which stresses local strengths over blind imitation.

This logic is also reflected in cultural heritage protection, where preservation is treated as an achievement in governance. In regional strategies, it means matching resources, industries and functions across wider areas instead of chasing isolated, short-term gains.

Hong Xianghua, a professor at the Party School of the Communist Party of China Central Committee (National Academy of Governance), said scientific decision-making has become an important pillar of China's efforts to modernize governance and pursue high-quality development.

At its core, the approach reflects a people-centered philosophy that measures governance performance by whether it improves lives and can stand the test of time, he said.

It also requires systematic planning — balancing development with protection, efficiency with fairness, and immediate needs with long-term goals — while grounding policy in China's realities and objective laws of development, he added.

In a more complex domestic and international environment, sound decision-making is essential for identifying development trends, managing risks, building consensus and turning institutional strengths into more effective governance, Hong said.

Teahouses: Commitment to craftsmanship reinforced at legal level

From page 1

His tea habits, too, have undergone a quiet transformation. In Ireland, black tea is typically served with milk and sugar. But in Guangzhou's teahouses, Parsons has come to prefer tea in its pure form.

Whether Pu'er or his favored Jin Jun Mei, he drinks it unadulterated. "Even when I'm abroad now, I never add milk or sugar," he said. "I've learned to appreciate the tea itself — its original flavor is much clearer this way."

This immersion in a culture of food and sociability has led him to draw parallels with home. In his view, the lively atmosphere of Guangzhou's teahouses echoes the social function of Irish pubs.

"It's a bit like being in a pub in Ireland," Parsons observed. "People come together for that warm, convivial atmosphere. It feels similar," he said.

Despite differences in timing — morning tea versus evening drinks — the purpose, he added, is strikingly similar: "to meet friends, to gather with family. It can feel a little chaotic, but that's part of its charm."

He is also intrigued by the finer details of the tradition, such as the custom of tapping fingers on the table to express thanks when tea is poured — often linked to a story about the Emperor Qianlong traveling incognito among commoners.

"That kind of story gives the ritual a deeper meaning," he said.

For those safeguarding this culinary heritage, the teahouses' bustle rests on exacting craftsmanship.

Xu Jinhui, executive chef of the China Hotel, describes Cantonese morning tea as "a cultural ritual" blending dim sum, tea and human connection.

In his view, dim sum is the "face" of Cantonese culture, and *har gow* its ultimate benchmark. "The wrapper must be thin yet resilient, crystal-clear, with the classic 13 pleats," Xu explained. "One bite should be fresh, tender and smooth. That refinement is the essence of Cantonese dim sum."

He emphasized rhythm and balance: tea first to awaken the palate, then steamed items for purity of flavor, fried dishes for texture, and sweets to finish — layering taste while avoiding heaviness.

Yet the passage of time has brought a sense of urgency.

"In more than 30 years in this trade, I've seen too many old techniques and flavors quietly disappear," Xu said.

"If we don't act now, they may be gone for good in a few decades."

That concern has led to projects aimed at reviving "lost dim sum", some requiring painstaking reconstruction. He cited the example of Jinling duck taro dumplings, where the ratio of taro paste, wheat starch and lard — and even the precise oil temperature tested with small fragments — determines the signature honeycomb texture.

Traditional methods, such as hand-pounding fillings, are preserved in defiance of industrial shortcuts, with the aim of "putting museum pieces back onto the plate".

This commitment to craftsmanship is now reinforced at the legal level. Regulations on the protection and inheritance of Guangzhou's morning tea culture, took effect on May 1, marking the country's first legislation dedicated specifically to *yum cha*.

They establish standards for on-site traditional preparation and require clear disclosure of production methods, including a strict 24-hour window for freshly made dim sum. Freshness, once reliant on a chef's discipline, is thus codified as a consumer right.

After navigating the crowds of the Canton Fair, Parsons returned to a teahouse table. Recalling his first visit years ago, he said the snacks and teahouses already left a strong impression — simpler than today, but just as special.

As tradition and regulation evolve together, *yum cha* continues to adapt. Yet each morning, the ritual endures: diners rinse their cups, share a few baskets, and ease into the day — one sip of tea, two bites of dim sum.



Yum cha, a traditional Cantonese morning meal, is laid out on a table in Shanwei, Guangdong province, on Aug 15, 2025. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

AI app by ByteDance explores paid plans for revenue

By CHENG YU
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Doubao, a flagship artificial intelligence app developed by Chinese tech company ByteDance, is testing a tiered subscription model that would charge users up to 500 yuan ($73) per month, a move that industry experts called a clear sign of Chinese AI large model developers pivoting from increasing user volume to generating revenue.

A recent service notice on Doubao's app store page outlined three monthly pricing tiers: a standard plan for 68 yuan, an advanced plan for 200 yuan and a professional plan for 500 yuan. ByteDance said the plans are still being tested and full details will be released through official channels, adding that some free services will also continue.

People familiar with the matter told China Daily that the paid features will target more complex, productivity-driven use cases, including automated PowerPoint generation, deep data analytics and film or video content creation.

Industry experts said the move reflects a broader shift across China's AI sector, where companies are racing to prove commercial viability after years of heavy investment.

According to statistics from global financial data and analytics platform Wind, AI companies performed differently in 2025. While 35 leading AI companies reported net profit growth of more than 50 percent year-on-year, 40 enterprises saw their revenues decline, highlighting the tension between rapid AI adoption and profitability.

Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said that Doubao's pricing experiment underscores a significant shift occurring in China's AI industry.

"After an initial phase of spending money to increase their size, developers are now under pressure to build sustainable revenue streams, shifting their focus from accumulating traffic to extracting value," he said.

The idea to charge users is driven by a surge in computing costs due to explosive demand. According to ByteDance cloud platform Volcano Engine, as of March, Doubao's underlying large model processed more than 120 trillion tokens per day, doubling in just three months and expanding roughly a thousandfold since its launch in May 2024.

Tokens are the fundamental units of data processed by AI models. The platform said the number of enterprise clients exceeding 1 trillion cumulative token usage is currently 140, compared with 100 at the end of last year.

Tan Dai, head of Volcano Engine, said in a previous news conference that the difference in token pricing essentially reflects a difference in capability.

"More advanced models carry higher costs per token, but they also generate greater economic value," Tan added.

Subscription models for AI services are already well established globally. Leading models such as ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini typically charge between $8 and $20 per month for entry-level plans, with premium tiers priced at $200 to $250.

"The shift to paid models signals a new competitive logic — not who can attract the largest number of users, but who can translate AI capability into measurable economic returns," said Wang, the researcher.

China's demand for AI data is growing rapidly, and it is beginning to reshape the economy. According to the latest figures from the National Data Administration, daily token usage soared from just over 1 trillion at the start of 2025 to 100 trillion by the end of the year.

ASIAFOCUS

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

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



A worker uses a forklift to carry plastic waste before putting it into a compressor for recycling in Bentong, Malaysia's Pahang state, in 2024. AFP

SUPPLY SQUEEZE

Demand for recycled plastic soars amid conflict in the Middle East

Under a cloudy sky in early April, five workers feed discarded Cookie Monster nappies into a machine to shred and recycle them.

"This is the warm 'popcorn' for low-density polyethylene, or LDPE, as a base material for industrial packaging, tarpaulin and drip tape," said G. Aushal, managing director of Sannanda Rika.

His company sources discarded plastic waste from the European Union and Japan to recycle it into up to 500 metric tons of LDPE materials every month. On the floor of the recycling plant, located 50 kilometers west of Kuala Lumpur, are hundreds of pallets of 25 kg packs of LDPE that are wrapped and stacked.



A worker installs low-density polyethylene plastic roll into a machine at a plastic factory in Klang, Malaysia's Selangor state, in 2024. MOHD RASFAN / AFP

The Iran war has affected not only the flow of oil but also plastic supply. Aushal's recycled plastic firm, along with others in the industry, has seen increased demand.

He said: "A Singapore-based customer could not secure plastic supply, so he asked me to ship up to three 40-foot containers of recycled plastic resin per week instead of per month previously." One container typically carries 27 to 28 tons.

Will Low, vice-president of the Malaysia Plastic Recyclers Association, said the demand for recycled materials has risen an estimated 20 to 30 percent since the US and Israel launched airstrikes against Iran in end-February. "At the same time, prices of some virgin materials have increased more than 50 to 60 percent. That is why some manufacturers have brought forward plans to increase the percentage of recycled materials in their product," he said.

In a blog post on April 12, Malaysia's Deputy Finance Minister Liew Chin Tong said now is the best time to scale up the plastic recycling industry amid a shortage of imported plastic resin in Malaysia.

Given the shortage, Low said recycled plastic is a strategic alternative.

"Typically, the price of recycled resin final product is 10 to 20 percent lower than virgin resin, which is produced directly from crude oil. We are pushing hard for the government to implement Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to drive the demand for recycled resin," he said.

EPR makes producers responsible for products across their life cycle to reduce plastic waste. The Malaysia Plastics Sustainability Roadmap aims to increase recycled content in packaging from 10 percent in 2023 to 15 percent in 2030 to stimulate investments in the "collection, sorting and recycling industries".

Malaysia's Housing and Local Government Ministry plans to make some manufacturers — depending on their size — report the recycled content of plastics, paper, metal, used beverage cartons and glass in their products by 2030.

While there is increased demand for recycled resin, it cannot always replace virgin resin. The usage of recycled resin is limited to certain categories of plastic products.

Mike Tan, chairman of the Malaysian Plastics Manufacturers Association's Johor branch, said: "High-precision electronic components and medical devices, including some personal protective equipment, often require virgin resin due to its superior heat resistance and robust insulating properties."

An industry veteran said the toughness of plastic resin is reduced each time it is recycled.

"Household products can use more recycled plastic resin, as at most it affects the color with a lower risk of breaking. But automotive products need higher-quality material, as recycled resin may not provide long-lasting durability," said the 41-year-old, who wanted to be known only as Chia.

Before its recent uplift in prospects, Malaysia's plastic recycling industry had been under scrutiny over contaminated plastic scrap imports.

In 2019, then Environment Minister Yeo Bee Yin vowed that Malaysia would not become a dumping ground for overseas plastic waste and pledged to return illegal shipments to their countries of origin.

According to 2025 data from the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, Malaysia imported $162 million worth of plastic scrap weighing nearly 460,000 tons, making it the third-largest in the world behind only the Netherlands and the US. This value has tripled from a decade ago.

To clamp down on the smuggling of plastic waste, Malaysian officials in February proposed a three-month moratorium on plastic imports before making a final decision on whether or not to import plastic waste at all.

The United Nations Development Programme estimated Malaysia produces over 1 million tons of plastic waste annually, of which a mere 10 percent is recycled.

"If you ask me, there may be no need to import plastic waste at all," outgoing Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Chief Azam Baki, who is leading the clampdown on illegal e-waste and plastic waste, said on April 2. He said that improving domestic waste management systems could eliminate the need for imports altogether.

In July 2025, Malaysia further restricted the import of plastic waste by insisting on pre-shipment inspections in exporting countries to address the health and environmental risks linked to illegal or poorly managed plastic waste practices.

But two researchers at Monash University Malaysia — Associate Professor Saman Ilankoon and his PhD student Shafeeq Ahmed Syed Ali — said if domestic plastic waste is not separated at its source, "it does not produce enough good quality and uncontaminated feedstock for the local industry".

"Meanwhile, imported homogeneous plastic sources offer higher-quality feedstock for producing high-value resin and generating sustainable profit margins."

In March, Malaysian Plastics Manufacturers Association President Cheah Chee Choon made the same point when appealing against a proposed moratorium on plastic waste imports — imported plastic waste is generally pricier but of higher quality than local waste.

Aushal's company imports 70 to 80 percent of its feedstock, with the remainder sourced locally.

The two-decade veteran in plastic recycling said imports remain essential, as they are consistently supplied and largely derived from postindustrial production, whereas local feedstock consists mainly of more contaminated postconsumer waste.

In the long term, Aushal is optimistic about the prospects of the recycled plastics industry.

"The shortage of virgin resin has pushed many to increase the use of recycled materials in their products. As a result, the future demand for recycled materials is expected to grow, with manufacturers better understanding their composition," he said.

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE

Falling literacy revives debate in S. Korea over Chinese characters in class

The National Education Commission of South Korea in April said it may review ways to strengthen education of Chinese characters, or "Hanja", including the possible addition of Chinese character annotations in textbooks, as part of broader efforts to improve student literacy.

"I think our discussions will mainly focus on reading, writing and vocabulary, but the issue of Hanja education will likely be the most controversial," said Kim Kyung-hoe, chair of the NEC's special committee on literacy. Hanja are Chinese characters traditionally used in written Korean.

"We will discuss the issue openly, but we will make sure there is no confusion among students or parents before anything is finalized," Kim added.

The government move comes as growing percentage of teachers voice concern over what they call falling literacy in classroom, as a significant number of students struggle to understand South Korean words derived from Hanja.

Park Young-hwan, a non-standing NEC member and chair of the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union, cautioned against moving toward a conclusion that would mandate Chinese character annotations in textbooks.

"There was major turmoil during the Park Geun-hye administration over the proposal to add Hanja to textbooks, and it was ultimately scrapped due to strong opposition from schools," Park said. "I hope this discussion does not end with a push for textbook annotations."

South Korea is facing what some describe as a literacy crisis. In a 2024 survey, 92 percent of teachers said students' literacy had declined compared with the past.

The survey, conducted by the Korean Federation of Teachers' Associations, or KFTA, found that two in 10 students could not understand textbooks without substantial help.

While the survey identified excessive smartphone use and gaming as the leading cause of declining literacy, some critics argue that the lack of Hanja education is also a major factor.

"Hanja education is essential for properly understanding and using the Korean language," said Koh Moon-hyun, a law professor at Soongsil University.

According to the National Institute of the Korean Language, about 57 percent of South Korean vocabulary is derived from Hanja. Teachers say students increasingly struggle to understand those words.

The teachers' survey included several examples.

One teacher recalled that during a mock debate on easing school hair regulations, a student confused the word *dubal* — a Sino-Korean term for hair, derived from characters meaning "head" (*du*) and "hair" (*bal*) — with a homophone meaning "two feet".

In another case, students mistook *geumil*, the Sino-Korean word for "today", for *geumyoil*, meaning Friday. But others confused *jungsik*, the Sino-Korean word for lunch, with a similar-sounding word meaning Chinese food. In this case, the Hanja are the same.

Professors interviewed earlier also said the problem extends into universities. In one example, students misunderstood the term *budongcheung*, or "swing voters", interpreting it as referring to voters with fixed preferences rather than undecided voters because they misread the underlying Chinese-character roots.

"Efforts to improve Korean literacy should be based on Hanja education," said Yoon Kun-young, superintendent of North Chungcheong Province. "Some provincial education offices are already pushing for it."

Still divisive

Hanja was Korea's first writing system, with recorded use dating back to the first century BC. It remained the primary written system on the peninsula for centuries and continued to be used alongside Hangeul — the Korean alphabet — through the Joseon era and until the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945.

After liberation, the South Korean government promoted an exclusive Hangeul policy to strengthen national identity while also improving literacy and administrative efficiency. In 1948, the government required public documents to be written primarily in Hangeul.

Hanja continued to be taught in schools until 1970, when the Park Chung-hee administration abolished Hanja education and removed it from textbooks. Since then, it has been offered only as an elective in middle and high schools.

In 2015, the Park Geun-hye administration briefly sought to reintroduce Chinese character annotations in textbooks, citing concerns over deteriorating literacy. The plan was abandoned after strong backlash from the education community.

Jang Seung-hyuk, spokesperson for the KFTA, said Hanja education could help improve literacy, but warned that it could also deepen educational inequality among students if not carefully designed.

"Hanja education may help improve literacy, but there are concerns that it could worsen polarization among students," Jang said. "The amount students are expected to learn would need to be set appropriately."

THE KOREA HERALD, SOUTH KOREA



A cultural center in Busan, South Korea, offers calligraphy-style couplets written in Chinese characters in 2025. YONHAP

Thai-Cambodia conflict impacting economy: Report

A UN report released in April warned that the 2025 border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia has triggered a "double shock" of mass displacement and economic collapse, which threatens to undo years of developmental gains.

The assessment showed that the hostilities, which peaked in late December, forced over 644,000 people to flee their homes while simultaneously driving nearly 900,000 Cambodian migrant workers back across the border.

Internally displaced families have fared little better, with average earnings declining by 34 percent. This financial freefall is exacerbated by the near-total evaporation of remittances, which were projected to drop by $942 million combined through 2026.

Beyond the immediate loss of cash, the conflict has obstructed essential services. At the height of the crisis, 883 schools were shuttered, disrupting the education of 200,000 children, while more than 50 health facilities were forced to suspend operations.

Agricultural production, the region's lifeline, has been gutted by falling farm-gate prices and a 42 percent crop loss for displaced farmers.

"This conflict did not just move people across a map; it dismantled the economic scaffolding of the border provinces, replacing steady wages with a debilitating cycle of debt and trauma that requires an immediate, localized response to repair," said the lead UN official involved in the assessment.

The UN is calling for a "transformative recovery" plan that moves away from traditional aid. The report's primary recommendation is to immediately stabilize household consumption through time-bound income support and cash-for-work programs. These initiatives would hire displaced workers to rehabilitate the very infrastructure — irrigation canals, roads and schools — damaged during the hostilities.

The macroeconomic damage has been equally severe, with the report identifying a "structural break" in Cambodia's trade and tourism sectors. Total exports to Thailand contracted by 13.5 percent, while tourism receipts in 2025 were slashed by $855 million as international arrivals plummeted.

In the agricultural sector specifically, the UN projects a $156 million decline in food and agriculture exports compared to the previous year. Major cash crops such as cassava, maize and fresh fruits suffered most, hit by a combination of border frictions, price collapses and quality restrictions.

"Prior to return, 85.8 percent of surveyed households received remittances from Thailand, averaging $2,194 per year. Following large-scale return, average remittances declined sharply to approximately $110. At the macro level, total remittances are projected at $2.60 billion in 2025, compared to a baseline of $2.88 billion, and $2.27 billion in 2026, compared to a baseline of $2.94 billion, implying estimated losses of $277 million in 2025 and $665 million in 2026," said the report.

Without this influx of money, which traditionally served as the primary means for servicing microfinance debt, the UN warns of a looming crisis of landlessness as impoverished families are forced into distress sales of their property to satisfy creditors.

THE PHNOM PENH POST, CAMBODIA

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

In the throes of sorrow



A grieving family gathers on Monday during the funeral of Palestinian Mousa Al-Abyad in Gaza City after he was killed in Israeli gunfire a day earlier, according to medics. Gaza's civil defense said on Monday that three Palestinians were killed in Israeli strikes in separate incidents across the enclave, amid reports that Israeli military officials were pushing for renewed operations. DAWOUD ABU ALKAS / REUTERS

US 'tariff theater' fuels divide

Global trade restructuring after move as China anchors multilateralism: Experts

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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Global trade is not collapsing under mounting protectionism, but instead undergoing a profound and uncoordinated restructuring, US experts say.

As the United States continues to use tariffs as a form of "political theater" to address domestic grievances, the rest of the world is moving toward a new, decentralized multilateralism, they said. This shift is being driven by a "domino effect" of regional agreements, with China playing a pivotal role in helping stabilize the global trading system, they added.

During a presentation on April 29 at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, Richard Baldwin, a professor at IMD Business School, said current trade frictions between the world's two largest economies are a long-term rather than a temporary episode.

US trade policy, characterized by aggressive tariff threats, is fundamentally about domestic political signaling, Baldwin said. "This is theater — tariff theater — not trade policy."

In an interview with China Daily, Gary Hufbauer, a nonresident senior fellow at the Peterson Institute, agreed with this assessment, saying "blowback from the financial markets, powerful firms and concern about affordability" have acted to restrain the height of effective tariffs.

As a result, the White House has initiated or allowed a range of special arrangements and exemptions, he said.

Both experts expressed concern that national security is being misused to justify protectionism. Hufbauer said efficiency is being "tossed out the window" as proponents of restrictions use security claims as an "all-purpose rationale".

Some US lawmakers are demanding a total ban on Chinese automobiles and parts in the name of national security, a move he described as "ridiculous".

This prioritization of politics over efficiency is consistent with findings from the World Trade Organization. In a March report, the WTO projected global merchandise trade growth would slow to 1.9 percent this year. While import growth in North America is forecast to stay flat, Asia is expected to lead with growth exceeding 3 percent.

Experts said the outlook underscores Asia's role — underpinned by China's robust industrial output — as the primary engine of global recovery, despite Western protectionism.

In contrast to US unilateralism, China has been recognized for its role in maintaining the integrity of the multilateral system.

Baldwin said Beijing's strategic use of export controls was intended to prevent the collapse of the global trade order.

"China's export controls did work," he said. "That dampened anti-Chinese aggression and indirectly protected the WTO system." China remains a natural defender of global connectivity, he added.

Advocating dialogue

Beijing continues to advocate dialogue and stability. On Thursday evening, Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng held a video call with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer to discuss the implementation of consensuses reached during previous summits.

During the candid and constructive exchange, both sides agreed to utilize trade and economic consultation mechanisms to manage differences.

As the US abdicates trade leadership, other countries are moving toward what Baldwin calls "WTO 2.0" through regional blocs such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Hufbauer said this appears to be the current "plan B" for the rest of the world.

Both experts said the current measures satisfy domestic hawks but do not achieve their stated economic goals.

As the global trading landscape shifts, the world is no longer looking to Washington for leadership in law-based commerce, Baldwin said.

"The whole rest of the world likes the multilateral rules-based trading system," he said.

WHO offers new clues on cruise outbreak

GENEVA/AMSTERDAM — The World Health Organization said on Tuesday that it suspects rarely seen human-to-human transmission took place between close contacts on board a luxury cruise ship hit by seven confirmed or suspected hantavirus cases.

A Dutch couple and a German national have died, while a British national was evacuated from the ship and is in intensive care in South Africa, officials said. Three more passengers suspected to be infected are still on board, one of whom has a mild fever.

The WHO said its working assumption was that the initial case of the couple, who boarded the boat in Argentina, was infected prior, possibly while bird-watching, and that human-to-human transmission may have happened on board.

The cruise ship hit by the deadly outbreak is marooned off Cape Verde — an island nation in the Atlantic Ocean off West Africa — and not allowed to put passengers ashore.

The WHO reiterated that the risk to the wider public was low as the disease typically spreads from infected rodents and only rarely passes between humans. People are usually infected by hantavirus through contact with infected rodents or their urine, their droppings or their saliva.



The *Hondius* cruise ship is anchored at a port in Praia, Cape Verde, on Monday. ARILSON ALMEIDA / AP

However, a limited spread among close contacts has been observed in some previous outbreaks with the Andes strain, which the WHO believes could be involved in this instance.

"We do believe that there may be some human-to-human transmission that's happening among the really close contacts, the husband and wife, people who have shared cabins," Maria Van Kerkhove, director of epidemic and pandemic preparedness and prevention at the WHO, told reporters in Geneva.

"Some people on the ship were couples, they were sharing rooms so that's quite intimate contact," Van Kerkhove said.

While the WHO said the ship would be headed to the Canary Islands, Spain's health ministry said it had made no decision yet on receiving it.

"Depending on the epidemiological data collected from the ship during its passage through Cape Verde, a decision will be made as to which port of call is most appropriate," the ministry said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Partnerships aid Africa's transport, energy plans

By SHARON NAKOLA
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Africa's ambitious transport and energy plans under the African Union are gaining renewed momentum through international partnerships, particularly with China, officials say.

However, delivery of frameworks such as continental infrastructure plans has been lagging because of funding shortages, outdated systems and coordination challenges, they said.

Speaking at a side event during the Fifth Ordinary Session of the AU Specialized Technical Committee on Transport and Energy in Johannesburg last week, Lerato Mataboge, commissioner for infrastructure and energy at the African Union Commission, said the continent is increasingly prioritizing investments that can unlock stalled projects, particularly in energy systems.

"One of the biggest weaknesses is our transmission infrastructure and our ability to integrate energy systems," she said, noting that while many countries are expanding the generation capacity, the challenge lies in efficiently distributing that power.

Partnerships with China remain critical in addressing Africa's infrastructure financing gap, estimated at between $90 billion and $100 billion annually, she said. "China is our largest investor in infrastructure, and we want to continue leveraging partnerships with China and other development-oriented partners to close our energy gap."

Strengthening transmission networks is central to enabling industrial growth and ensuring that energy generated — particularly from renewable sources — can be effectively delivered across borders, Mataboge said.

Such cooperation helped move projects from planning to execution more quickly, particularly where financing and construction are bundled, though progress remains uneven across regions, she said.

African leaders are also rethinking how transport and energy systems are structured.

Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, South Africa's minister of electricity and energy, described the current global context as a strategic turning point, where infrastructure is no longer just developmental but a tool of economic power.

Africa's dual constraints — energy deficits affecting hundreds of millions of people and fragmented transport systems that raise trade costs — are mutually reinforcing and must be addressed through integrated planning, he said.

Rather than treating sectors separately, he called for aligning transport and energy systems into a unified economic platform capable of driving industrialization, urging a shift from policy frameworks to measurable outcomes such as megawatts added, operational corridors and jobs created.

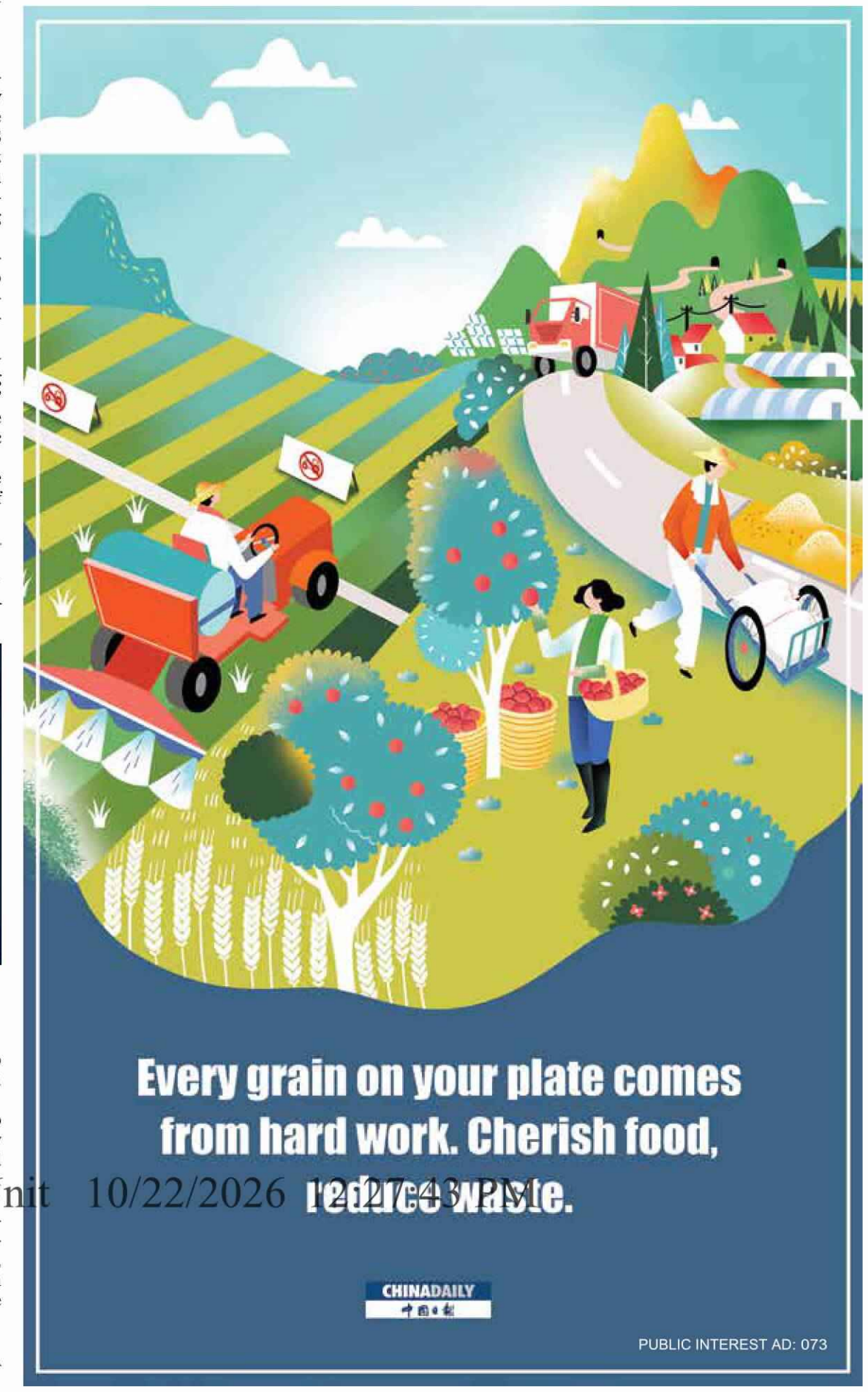
Update needed

Meanwhile, structural challenges continue to slow implementation on the ground. Rod Rembendambya, high commissioner of Gabon to South Africa, said much of Africa's infrastructure remains outdated, with systems in some countries dating back decades. "We need to update everything," he said.

The African Union has adopted long-term infrastructure strategies, but implementation continues to depend heavily on external financing, policy coordination and technical capacity.

While partnerships with China and other global players are helping unlock progress, analysts said addressing internal bottlenecks will be critical to sustaining momentum.

Ndumiso Mlilo in South Africa contributed to this story.



Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

Editorials

Tokyo's straying from Tokyo Trials judgments measures its push to advance neo-militarism

At a time when the world is marking the 80th anniversary of the opening of the Tokyo Trials, the hard-won lessons of history are once again being tested. Developments surrounding nuclear nonproliferation, regional security and Japan's political and military moves have raised serious concerns about whether the country is honoring its postwar commitments or drifting toward dangerous revisionism.

Speaking at a review conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in New York on Monday, China's Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs Shen Jian stressed that the global nonproliferation regime must not be undermined by double standards. As the cornerstone of international nuclear governance, the treaty relies on the authority of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the trust of nonnuclear-weapon states. Yet, certain countries' selective application of the rules is eroding that foundation.

Shen pointed in particular to Japan's recent trajectory. Tokyo has in recent years released a series of troubling signals. Discussions about revising the "Three Non-Nuclear Principles", the expansion of long-range strike capabilities, and interest in hosting nuclear weapons under so-called "extended deterrence" arrangements all suggest a shift that warrants vigilance.

These concerns are compounded by broader policy changes. Tokyo is pushing for a revival of the titles of the military ranks used during World War II for the country's Self-Defense Forces. As noted by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian, Japan's postwar choice to abandon militaristic rank nomenclature was an effort to break with its wartime past. It was aligned with the spirit of its pacifist Constitution. Reinstating these titles now, under the pretext of fostering a "sense of honor", sends deeply troubling signals.

The Tokyo Trials delivered a definitive judgment on Japan's wartime aggression, affirming international justice and establishing a framework for postwar peace. Any attempt to dilute that legacy or advance neo-militarism runs counter to the postwar international order.

Further raising alarm are recent remarks by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, who has called for revising key security documents and preparing the country for a long-time emergency. Such rhetoric, coupled with efforts to strengthen military capabilities across maritime, cyber and economic domains, suggests a departure from the "exclusively defense-oriented" policy Japan has long professed.

Japan goes even further. During her recent visits to Vietnam and Australia, Takaichi promoted the so-called "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy. Such initiatives risk creating division and confrontation, forming exclusive blocs rather than fostering inclusive regional cooperation.

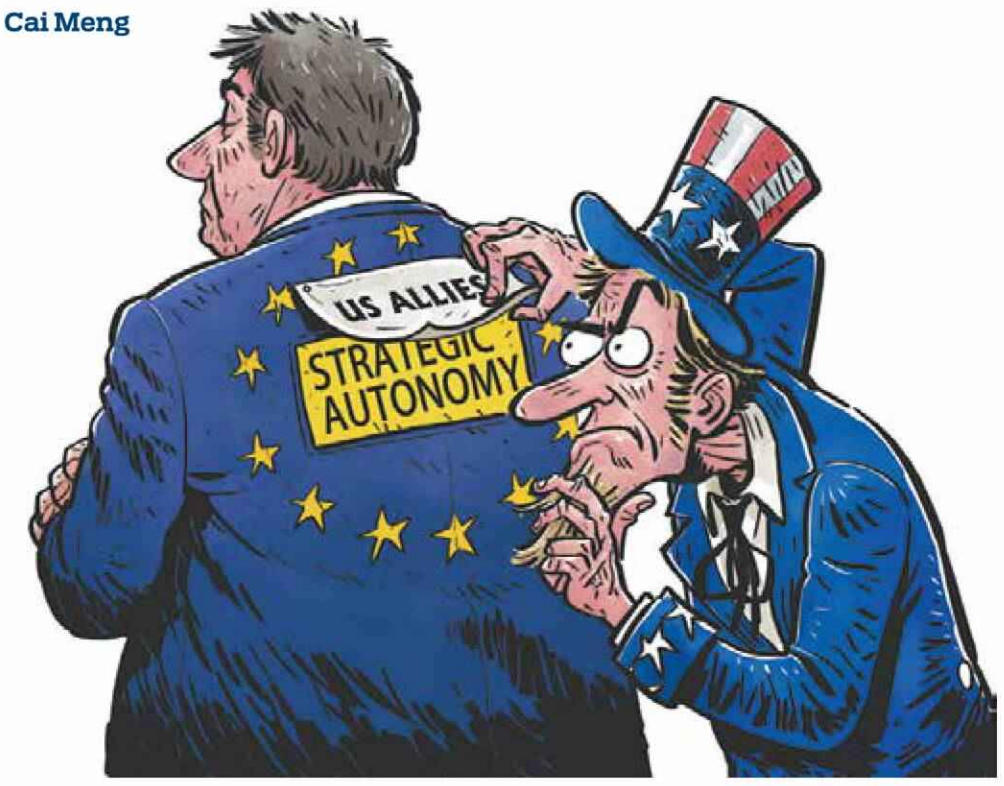
Equally troubling are actions that touch on historical accountability. The recent visit by Japanese lawmakers to the Yasukuni Shrine, following Takaichi's monetary offering to the notorious shrine, once again underscores a persistent unwillingness among certain political forces to confront Japan's past. The site, which enshrines 14 WWII Class-A war criminals, remains a symbol of militarism. Such visits constitute a challenge to historical justice and the outcomes of WWII.

Likewise, Japan's unresolved obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention continue to cast a shadow. The destruction of chemical weapons left in China by Japanese forces during the war remains incomplete, decades after the agreed deadline. These weapons still pose serious risks to public health and the environment, making their thorough elimination not only a legal duty but also a moral obligation.

The tragedies of the past were born of unchecked militarism, strategic miscalculation and the erosion of international norms. Today, as the world reflects on the legacy of the Tokyo Trials, it is imperative that all peace-loving countries uphold their commitments, reject double standards, and resist any resurgence of militarism.

Peace and stability in Asia and beyond depend on vigilance, responsibility and a shared commitment to the principles that emerged from the ashes of the war. The international community should remain resolute in safeguarding these principles, ensuring that history is not repeated.

Cai Meng



Economic vitality reflected in holiday surge

The May Day holiday is one of the busiest travel times of the year in China. During the five-day period from Friday to Tuesday, large numbers of Chinese travelers take the opportunity to visit family, explore domestic destinations or go abroad. The surge in travel this year not only provides a boost to the country's transportation, tourism and retail sectors, but also serves as an indicator of the vitality and potential of the Chinese consumer market.

During this period, many travel figures reached new heights, with the number of cross-regional trips at home expected to total 1.52 billion, an average of 304 million per day — a 4 percent increase over last year. International air travel bookings are expected to surpass 1.12 million, while daily border crossings are projected to reach a peak of 2.25 million. This travel frenzy reflects a marked rise in the overall demand that has been facilitated by improvements in China's infrastructure as well as its policy and business environment.

Tourist consumption patterns have changed, with travelers no longer merely sightseeing but engaging in immersive experiences. Customized interest tours, intangible cultural heritage workshops and immersive performances have seen strong demand, with orders for "interest-based custom tours" on some platforms increasing by nearly 80 percent year-on-year.

China boasts a diverse tapestry of attractions, from breathtaking natural landscapes to profound cultural heritage sites, all supported by modern infrastructure such as high-speed rail and 5G networks. This combination provides a robust foundation for continued consumption growth.

The evolving consumption habits of the younger generation are also reshaping market dynamics, as they are driving the shift toward cultural tourism and more tailored experiences, and opening new opportunities for related sectors, including dining, accommodation and transportation.

This rise in cultural tourism has led to new business models, such as nighttime cultural tourism. The cross-industry integration invigorates the consumer market and injects new vitality into the cultural tourism industry.

Government initiatives have also played their part in the tourism boom, with over 284 million yuan ($41.58 million) in tourism vouchers distributed. Moreover, financial institutions have introduced interest subsidies and zero-interest coupons, reducing consumer credit costs and driving cultural tourism and dining spending. These policy dividends have helped unleash consumption.

Meanwhile, China's optimized visa policies, immediate tax refunds for departing tourists and the convenience of mobile payments have markedly lowered travel barriers and enhanced service convenience for overseas tourists. The country has expanded its unilateral visa-free access to 50 countries and extended mutual visa-exemption agreements to 29 countries. Plus, travelers from 55 countries can take advantage of a 240-hour visa-free transit policy to visit China.

The expansion of visa-free policies has directly spurred a surge in inbound tourism. Visitors from countries such as Russia, the United Kingdom and Spain have increased significantly, with inbound tourism extending beyond traditional hot spots, indicating China's growing international appeal. Destinations such as Lhasa, Chengdu, and Taiyuan have seen marked growth in foreign visitors thanks to the appeal of their intangible cultural heritage and local customs.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, China's travel and tourism economy grew 9.9 percent last year — more than twice the global average. The growth was largely driven by a more than 10 percent increase in foreign tourist spending in China in 2025. "China could become the world's largest tourism economy by the end of the decade," WTTC President and CEO Gloria Guevara told the media.

While the five-hour radius is still the mainstay of outbound tourism, longer trips are trending, with Italy, the United States and Australia ranking among the top 10 destinations for Chinese tourists. Young travelers are increasingly taking "extended vacations" to embark on long journeys. This not only helps boost the holiday economy, but also helps shape China's international image.

The strong holiday consumption is not only a result of the organic integration of residents' consumption upgrading and high-quality economic development, it also resonates well with China's first-quarter economic data, reflecting the smooth circulation of the economy and the release of domestic demand potential.

China's tourism consumption boom during the May Day holiday is a vivid reflection of the country's pursuit of high-quality development. The world sees an increasingly open, prosperous and confident China. What China offers to the world is opportunity, growth and innovation.

Opinion Line

Bid for pomp and circumstance leaves Lai floundering in a flop

While the Democratic Progressive Party authorities' outreach to their "partners" is theater, their secessionist-minded leader Lai Ching-te's latest sneaky outing to Eswatini is more like an old-school farce.

The star of this curious production, Lai, did not so much depart China's Taiwan island as slip out, reportedly aboard the King of Eswatini's private jet.

The so-called "diplomatic achievements" painstakingly fabricated by Lai are nothing but petty tricks that make him a laughingstock to the world, as Chen Binhua, a spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said.

Lai's original itinerary — reportedly envisioned as a high-profile "visit" — ran into a wall of refusals, as multiple African countries along his flight path declined overflight permissions, adhering to the one-China principle. Some European countries also shut their doors to transit requests.

Chen stressed that the historical trend of China's national reunification is unstoppable.

Back in Taiwan, the timing has raised eyebrows. Taiwan is dealing with the aftermath of a damaging earthquake — one of those moments when local authorities are measured not in air miles but in presence. Yet Lai pressed ahead, prioritizing a symbolic overseas appearance over the island's urgency. The optics, to put it mildly, are not flattering.

That just added yet another scandalous escapade to "Taiwan independence" separatism.

The one-China principle has long been a basic norm in international relations and the prevailing international consensus, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said.

Then there's the money. Critics argue that such trips are nothing more than expensive pageantry. The taxpayers on the Chinese island are footing the bill for a show whose ratings have plummeted.

Discontent in Taiwan appears to be bubbling. Polls suggest deep frustration. The sentiment points to a local leader whose performance has lost its luster.

Lai and his supporters have attempted to spin the visit as a "success". But that framing feels strained. Success in international engagement is usually measured by doors opened, not doors closed.

Lai's political ambition, untethered from geopolitical realities and historical truths, has veered into empty performative politics.

In the end, this was not the "triumphant tour" it aspired to be. It was something stranger and more revealing: a glimpse into the narrowing space in which the "Taiwan independence" forces' ambition now operates.

The curtain falls on a show that was a very public reminder of the DPP's isolation dressed up as intrigue.

As the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stressed, no matter how the DPP authorities collude with external forces and keep those people in DPP's pay, it will always be a losing cause and nothing will ever change the fact that Taiwan is part of China. And no matter how "Taiwan independence" forces try to cover up their nature or change appearance, nothing can save their reputation or help them escape the denunciation of the international community.

Eswatini and some other individual countries are urged to see where the arc of history bends and stop serving as the prop of "Taiwan independence" separatists.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Policy: Challenges need to be addressed

From page 1

As part of its impact on social support and the provision of public goods, the tariff-free arrangement will improve livelihoods, create jobs, stabilize employment, boost incomes and enhance public welfare.

The benefits of zero-tariff deals also align with the 2026 China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges. The tariff-free framework will strengthen bilateral ties and friendship, allowing people to share development dividends. It also upholds the principles of mutual benefit, sincerity, tangible outcomes, solidarity and good faith that have long guided China-Africa cooperation.

At the continental level, the zero-tariff policy will complement and advance Africa's strategic trade framework under the African Continental Free Trade Area, or AfCFTA, a flagship project of the African Union's Agenda 2063. It will also help dismantle long-standing structural trade barriers that have hindered full realization of the AfCFTA.

Furthermore, the new China-Africa trade framework will be bolstered by key global initiatives and mechanisms proposed by China, including the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative and the four major global initiatives.

Ultimately, the zero-tariff policy will accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Action Plan for 2025-2027, which was adopted at the FOCAC summit in Beijing in 2024 and covers trade promotion.

The resulting zero-tariff system will further strengthen China-Africa solidarity in pursuing modernization and deepen bilateral cooperation.

However, to fully seize the opportunities presented by the zero-tariff policy, both China and Africa need to address critical challenges that, if left unresolved, will continue to slow down the full realization of the trade-transforming policy.

First, some stakeholders in Africa — including farmers, local producers and industrialists — lack a full understanding of the zero-tariff policy. These key stakeholders, who stand to benefit from the policy's dividends, have not yet fully grasped the tangible advantages. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness of the zero-tariff policy across Africa. Chinese embassies and their commercial offices, for instance, could partner with local governments, media, industries and cooperatives to publicize the benefits of the program for all parties concerned.

Second, Africa continues to struggle with technological constraints and insufficient production capacity. Most African farmers lack access to modern technologies that would enable them to produce agricultural goods in large quantities and fully tap into China's huge consumer market. This shortage of modern technology undermines product consistency, quality grading, storage and value-added processing. As a result, Chinese assistance is needed to introduce advanced technological mechanisms and boost overall production capacity.

Third, many African products face difficulties in reaching Chinese consumers, as the market is regulated by stringent sanitary and phytosanitary standards and regulations. Therefore, it is of great importance for key stakeholders to fully understand relevant standards and certification policies, in order to effectively tap into and enter the Chinese market.

Last but not least, African countries still face challenges stemming from weak institutional capacity, resulting from poor coordination between government agencies, export promotion bodies and private-sector players. Such institutional inefficiency creates major obstacles for farmers and producers of key export goods, including avocados, coffee, tea and macadamia nuts. These products are vital for African nations to gain better access to the Chinese market and narrow the China-Africa trade imbalance, an issue the new zero-tariff framework is designed to address.

This notwithstanding, the benefits of the zero-tariff policy far outweigh the challenges.

China and Africa are genuine, dedicated and steadfast partners, committed to breaking down trade barriers, realizing shared development, and advancing Africa's renaissance to empower the continent in pursuing high-quality modernization.

The author is executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Nairobi-based Africa Policy Institute. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

VIEWS

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

China and the World Roundtable | Report Unveils World Security Challenges

Editor's Note: *The China Institute of International Studies released the Report on the Global Security Situation 2025 in Beijing on April 20. CIIS President Chen Bo said the report identifies key characteristics of the global security landscape in 2025, including an increasingly tense global security situation, a polarized trend in contributions to world peace and justice, more frequent security challenges across various geopolitical hot spots, and China's prominent role as a stabilizing force for world peace. Below are excerpts from three speakers sharing their views on the topic.*

Navigating a new global security situation

Four levers to safeguard global security



Yang Mingjie is the former president of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

In response to the evolving international security landscape, efforts should be made to advance the building of a community with a shared future for humanity by focusing on four key dimensions: promoting peace, putting people first, taking preventive measures, and safeguarding the role of the United Nations in global affairs.

First, curb the escalation and spread of regional conflicts. It is essential to stay committed to a political settlement. History has repeatedly shown that the use of force cannot resolve international disputes; it only intensifies tensions. Coordinating security with development offers both the framework and the practical pathway for achieving lasting stability.

Besides, adopt a people-centered approach to alleviating humanitarian crises. Hundreds of thousands of people in the Middle East have been displaced, and extensive civilian infrastructure has been destroyed. The food and energy crises triggered by conflicts are further spreading through global supply chains, severely impacting populations, particularly in less-developed regions. All parties must refrain from exploiting humanitarian assistance for political or military purposes. Moreover, humanitarian access and delivery methods should not be used as bargaining chips by stakeholders.

Additionally, take preventive measures to forestall potential crises. International security threats are becoming increasingly cross-domain and complex, exacerbated by certain major powers striving to maintain so-called absolute strategic superiority in areas such as nuclear technology and artificial intelligence. In light of threats to resume nuclear testing or military strikes targeting nuclear facilities, the international community must uphold international regulations on nuclear arms control and nonproliferation. It is also alarming that AI is being integrated into the kill chains and decision-making processes of warfare by certain countries. It is imperative to prevent technology from spiraling out of control.

Moreover, stay committed to the original aspiration and uphold the central role of the UN in international security affairs. The four global initiatives proposed by China align closely with the spirit of the UN Charter, forming an integrated framework that seeks to promote prosperity through development, ensure stability through security, enhance trust through dialogue among civilizations, and advance justice through governance.

Development remains a timeless theme of human society, and it is essential to stay highly vigilant against the growing trend of security risks encroaching upon the development domain. It is vital to coordinate development and security on a global scale.

Redefining security in an era of global interdependence

In an era defined by unprecedented interconnectivity, rapid technological advancement, and shifting geopolitical dynamics, the concept of security has undergone profound transformation. Security, as we know it, is no longer confined to traditional military confrontation. In today's world security now encompasses a broader spectrum of risks, including cyber threats, climate change, pandemics, and the intricate interplay of economic and political instability.

Among the most urgent of these challenges is cybersecurity. Cyberattacks possess the capacity to disrupt economies, undermine governance, and threaten the safety and livelihoods of individuals. Their anonymity and the difficulty of attribution render conventional response mechanisms insufficient. This evolving threat landscape underscores the need for enhanced international cooperation in the development of robust and coordinated cyber defense strategies.

Terrorism remains another significant and evolving global threat. The proliferation of digital platforms has enabled extremist ideologies to spread with unprecedented speed and reach, facilitating recruitment and operational coordination. While governments continue to strengthen counter-terrorism measures, the underlying drivers — poverty, marginalization, and ideological extremism — remain deeply entrenched. Addressing these root causes through sustained diplomatic engagement, education, and inclusive economic development is essential to achieving lasting stability.

Climate change has emerged as a defining security challenge of our time. Beyond its environmental implications, it acts as a threat multiplier — intensifying resource scarcity, exacerbating displacement and migration, and heightening the risk of conflict, particularly in regions already burdened by political fragility. As pressures on natural resources increase, so too does the potential for competition and instability, reinforcing the urgent need for collective climate action.

At the same time, the global security architecture is being reshaped by a shifting balance of power. The post-Cold War unipolar moment has gradually given way to a more multipolar international system, characterized by strategic competition and evolving alliances. In this context, multilateral institutions — foremost among them the United Nations — have an indispensable role in conflict prevention, peace building, and the coordination of humanitarian responses, even as they confront increasing complexity and constraint.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



Martin Charles is the ambassador of the Commonwealth of Dominica to China.

The global security environment in 2026 is marked by fragmentation and the resurgence of nationalist tendencies. Major players are actively competing across technological, economic and environmental spheres, the result of which is spillover effects that disproportionately impact smaller and more vulnerable states. Yet, opportunities emerge out of this complexity. Interconnectivity, while presenting new vulnerabilities, also offers pathways for deeper cooperation and shared solutions. The international community must therefore renew its commitment to diplomacy, invest meaningfully in sustainable development, and strengthen collective mechanisms for addressing transnational threats.

Navigating the evolving security landscape will require sustained political will, mutual trust, and a steadfast commitment to multilateralism. While the challenges are considerable, they are not insurmountable. I remain hopeful that with coordinated action and a shared vision for global stability, we can navigate the complexities of global security.

SCO a sustainable contributor to global security

On the one hand, the international system is moving toward a more just, equitable, and representative multipolar structure, which presents new opportunities for shared development and mutually beneficial cooperation among nations. On the other hand, intensifying geopolitical rivalries pose severe threats to regional and global peace and stability. Against this backdrop, many countries are seeking effective pathways to ensure both sustainable security and development.



Piao Yangfan is the deputy secretary-general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Over the past 25 years, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, making joint efforts with like-minded countries and international organizations and guided by the Shanghai Spirit, has continuously advanced multilateral cooperation in political, security, economic, people-to-people exchanges and cultural fields. This has contributed to lasting peace and stability in the region, enhanced the well-being of people and improved the global governance system.

The SCO supports the United Nations' central coordinating role in international affairs and adheres to the UN Charter and other universally recognized principles of international law. Our member states actively uphold both traditional and nontraditional security, opposing the pursuit of absolute security for oneself at the expense of others. Through SCO cooperation, we strive to lay the groundwork for an equal and indivisible security architecture in Eurasia, while promoting sustainable development to ensure sustainable security.

The CIIS security report serves as an important reference for understanding China's perspective and proposals regarding the global security landscape, particularly from the academic community. The SCO Secretariat maintains close communication with academic circles in member states and facilitates exchanges among scholars through platforms such as SCO forums. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of the SCO. In autumn, Kyrgyzstan will host the SCO Summit in Bishkek. It is hoped that think tanks from member states, represented by the CIIS, will offer valuable insights on the SCO's future development. This will help contribute an SCO solution for reforming and improving regional and global governance and achieving lasting peace and shared development.

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

Niu Xinyi and Fan Beibei

ICT shows the way to empowering rural women

In the mountains of Gulin county in Sichuan province, ancient tea trees have stood for centuries, and wild honey has long been a local treasure. When internet connectivity arrived, it brought not only information but also opportunity.

Liu Qian, a young entrepreneur who returned to her hometown to vitalize its rich yet underutilized resources, quickly recognized this potential. She established an agricultural cooperative to sell local products and built a homestay, employing many elderly local residents. Liu is also supported by a women's cooperative leadership capacity development program in Sichuan supported by United Nations Women and Mengdingshan Academy for Cooperative Development, where she developed skills in digital applications and rural entrepreneurship. She uses short video platforms to showcase the beauty of the region and the local products.

Crucially, Liu ensured that connectivity benefited everyone in her community by introducing the elderly to artificial intelligence-powered voice assistance. When elderly workers encountered a problem such as understanding a new regulation, operating some equipment, or simply seeking information, they usually called their children working in distant cities for help. Now, AI provides immediate, spoken guidance.

Liu's story illuminates a broader reality: when women are equipped with the tools of the digital age, they do not just earn a living — they reshape their futures and the communities. It is a vivid example of what happens when supportive policies, digital infrastructure, and a commitment to women's empowerment converge.

Behind every woman in China stands a robust, multilayered national framework designed to ensure that the digital economy empowers women. As articulated in a 2025 white paper titled China's Achievements in Women's Well-Rounded Development in the New Era, gender equality is identified as a key policy priority, and the advancement of women is seen as integral to the broader framework of Chinese modernization. The country has published four outlines for women's development, each building on the last to create a supportive policy environment.

One of the most transformative aspects of this policy landscape has been the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into women's economic participation. For rural women entrepreneurs, leveraging ICT has enabled them to overcome the constraints of time and mobility.

Liu Mengyue, the founder of a tea factory in Qilong village in Sichuan province, has been an advocate for leveraging technology to bring upskilling opportunities to local women farmers. Since the tea trees are located along the highland boundaries of the plateau, fertilizing and applying pesticides were always physically demanding tasks that only men could do. Nowadays, however, drone technology has made remote fertilization possible. She has also drawn on training received at the Mengdingshan academy to integrate digital technologies into agricultural production and management. In Liu Mengyue's tea garden, half of the drone pilots are women, including a former stay-at-home mother.

Such technological advancement enhances agricultural productivity and operational standardization, and brings equitable opportunities to women. ICT has effectively dismantled the physical barriers that once defined women's limits.

The stories are not random occurrences. The All-China Women's Federation, together with the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, rolled out nationwide e-commerce and live commerce training in 2015. The support ecosystem includes inclusive finance, brand creation, and rural service stations. Institutions such as the Mengdingshan academy have contributed to strengthening rural women's digital and entrepreneurial capabilities. The result is a growing cohort of women e-commerce experts selling local goods nationwide and globally, mastering advanced AI tools.

While the spread of ICT has resulted in tangible economic gains, the deeper significance of this approach lies in its alignment with a proven theoretical framework for women's empowerment. Gender equality is not only about equal access to resources, it is also about cultivating agency — allowing women to become agents of their own development and make their own decisions.

This agency grows by building skills, knowledge, confidence, and experience. A combination of skills and positive self-perception is the proven gateway to empowerment. When a woman learns to use a smartphone to film, edit, and broadcast a livestream, she is not just learning a technical skill but gaining confidence to present herself and her products. When she sees her efforts translate into a sale and income, that confidence solidifies into a new self-image: she is an active creator of value.

The global community celebrates the potential of technology to open doors for young women and girls. The digital road is ultimately a road to empowerment. And for millions of rural women and men across China, that road is now wider than ever.

Niu Xinyi is a program coordinator, and Fan Beibei is a communication officer at the UNESCO International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

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Maya Majueran

Chinese public goods helping shape Asia-Pacific synergy

Global Lens

Asia-Pacific geopolitics is undergoing a subtle yet consequential shift. Where cooperation was once defined by Western-led rules, norms and security alignments, China is advancing a model focused on delivering tangible public goods rather than abstract principles.

At the core of this shift is a deeper contrast between two models of regional influence. The traditional Western approach focused on rules, standards, governance norms, and security alliances, drawing legitimacy from adherence to established principles. China, by contrast, is advancing a more functional model of leadership, where legitimacy flows from delivery: building infrastructure, mobilizing financing, and creating visible economic benefits. In this framing, Asia-Pacific cooperation is defined not just by rule-making but by the ability to implement solutions.

By prioritizing infrastructure, financing, digital connectivity, and the real economy, China is redefining both the terms of cooperation and the locus of leadership.

For decades, regional cooperation has been organized around frameworks governing trade, governance and security. While important, these frameworks can seem distant from the everyday realities of developing economies. China's approach begins differently by asking a practical question: What do countries actually need?

Across much of Asia, the answer has been consistent: roads, railways, ports, energy systems and access to capital. By focusing on these essentials, China has made cooperation visible, measurable and immediate. A railway that halves travel time or a port that unlocks trade is a concrete benefit in their daily lives.

At the center of this shift is infrastructure. Projects such as the China-Laos Railway, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway and Hambantota International Port are connective tissues that bind the region closely together.

By reducing transport costs, opening inland regions to global markets and accelerating industrial growth, these projects are reshaping economic geography. Unlike traditional aid, infrastructure delivers visible, real-world benefits, making it one of the most persuasive forms of public goods in the region.

Yet infrastructure is capital-intensive, and this is where China's role becomes pivotal. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, its policy banks, investment funds, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China has helped address Asia's long-standing financing gap. Many developing countries have struggled to secure adequate and timely funding. China's financing is often faster and less encumbered by political conditions, making it an increasingly attractive partner.

This financial role ensures that China is not only building projects but also shaping the broader system in which regional development unfolds.

China's influence is now deeply embedded in regional supply chains and trade networks, with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership at the center. Its decision to offer zero-tariff treatment to least developed countries, with which it has diplomatic relations, shows that this cooperation is grounded in action, not rhetoric. It does not unfold solely in diplomatic forums, but is built in factories, logistics hubs and digital platforms. Rooted in the real economy, it is inherently more resilient, as supply chains are far more difficult to unwind than political narratives.

China's approach now encompasses food security, poverty reduction, green energy, and digital connectivity. These are areas that directly affect people's livelihoods. Meantime, it is advancing into frontier sectors such as healthcare, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence, signaling an ambition to shape the region's developmental and technological trajectory.

Beyond physical infrastructure, China's push into the digital domain is becoming equally consequential. Through the Digital Silk Road, it is expanding its presence in 5G networks, e-commerce ecosystems, digital payments and smart city development across the region. More importantly, this expansion is increasingly tied to standard-setting in emerging fields.

These are not merely technical domains, they are the building blocks of future economic and political influence. As digital systems become embedded in everyday life, the ability to shape their standards and architecture will matter as much as building roads or ports, positioning China at the forefront of a data-driven layer of regional integration.

Taken together, these efforts point to a larger ambition: China is positioning itself as a provider of comprehensive development goods.

Importantly, China is not dismantling existing regional structures. Rather, it is working through them. By engaging ASEAN-led mechanisms such as ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit, China reinforces the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' centrality rather than displacing it. Its participation in frameworks like the RCEP and institutions such as the AIIB further complements this approach.

By delivering tangible public goods, China has shifted the region's center of gravity toward infrastructure, connectivity and real economic integration. Cooperation is becoming less about what is said and more about what is built. The defining question for Asia-Pacific cooperation is no longer who sets the rules but who builds the systems others depend on.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

XU MINGQI

Plan lays foundation for optimism

China's economic strength and competitiveness will continue to strengthen over the next five years

The Chinese government has set the GDP growth target at around 4.5 to 5 percent for 2026, slightly lower than in the past five years, as the country's focus has shifted toward qualitative development instead of quantitative expansion. However, it will still make a large contribution to global economic growth.



The main driving forces of the economy will be the development of high-quality industries, such as advanced semiconductors (including cutting-edge chips), robotics, artificial intelligence-driven manufacturing, new materials, new energy, aerospace, maritime equipment, biotechnology and low-carbon green technology. Investment in these industries will remain at a high level, while policies to stimulate domestic consumption will be strengthened. There is a consensus at home and abroad that China's industrial policy facilitating the manufacturing sector is very effective and should enable the country to meet this year's growth target.

Western commentators on Chinese economic development often focus on the structural imbalance between investment and domestic consumption, which leads to a deflationary tendency that makes the Chinese economy more dependent on international markets at a time when geopolitical confrontations and economic protectionism are on the rise. This may make China's export growth difficult to sustain in the future.

In the past four years, owing to high inflation in the United States and the appreciation of the US dollar, China's economic growth has been faster in real terms. Yet in nominal terms and at current market exchange rates, China's GDP as a share of that of the US dropped from 75.5 percent in 2021 to 63.3 percent in 2025. China's share of global GDP also declined from 19 percent to 17 percent, measured in current dollar terms.

According to the latest estimates by the International Monetary Fund, measured in purchasing power parity terms in 2025, China's GDP reached $40.7 trillion, exceeding the US figure of $30.5 trillion.

During 2021-25, the US had rather high inflation and its annual average consumer price index growth rate was 4.46 percent. High inflation forced the US Federal Reserve to raise interest rates dramatically from 1.5-1.75 percent in June 2022 to 5.25-5.5 percent in July 2023. Hiking interest rates caused the US dollar exchange rate to jump to a 10-year high, with the dollar index rising from 98 points in June 2022 to 114 points in September 2022.

During this period, China did not experience inflation and its average annual CPI growth rate was 0.66 percent, well below the target rate of 2 percent. The renminbi exchange rate depreciated from 6.5 yuan per dollar to 7.2 yuan per dollar, owing to the US dollar's appreciation against most currencies.

While the Chinese economy remains strong, this does not negate the need to tackle the structural imbalance. The Chinese government has already outlined policy measures, including employment promotion, improvements in government expenditure on social insurance and increasing household incomes, to promote domestic consumption in the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30).

There will be special programs to stimulate consumption of digital products, green products, healthcare, culture and tourism. The Chinese government will also make efforts to dismantle local and regional barriers to create a unified domestic market to promote service sector consumption. Culturally, Asian people tend to save more than Western people. The savings ratio is higher in China than in many non-Asian countries. This makes boosting consumption a difficult task. But with promoting consumption as a policy target of the 15th Five-Year Plan, there will be an obvious increase in consumption in the future.

The structural imbalance issue will be solved in the coming years not only because domestic consumption will grow faster with Chinese government policy facilitation, but also because of the further opening measures the Chinese government is pursuing. Maintaining a large trade surplus is not a policy target of the Chinese government. China has launched the China International Import Expo to enhance imports. The rapid growth of the Chinese trade surplus in recent years is mainly caused by the growing demand for Chinese products stimulated by overseas governments' expansionary fiscal and monetary policies and domestic high inflation. Chinese products are more competitive and attractive even though high tariffs have pushed up prices. The Chinese government is aware that a large trade surplus is not sustainable and may lead to more complaints and protectionist measures from trading partners. It is adjusting its trade policies to simultaneously promote exports and encourage imports. That the trade balance was highlighted in this year's Government Work Report is an important indication. Therefore, imports will increase and trade will be gradually balanced. This will create more opportunities for trade partners to access the Chinese market.

Foreign investment used to play an important role in the growth of China's exports and economy. Western observers have exaggerated the outflow of foreign capital from China in recent years. However, even if some foreign companies' profit margins are lower than before, most of them are still making profits in China.

China remains one of the most attractive destinations for foreign investment and its inflow of foreign direct investment has ranked second in the world in the past five years, just behind that of the US. In the next five years, foreign investment in the manufacturing sector may decrease, but it will increase in the service sector as China opens up its service industries further.

Even if denominated in US dollar, Western observers admit that China's share of the global economy may be set for a rebound. There is no reason to take a pessimistic view of Chinese economic development. The 15th Five-Year Plan will guide the Chinese economy to grow stronger and healthier. The Chinese economy remains on course to become the largest in the world both in PPP terms and in nominal terms, regardless of currency metrics, sooner or later.

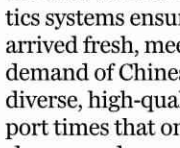
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LIU WEN AND LI XINTIAN

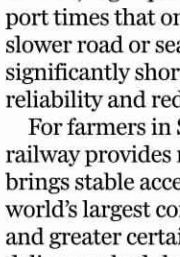
Lines of connection

High-speed railways are delivering on the promise of openness, shared technology and people-centered development

On a humid morning in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, passengers board sleek train carriages bound for Kunming, Yunnan province. In Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, commuters step onto a train that will carry them to Bandung in under an hour. Along China's southern border, freight cars loaded with tropical fruit roll north while consumer goods head south. The rhythm of departure and arrival is becoming part of everyday life across China and Southeast Asia. What was once a vision on planning maps has become a lived reality of connection.



Liu Wen



Li Xintian

More than two millennia ago, Confucius imagined a world in which "all under heaven is shared by all". Today, high-speed railways stretching across mountains and rivers give concrete form to that ideal. They are not only feats of engineering; they are pathways of shared development, binding countries together through cooperation and mutual benefit.

The transformation is visible in daily life. During this year's Spring Festival holiday, freight trains of the Lancang-Mekong Express on the China-Laos Railway carried bananas from Laos, dragon fruit from Vietnam and durians from Thailand into the Chinese market. Cold-chain logistics systems ensured that the fruit arrived fresh, meeting the growing demand of Chinese consumers for diverse, high-quality produce. Transport times that once depended on slower road or sea routes have been significantly shortened, improving reliability and reducing spoilage.

For farmers in Southeast Asia, the railway provides more than speed. It brings stable access to one of the world's largest consumer markets and greater certainty in pricing and delivery schedules. For Chinese families, it expands the "fruit basket" with affordable tropical flavors. At the same time, daily necessities, small appliances and medical supplies from China are transported southward, reaching towns and cities across Southeast Asia more efficiently. Behind these exchanges lies a rapidly evolving network integrating railways, ports and highway systems, making cross-border logistics smoother and more resilient.

Technology has played a critical role. On the China-Laos Railway, China's Beidou Navigation Satellite System enables precise real-time positioning, while intelligent monitoring systems inspect tracks, bridges and tunnels to ensure operational safety. Digitized management platforms track cargo throughout the journey, and advanced cold-chain systems help preserve perishable goods. These technologies, developed through years of research and now shared in international cooperation, have supported safe, efficient and increasingly low-carbon rail operations.

High-speed rail has also emerged as a flagship of regional infrastructure cooperation. Since the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway began commercial service in October 2023, travel time between Indonesia's capital and Bandung has been reduced from more than three hours to about 46 minutes. Known locally as "Whoosh", the line is Southeast Asia's first high-speed railway. Its launch marked a milestone not only for Indonesia's transport system but also for broader regional connectivity.

The shortened journey has stimulated tourism, facilitated commuting and enhanced the efficiency of the movement of goods. Industrial zones along the corridor are expected to benefit from improved logistics, while the railway has already become a symbol of technological advancement and partnership. As a landmark project under the Belt and Road Initiative, it demonstrates how infrastructure can accelerate economic transformation when aligned with local development strategies.

The opening of the China-Laos Railway in December 2021 represented another historic shift. Connecting Kunming in Southwest China with Vientiane, the line has linked more than 500 tourist destinations and created new channels for trade. For Laos, long described as landlocked, the railway offers a pathway to becoming land-linked. On Dec 2, 2025, the China-Laos Railway marked four years of operations. During this period, it has maintained a safe and stable service, with more than 62.5 million passenger trips and the transportation of over 72.5 million metric tons of cargo in total. The role of the railway as a "golden corridor" has continued to grow. By connecting to regional supply chains and facilitating cross-border commerce, it supports Laos' integration into the broader economic landscape of Southeast Asia and beyond.

The economic effects are tangible. Cross-border freight volumes have steadily increased since the line's inauguration, covering agricultural products, electronics, minerals and other goods. Passenger services have stimulated tourism on both sides, with travelers exploring heritage sites, culinary traditions and natural landscapes previously less accessible. Small businesses near stations have seen rising foot traffic, and new service industries have emerged to support growing mobility.

The significance of these railways extends beyond economics. Infrastructure can reshape perceptions as well as markets. As trains traverse borders with ease, they foster a sense of shared space and shared destiny. Reduced travel times make academic exchanges, business cooperation and cultural interaction more frequent and less costly.

Young people are at the forefront of this new connectivity. Increasing numbers of students from Southeast Asian nations are studying in Chinese universities, while Chinese students travel to Southeast Asia for exchange programs and internships. High-speed trains make weekend trips and research visits more practical, encouraging sustained engagement rather than one-off encounters. In classrooms, laboratories and startup incubators, friendships and professional networks take shape.

Digital connectivity amplifies these ties. Social media platforms host lively exchanges among Chinese and Southeast Asian youth, who share travel experiences, entrepreneurial ideas and cultural interests. Some collaborate through cross-border e-commerce and live streaming, bringing regional products to wider audiences. Others work together in digital creative industries, blending design, music and storytelling across cultures. The railway becomes both a physical and symbolic link, reinforcing the idea that cooperation is not abstract but personal.

From a broader perspective, high-speed rail illustrates how infrastructure can serve peace. In a world where geopolitical tensions and economic fragmentation are rising, projects grounded in mutual benefit offer an alternative narrative. Railways require long-term planning, technical coordination and sustained trust among partners. Their successful operation depends on shared standards, transparent management and continuous dialogue.

Moreover, modern electric rail systems contribute to greener development by providing energy-efficient alternatives to road and air transport. As countries in the region pursue sustainable growth and climate commitments, railways can play a constructive role in reducing emissions and promoting balanced regional development.

The journey from a "bond of hearts" to "lines of connectivity" is therefore both literal and metaphorical. It begins with shared aspirations and becomes concrete through railway lines, stations and trains. Each departure signals not only movement across distance but also progress toward deeper cooperation.

When passengers board in Vientiane, Jakarta or elsewhere, they are participating in a transformation that takes years in the making. Farmers sending produce across borders, entrepreneurs launching joint ventures, students exploring new cultures — all are beneficiaries of connectivity that turns geography from a barrier into a bridge.

As these rail corridors continue to expand and integrate with ports, highways and digital networks, they are weaving a tighter fabric of interdependence across China and Southeast Asia. The promise they embody is straightforward yet profound: That through openness, shared technology and people-centered development, infrastructures can serve as foundation for lasting peace and prosperity.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

BUSINESS

Reel rise

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM



A moviegoer passes promotional posters for the 2026 May Day film season at a theater in Renhuai, Guizhou province, on Tuesday. According to movie market tracker Maoyan, the holiday box office revenue had topped 700 million yuan ($102.4 million) as of Tuesday noon, with attendance hitting 18.948 million and surpassing the 2025 holiday's total visitor numbers. CHEN YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

One-person companies rise in popularity, gain policy support

AI-empowered OPCs now hottest entrepreneurial trend nationwide

By **CHENG YU**
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China is elevating the "one-person company" from a fringe business model to a national strategy, betting that artificial intelligence can turn individuals into scalable economic units, which industry experts said is a shift unfolding in parallel with the United States, but along a markedly different path.

The one-person company, or OPC, emerged as one of China's hottest entrepreneurial trends recently. A research report by the State Administration for Market Regulation describes the sector as "entering a phase of rapid expansion", concentrated in major economic clusters such as the Yangtze River Delta region, the Pearl River Delta region and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, as well as rising inland innovation hubs.

The numbers underscore the momentum. By June 2025, China had more than 16 million registered one-person limited liability companies, accounting for 27.4 percent of all enterprises. In the first half of 2025 alone, 2.86 million new OPCs were registered, up 47 percent year-on-year and representing nearly a quarter of all new businesses.

> AI is creating significant opportunities for startups. But this is not something handed to entrepreneurs — it has to be built through practice."
>
> **Wang Jian,** an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering

Unlike in the US, where solo entrepreneurship is often tied to gig work or digital services, China's OPC boom is being hardwired into industrial policy and anchored in the country's vast manufacturing ecosystem.

A single entrepreneur operating behind a laptop can tap into dense supply chains spanning cities like Yiwu, Zhejiang province; Dongguan, Guangdong province and Suzhou, Jiangsu province, effectively leveraging an industrial network at national scale.

That "individual plus supply chain" model is emerging as a defining feature of China's approach and one with few direct parallels in Western economies, industry experts said.

Shenzhen, Guangdong, rolled out an action plan in January to position itself as a global hub for AI-driven OPCs. The province in March rolled out China's first provincial-level policy framework dedicated to AI-enabled solo entrepreneurship. In April, Sichuan province unveiled its own plan, outlining 16 priority tasks across five key areas to build a regional OPC innovation ecosystem.

The policy shift signals a broader recalibration. Rather than simply encouraging entrepreneurship, local governments are moving to construct full-stack support systems combining funding, data access, computing power and application scenarios. The aim is to create what officials describe as a five-dimensional ecosystem spanning policy, capital, talent, infrastructure and real-world use cases.

Early signs of that transition are visible on the ground. Dedicated OPC startup communities are taking shape, including a cluster in Shanghai's Lingang Special Area that had attracted more than 500 entrepreneurs by early 2026. Guangdong has introduced specialized recruitment tracks for "super individuals", while Sichuan plans to establish AI-focused OPC hubs by 2027.

Behind the policy push lies a structural shift in China's economy. As industrial upgrading accelerates, a growing pool of highly skilled young workers — many born in the 1990s and 2000s — are opting for flexible, independent career paths. OPCs, particularly in AI-driven and asset-light sectors, offer a vehicle to deploy those skills with minimal overheads.

Wang Jian, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, frames the trend as a "miniaturization" of small and medium-sized enterprises. "AI is creating significant opportunities for startups," Wang said. "But this is not something handed to entrepreneurs — it has to be built through practice."

In his view, the real task is to create an environment where a single-person venture can evolve into a technology leader — a transformation he compares to the early days of the internet economy.

Others are pushing for further institutional innovation. Zhong Bo, chairman of Chinese technology firm XGIMI, has called for the creation of a legal framework for "digital one-person enterprises", alongside tax incentives for data-driven production and more flexible social security systems tailored to independent entrepreneurs.

Zhong also urged the development of credit and financing systems designed specifically for micro-scale digital businesses.

Bluetooth SIG hails China's innovative role in global ecosystem

By **LI JIAYING**
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China is emerging as a pivotal force in the global Bluetooth ecosystem, both as a major market and an increasingly important source of innovation, as the technology shifts from consumer connectivity toward broader applications in the artificial intelligence era, said a senior executive of Bluetooth Special Interest Group.

"Boasting the second-largest number of Bluetooth member companies globally and ranking first in product qualifications, China is now an indispensable innovator to Bluetooth development," said Neville Meijers, CEO of the company.

> Boasting the second-largest number of Bluetooth member companies globally and ranking first in product qualifications, China is now an indispensable innovator to Bluetooth development."
>
> **Neville Meijers,** CEO of Bluetooth Special Interest Group

Meijers said that with one in every three qualified Bluetooth devices in Asia-Pacific now coming from China, the country sits at the heart of the Bluetooth ecosystem in the region.

Founded in 1998 by global tech heavyweights including Ericsson, IBM and Intel, Bluetooth has grown into a global industry consortium with the Asia-Pacific region accounting for 38 percent of its global membership.

With nearly half of the global mobile Bluetooth market and strong capabilities in self-developed chips, China is moving beyond manufacturing to become a source of innovation, contributing to global standards and feeding back into the broader ecosystem, Meijers said.

"To really serve a global ecosystem, we need to understand local innovation deeply," he added.

Reflecting such a need, Bluetooth SIG has stepped up its local engagement. It established legal entities in Beijing; Shenzhen, Guangdong province; and Shanghai in February last year, followed by the launch of a China Interest Group in October. The group, led by local companies such as Xiaomi, Oppo and Vivo, focuses on aligning Chinese market needs with global technology roadmaps.

"It's important for the Bluetooth community to understand the ideas, needs and regional requirements of our members here in China — not just for products designed for the domestic market, but also for those targeting global markets," Meijers said.

Targeting the Chinese market, the interest group has set up dedicated automotive and audio teams to explore innovative applications of Bluetooth technology in areas such as automotives and the industrial internet of things.

Lori Lee, senior director of Asia-Pacific and China at Bluetooth SIG, said the mechanism enables closer collaboration with local partners and allows Chinese innovation to be incorporated into global standards.

"Building on its success in China, the model is now being extended to other markets such as Japan," Lee said.

The importance of such collaboration is underscored by the scale of the market. Bluetooth SIG expects annual shipments of Bluetooth-enabled devices to approach 6 billion units by the end of 2026, with projections exceeding 8 billion units in the following years.

6 billion units
expected annual shipments of Bluetooth-enabled devices by the end of 2026

As the ecosystem expands, Bluetooth is also expected to gain new relevance in the AI era. Sitting at the edge of connected networks, the tech is playing a growing role in data collection and transmission — a key foundation for AI applications.

"In the AI era, Bluetooth devices will become even more prevalent, as they can pull data from networks through edge devices, enabling AI to generate insights," Meijers said.

This shift is also broadening Bluetooth's application scenarios. While long associated with consumer devices such as headphones and wearables, the technology is increasingly moving into industrial and enterprise environments.

From a deployment perspective, some of the fastest-growing use cases — including asset tracking, battery-free tags for inventory management and smart lighting control — have already completed the full cycle from proof of concept to large-scale rollouts in China.

"This makes China not only the largest user of Bluetooth standards, but also a real-world testing ground and accelerator for new applications," Meijers said.

Looking ahead, Bluetooth SIG has outlined a technology roadmap for 2026 to 2030. Key priorities include advancing high data throughput (HDT) technologies to enable cable-like wireless performance, enhancing lossless high-definition audio frameworks, and developing ambient IoT standards to support ultra-low-power and self-powered devices aligned with global sustainability goals.

'Rooftop economy' latest consumption front

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**
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After the "night economy", the "rooftop economy" is now taking to the rooftops of shopping centers nationwide.

Rooftops and terraces are emerging as the latest frontiers for retailers in China, offering new ways to boost consumption and attract visitors.

Beijing's Dongcheng district has officially launched the Breeze Terrace Project, a coordinated effort to fuse cultural, commercial and tourism growth across the capital.

The initiative reflects a broader push by the country's commercial retail centers to diversify and extend retail spaces to stimulate consumption, linking communities.

The program, inaugurated at the 7th-floor terrace garden of Beijing APM Shopping Mall recently, will run through October, covering peak leisure periods including the May Day holiday, summer vacation and Mid-Autumn Festival/National Day.

The project integrates more than 100 terrace venues through a phased promotional strategy, leveraging partnerships across media, financial institutions, lifestyle platforms and the wider merchant supply chain.

Organizers said the initiative aims to drive experience upgrades through product innovation while fostering high-quality consumption through collective synergy.

The 2025 pilot of the Breeze Terrace Project drew more than 1 million residents and tourists, cementing the so-called "terrace economy" as a rising trend in Beijing's cultural consumption.

This year, the program expands with 75 new rooftop cultural tourism venues, spanning hotels, *huitong* cafes, bookstores, restaurants and cultural parks. Key highlights include a reading space at Librairie Peut-etre, Sugar Cafe Nanluoguxiang branch, Peace Hotel, and the Mandarin Oriental Qianmen.

Curated experiential offerings form a central part of the project. The classical music afternoon tea salon at Hilton Beijing Wangfujing features *guzheng*, a traditional Chinese zither, and *pipa*, a traditional lute, performances by emerging musicians.

At Beijing APM mall, activities such as Breeze Yoga and Sunset Concerts complement terrace tennis lessons, creating a multiage, multi-interest consumption ecosystem, organizers said.

Han Wei, deputy director of the Dongcheng district bureau of culture and tourism, said the program leverages terrace spaces "to link diverse industries", with the goal of building a "sky-high economic belt" that balances cultural depth with commercial vitality.

The launch coincides with steady retail growth in China. In the first quarter, total retail sales of consumer goods were up 2.4 percent year-on-year, accelerating 0.7 percentage point from the previous quarter.

Industry experts see structural transformation in China's retail sector as a key driver for initiatives like the Breeze Terrace Project. Speaking at the release of the 2026 Shopping Center and Retail Consumption Development Report last month, Cai Yun, vice-president of the China General Chamber of Commerce's shopping center branch, said that shopping centers in the country are evolving from traditional "goods-selling" spaces into lifestyle hubs, social destinations and experience-driven platforms, creating fertile ground for creative urban retail initiatives.

"The current window of opportunity allows shopping centers to evolve into urban hubs for culture, leisure and experience consumption," Cai said.



A performance is staged on the terrace of a building in Shikumen, a major tourist attraction in Shanghai, on Sunday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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BUSINESS

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Foreigners booming in Hainan livestream mkt

Expat livestreamers help customers better understand China and Chinese products



A foreign host is livestreaming cosmetics products "Made in China" in Chengmai county, Hainan province, in September 2025. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A male foreign host livestreams Chinese products in Chengmai in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Visitors ask about duty-free cross-border goods at an international consumer expo in Haikou, Hainan, on Nov 20. XU ERSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

By MA SI and **CHEN BOWEN**
in Chengmai, Hainan

The afternoon sun slants through the tinted glass walls of a livestreaming base in Chengmai county, Hainan province, casting a golden light on the busy venue.

At 2 pm, the place comes alive. Behind one soundproof door, a young woman from Morocco adjusts a ring light; behind another, a Ghanaian man flashes a wide smile at his camera. In less than a minute, they will begin speaking to thousands of shoppers thousands of miles away — in places like New York, Casablanca, Lagos and Jakarta.

This is not a scene from well-known Chinese e-commerce cities such as Shenzhen, Guangdong province, or Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. This is Hainan, the southern island province known for coconut trees, beach resorts and rocket launches.

But after the island-wide special customs operations came into effect in December at Hainan Free Trade Port, a different kind of tide is rolling in — not of tourists, but of foreign faces speaking into phones, selling "Made in China" to the world.

"What makes me come to Hainan? It's growing. It's a good opportunity. I feel like I'm going to grow together with this island," said Imane, a 25-year-old from Morocco, taking a quick break from her setup.

Her eyes scan a shelf of products: a professional DJ mixer, a foldable electric scooter and Labubu figurines from Pop Mart. "Especially the policies, especially the shipments — you know the ports, the delivery is fast plus it doesn't cost that much money."

Imane is one of a growing number of foreign livestreamers who have made Hainan their home base. Since arriving in October, she has gone from a newcomer to a seasoned host, broadcasting to audiences who once questioned the quality of Chinese goods. Now she speaks not just as a seller, but as a cultural bridge.

During a recent livestreaming session, she held up a sleek electric bike.

"This bike is popular, it's famous, and even trending — especially in the US," she said. Her tone was neither rehearsed nor forced. She speaks with the ease of someone who has lived in China for years — Hangzhou; Guangzhou, Guangdong; Shenyang, Liaoning province; and now Hainan. That journey gave her a layered understanding of a country that many overseas consumers still see in flat, outdated terms.

"Before, it was so difficult because people didn't trust Chinese products," she said. "But when we start explaining — the story of how it comes, we talk about the quality, how it's going to help your daily life — then they start understanding."

She held up a box of coconut tea, a Hainan specialty. "I drink Chinese tea every day — green tea, very refreshing. But when I moved to Hainan, I really like this: coconut tea. In Morocco, we also have tea, it's famous. So I tell my audience: 'This is like your tea, but with a tropical touch'. The biggest challenge is not the language," she reflected.

"It's the trust. But once you show them the story behind the product — how it's made, who makes it and what problem it solves — they become your loyal customers."

That trust-building is exactly why Hainan's cross-border e-commerce players are doubling down on foreign hosts. Xu Jie, co-founder of Hainan Chuangchen Overseas Enterprise Services, runs a livestreaming base in Chengmai that now employs hosts from nine countries — Pakistan, Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Congo and beyond.

"In the Chinese mainland, it's very difficult to get work visas for foreign livestreamers. Thanks to Hainan's policy, we can legally hire foreign hosts. We also have dedicated cross-border livestreaming lines that ensure realtime transmission with very low latency. Overseas consumers see a local face, hear a local accent and receive a local cultural reference. That's an unbeatable advantage," Xu said.

Behind the smiling faces on camera is a carefully engineered policy environment. Xu said: "Without Hainan's special policies, we couldn't have built this international team."

Hainan Free Trade Port has rolled out a suite of measures that directly benefit cross-border e-commerce. For foreign talent, the process has been streamlined. Hainan now offers a joint work permit and residence permit application that takes just three working days — a reduction of more than seventy percent compared to traditional procedures. Work permits, once issued for three or six months, are now routinely valid for a year.

"That means our foreign hosts can legally live and work in Hainan for the long term. That stability is essential for building a team and growing a business," Xu said.

Even more attractive are the cost advantages brought by the customs policies. Xu calculated that with individual income tax capped at 15 percent for high-end talent — and corporate income tax at 15 percent for encouraged industries — his total operating costs are fifteen to twenty percent lower than in the Chinese mainland.

For a company that employs dozens of international staff and ships thousands of parcels daily, that is a game-changing edge.

Why has Chengmai become the epicenter of this activity? The county, located in northwestern Hainan, sits inside the half-hour economic circle of the provincial capital Haikou. It is close enough to benefit from Haikou's infrastructure, but affordable enough to host large-scale operations.

Huang Wanshu, deputy director of the Bureau of Commerce in Chengmai, said the strategy comes with right timing, right location and right people.

The location includes Macun Port — a national first-class open port connecting to Southeast Asia and the countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative. Logistics giants such as JD.com, Prologis, Mapletree and Americold have set up facilities there, cutting transportation and customs costs by at least 10 percent.

As for people, Chengmai has adopted a "talent first" philosophy, streamlining bureaucratic hurdles and providing value-added services. "We chose the '100 meters deep, one meter wide' approach — focusing on a niche section of cross-border e-commerce, and digging deep," Huang said.

But Chengmai's ambitions rest on more than low costs and good ports. The county also boasts Hainan's first and largest digital economy cluster — Hainan Ecological Software Park.

"More than 17,000 enterprises have registered there, with combined annual revenue exceeding 200 billion yuan ($29.3 billion). Tech giants including Baidu, Tencent and Meituan have a presence."

The park was also approved as one of China's first digital service export bases, and its game-centric global public services platform has launched 158 Chinese games overseas, with more than 12 million registered users outside China.

"That digital infrastructure provides invaluable technical and data-compliance support for cross-border e-commerce," Huang said.

Financial services are equally robust. Chengmai has built a fund matrix of "mother funds plus sub-funds plus special funds". The entire county now hosts 55 registered private fund managers, managing 1,748 funds with total assets exceeding 220 billion yuan — more than half of the entire island's total.

The story of Chengmai is not isolated. Across Hainan, a bigger picture is emerging. In Haikou's industrial parks, livestreaming rooms facing Southeast Asia are running at full capacity. More than a thousand foreign livestreamers now operate in that park alone.

In Sanya, cross-border e-commerce charter flights are also busy traveling around the world.

Zhang Chunsheng, president of the Hainan Cross-border E-commerce Association, puts the transformation into a historical context.

"For a long time, when people in Hainan said 'cross-border e-commerce', they meant imports," he recalled. "Without a strong manufacturing base like Guangzhou or Hangzhou, Hainan naturally focused on bringing goods in — that's how we got the label 'the island of imported goods'."

That began to change two years ago, when the so-called "9610" e-commerce retail export model took off. About two years ago, Hainan's cross-border e-commerce export value reached roughly 2 billion yuan, mostly via "transshipment aggregation" — mainly goods made in the Pearl River or Yangtze River deltas being shipped to Hainan for customs clearance, then sent directly to overseas consumers using Hainan's extensive Southeast Asia shipping routes.

Special customs operations have brought two major benefits, Zhang said. First, the entire island has become a comprehensive pilot zone for exports — a scale and degree of autonomy unmatched anywhere else in China.

Second, a massive tourist dividend has evolved. "Hainan receives about 90 million tourists a year. That could rise to 400 million within two to three years," Zhang predicted. Those 400 million visitors will generate new offline-online hybrid models — O2O, self-pickup and fast delivery — aimed at foreign travelers, creating a completely new growth frontier.

"Some people say Hainan has no industry cluster," Zhang said. "But neither did Hong Kong nor Singapore. Hainan's goal is to become a free trade port with its own manufacturing support. The current zero-tariff policy covering 6,600 tariff lines benefits enterprises, but the real intent is to encourage the import of production-oriented raw materials to attract substantive processing and manufacturing to the island, and to gradually cultivate a local industrial base. That road is longer, but once built, its value will be much higher."

As dusk falls over Chengmai, Imane wraps up her final broadcast of the day. "I'm not just selling a lamp or a speaker," she said, unplugging her microphone. "I'm showing them that Chinese innovation is real, that it can make their life better. And I'm from Morocco — they see me, they trust me and they start to trust China."

Hainan, once a tropical vacation getaway, is now a frontier of a different kind — an island where a young woman from Casablanca and a young man from Accra are helping the world see a new China, one livestreaming session at a time.

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Shanghai to build iconic attractions

World's largest spokeless Ferris wheel among projects worth 4b yuan unveiled

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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An array of benchmark projects, including the world's largest spokeless Ferris wheel, has been announced in Shanghai, a move experts say will upgrade the city's skyline and boost its appeal as a cultural and tourism destination.

"The new attractions will further enhance Shanghai's appeal to both domestic and international tourists, reinforcing the East China city's position as a top-tier tourism destination," said Qi Xiaozhai, vice-chairman of the Commerce Economy Association of China.

"In particular, the would-be tallest Ferris wheel is expected to become a must-visit attraction for tourists interested in traveling to China," Qi said.

Located on the riverside in Baoshan district, the 2-billion-yuan ($292.83 million) Ferris wheel project tops the list. Literally meaning the "Arch of Shanghai", the 228-meter-high spokeless structure will take the shape of a gigantic ring, according to the city's official Jiefang Daily.

Designed to reflect features of an international cruise and maritime gateway, the new urban cultural and tourism landmark is set to begin construction by the end of 2026.

"It is common practice for global cities to develop iconic projects. Shanghai is already home to numerous attractions, including the Bund and the Shanghai Disney Resort. However, Baoshan district remains something of a missing piece when it comes to flagship tourism destinations," Qi said.

The project, located near the Shanghai Wusongkou International Cruise Terminal, is expected to integrate with nearby attractions to offer global travelers a unique experience, Qi added.

The current largest spokeless Ferris wheel in the world is the "Eye of Bohai" in Weifang, Shandong province. Standing at 142.52 meters, it holds the Guinness World Record for the tallest centerless Ferris wheel due to its distinctive structure and height, according to public information.

In addition, the country's first immersive artificial intelligence interactive theater, named "New World: Golden Age" in Chinese, is set to launch this year, Yu Song, assistant to the general manager of the Shanghai Film Park, said in a China News Service report.

Developed on the basis of the filming location of the award-winning TV drama *Fan Hua*, or *Blossoms Shanghai*, the theater is set in the 1990s Shanghai and will feature four main storylines and nearly 100 subplots, allowing visitors to choose their own narrative and role.

"Tourists will not be confined to fixed seating; instead, they can move freely across the nearly 10,000-square-meter real-life street set to experience an immersive adventure," Yu said.

Another highlight is a 360-degree spherical venue. With an investment of 1.2 billion yuan, the venue, located on the West Bund in Xuhui district, will accommodate about 3,000 people.

Scheduled to begin construction in the second half of this year, it is expected to become a new landmark and complement the area's cultural ecosystem.

Five major projects, with a combined investment of about 4 billion yuan, were announced during the Shanghai Tourism Investment Promotion Conference on April 29, covering waterfront leisure, urban renewal, digital performance, immersive experiences and landmark development.

"Standing out for their technological appeal, immersive experience and iconic features, the new projects are expected to enhance Shanghai's charm as a global cultural and tourism city," Qi said.

The projects come as Shanghai pushes to become a leading urban tourism destination. The city recorded 425 million tourist trips in 2025, generating 672.4 billion yuan in total tourism revenue, according to Jiefang Daily.

Inbound travel also surged, with 9.36 million trips made by overseas visitors last year, up 39.58 percent year-on-year, according to the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism. Among them, overnight inbound tourists totaled 8.79 million trips, an increase of 45.09 percent year-on-year.

New lunar mineral found in meteorite

By LI MENGHAN
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Chinese scientists have identified a new mineral in the first lunar meteorite ever found in China, marking the 11th lunar mineral discovered worldwide. With this finding, China has now identified four lunar minerals, tying with the United States for the most lunar mineral discoveries.

The mineral, named Magnesiochangesite-(Ce), has been approved by the International Mineralogical Association's Commission on New Minerals, Nomenclature and Classification, the global authority responsible for verifying and naming newly discovered minerals.

A rare-earth-bearing phosphate, Magnesiochangesite-(Ce), is colorless and transparent with a glasslike luster. It is brittle, breaks with shell-like fractures, and fluoresces under ultraviolet light. Researchers said such properties help distinguish it from other lunar materials.

> "The discovery provides key mineralogical evidence for understanding the origin and evolution of the moon."
>
> **Wang Yanjuan,** a doctoral graduate at the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences

The mineral was discovered in Pakepake 005, the first lunar meteorite found in China. The 44-gram spherical stone, with a dark fusion crust formed during its passage through Earth's atmosphere, was recovered in 2024 in the Taklamakan Desert, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Wang Yanjuan, a doctoral graduate at the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences and the first to identify the mineral, said the discovery carries scientific significance.

"The discovery provides key mineralogical evidence for understanding the origin and evolution of the moon, and expands the boundaries of human knowledge of the material world," Wang said.

She added that the mineral's crystal structure and chemical composition offer insights into lunar volcanic activity and the way rare earth elements separate during planetary formation. She also noted its unusual luminescent properties could inform the development of new glowing materials.

Che Xiaochao, an associate researcher at the planetary science research center of the Institute of Geology under the CAGS, said analysis of the meteorite relied on a domestically developed high-resolution secondary ion mass spectrometer. The instrument uses a focused ion beam to analyze a sample's surface composition at the microscopic level without dissolving or destroying it.

"It's like doing a CT scan on the rock — without dissolving the sample, we can accurately obtain its internal chemical information and precisely analyze almost all elements and isotopes," Che said. He noted the technology also has applications in semiconductors and new energy materials.

Institute director Yang Zhiming said advanced instruments are essential for accurately measuring and analyzing rare samples.

He added that the instrument was also used in studying lunar samples from China's Chang'e 6 mission and the country's first lunar meteorite, underscoring the importance of mastering core scientific equipment and analytical techniques to advance research capabilities.

Robots ease high-altitude construction in Xizang

By DAQIONG in Lhasa
and **ZHENG JINRAN**

A 300-megawatt solar project in Chamdo, Xizang autonomous region, has deployed high-altitude-adapted installation robots during construction, underscoring the growing role of intelligent technologies in overcoming extreme conditions and advancing renewable energy development on the plateau.

The project, in Yechen township of Pashoi county at elevations above 4,300 meters, faces challenges that include low oxygen levels, harsh weather and a construction window of less than five months each year.

Developed by Datang Yuquhe Hydropower Development Co, the project is a key component of eastern Xizang's clean energy base. Construction began in August.

"Traditional construction methods are difficult to sustain under such conditions," said Yang Shuanglong, the project manager. "Introducing intelligent equipment is both a practical solution and an important step toward upgrading construction methods in high-altitude areas."

To address these challenges, the project introduced four high-altitude-adapted photovoltaic installation robots as part of a pilot program exploring scalable solutions for plateau solar construction.

Operating under a "remote control plus on-site support" model and supported by a 5G system, the robots are capable of autonomous navigation, precise positioning and integrated panel installation, Yang said.

Each robot can install up to 100 solar panels per hour, with daily output exceeding 600 panels — about twice the efficiency of manual labor. Equipped with a high-precision 3D vision system, the machines maintain millimeter-level accuracy under strong ultraviolet radiation, while a hydraulic leveling system enables operation on slopes of up to 12 degrees.

"The robots significantly improve efficiency while reducing safety risks for workers," he said.

At such altitudes, manual installation requires workers to carry components weighing up to 39 kilograms, placing physical strain on laborers in oxygen-thin conditions. The robots have taken on high-intensity tasks such as lifting and positioning panels, reducing the risk of fatigue and injury.

Yang said early results from the pilot program show the technology is well suited to high-altitude environments and could be expanded in future projects across Xizang.

The deployment of robotic systems reflects a broader shift from labor-intensive construction to technology-driven solutions in extreme environments, with potential applications in other large-scale renewable energy projects, he said.

Once fully operational, the project is expected to generate about 530 million kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, enough to meet the needs of around 1.38 million people. It will also help reduce carbon emissions and support Xizang's transition toward a cleaner energy mix, Yang said.

The Yechen project, with a total investment of 980 million yuan ($143.5 million) and planned land use of about 357.6 hectares, has also generated economic benefits for surrounding communities.

It has contributed nearly 15 million yuan in income through housing rentals, equipment leasing, transportation and catering services, according to local media reports. More than 100 residents from nearby villages have been employed on-site, earning a combined total of more than 300,000 yuan.

Local residents have seen new income opportunities emerge alongside the project.

"We have taken up temporary construction work in addition to traditional herding, earning about 260 yuan per day," Dawa Gyaltsan, a resident from Yamda village, said in a Xizang Daily report.

Before construction began, residents in Yamda and Ochung villages mainly relied on livestock grazing and occasional temporary jobs to earn a living.

The project also includes ecological protection measures to minimize environmental impact in the fragile alpine ecosystem, including soil conservation and vegetation restoration during construction.

It has also incorporated a "solar-grazing" design model, with solar panel structures elevated to allow livestock to graze beneath them without disrupting traditional pastoral activities, according to the project team.

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Online
See more by scanning the code.



An intelligent robot installs solar panels at a photovoltaic project site in Yechen township, Chamdo, Xizang autonomous region.
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Fair trade



Overseas buyers explore products in the toy exhibition area of the 139th China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Tuesday. The event, which concluded on the same day, attracted 314,000 overseas buyers from 220 countries and regions, reflecting a 1.1 percent increase compared to the previous fair. CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Novel AI model to advance research and redefine innovation landscape

By LI MENGHAN
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The Beijing Spectrometer — a state-of-the-art particle detector often described as a "high-speed camera" for microscopic particles invisible to the naked eye — is entering a new phase of intelligent, autonomous and more efficient operation, reflecting what researchers call agentic artificial intelligence.

Over its 16 years of operation, the large-scale scientific facility has generated vast amounts of data. Combined with the complexity of its research targets, that has led to long analysis cycles and challenges for traditional, human-led analysis methods, said Liu Beijiang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of High Energy Physics.

Now, guided by what researchers describe as an "intelligent brain", automated scientific workflows can integrate AI-enhanced tools to reduce repetitive tasks and improve efficiency, Liu said.

The "intelligent brain" is part of a suite of eight large language models tailored to different scientific disciplines, along with a foundational scientific model, released by the CAS in Beijing on April 28. The system, called ScienceOne 100, is designed to advance "AI for Science" by shifting research from fragmented, isolated efforts toward a more integrated, platform-based model of innovation.

Large language models are AI systems trained on vast amounts of text and data that can understand, generate and analyze language. In this case, they are adapted for scientific research tasks.

"With the acceleration of a new round of technological revolution, AI for Science has shifted the paradigm in scientific research. It is redefining the innovation landscape of the new era, as well as enhancing the efficiency and quality of scientific development," said Zeng Dajun, a researcher at the CAS' Institute of Automation.

China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) highlights the importance of fully implementing "AI Plus", an initiative that uses AI to process complex scientific data, improve research and development efficiency, and support more collaborative human-machine research methods.

Zeng said the system, built on a foundational scientific model first launched in July and continuously improved since then, promotes the open sharing of data, models and algorithms to support scientific innovation.

He said its most widely used function is an intelligent literature assistant, which helps researchers analyze academic papers. According to the CAS, it improves accuracy from about 70 percent in mainstream international systems to 90 percent through cross-checking and multi-step validation, helping reduce errors known as AI hallucinations, where systems generate incorrect or misleading information.

The system also allows users to intervene during operation, adjust tasks in real time, reduce trial-and-error work and shorten research time by more than 60 percent, Zeng said.

While the foundational model addresses broad scientific problems and supports interdisciplinary research, the eight discipline-specific models focus on more specialized challenges, he said. Together, they are designed to create a coordinated research ecosystem across different fields.

Liu Jianjun, a researcher at the CAS' Shanghai Institute of Ceramics, highlighted the model's role in developing high-performance materials used in extreme environments.

Such materials are essential for advances in aerospace and integrated circuits, but traditional development cycles can take about 15 years due to the large number of variables involved, he said.

By integrating scientific literature, physical laws and material properties, the model can help generate customized material designs. Liu said it also improves the link between laboratory research and real-world application, speeding up development.

Yang Yanchu, a researcher at the CAS' Aerospace Information Research Institute, said a large language model for the near space domain fills a gap in China's research capabilities.

Near space, at altitudes of 20 to 100 kilometers, is a transitional region between the atmosphere used by aircraft and the orbital environment of satellites.

Yang said the model simulates atmospheric, meteorological and electromagnetic conditions in that region and supports applications such as communications, navigation, remote sensing and detection. It also integrates knowledge in energy, materials and flight control.

Compared with other models of similar size, Yang said it performs better in logical consistency, accuracy and technical reasoning, providing more reliable expert-level responses.

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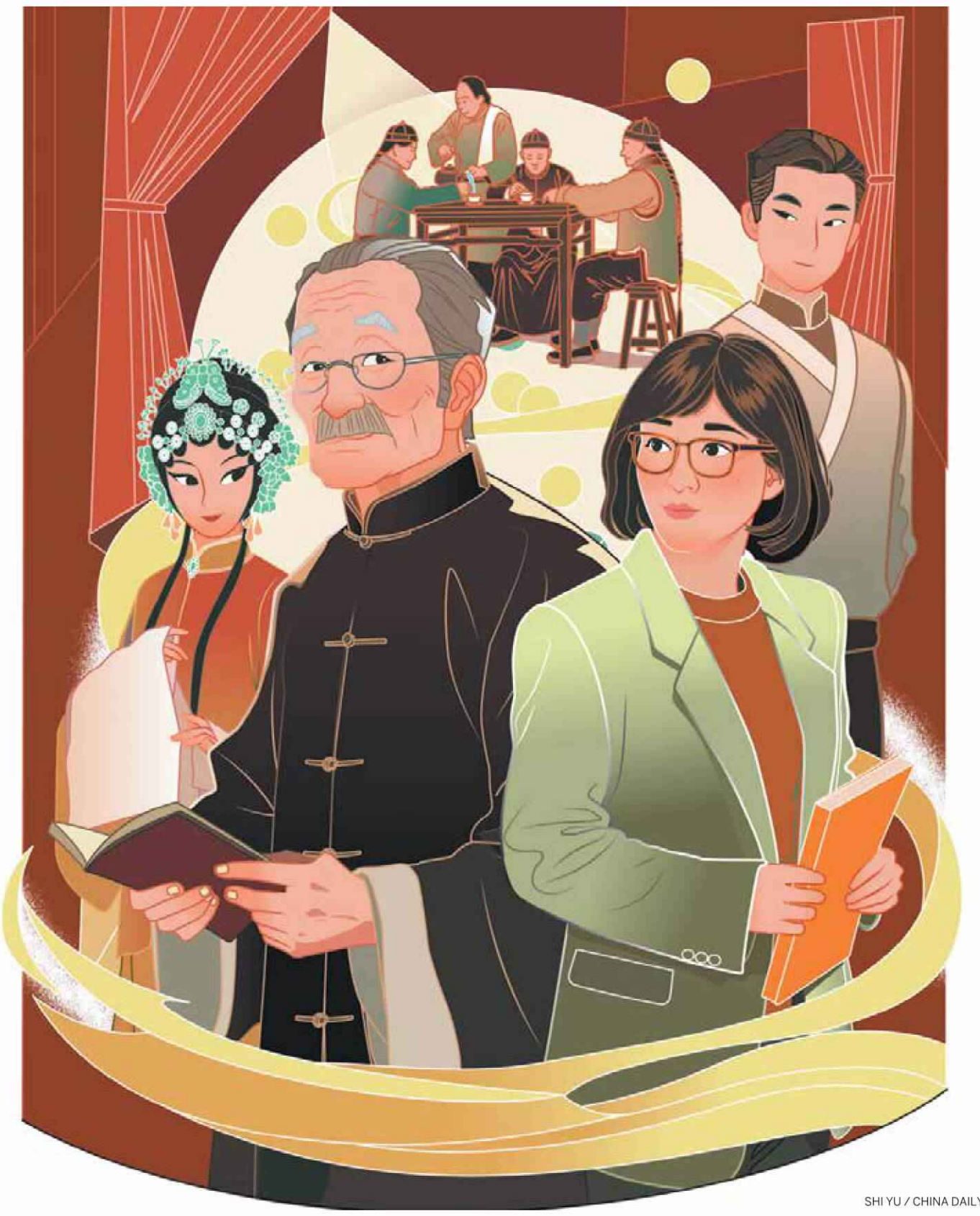
POLICY REVIEW

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

Plan aims to revive traditional drama

Innovation, education key to winning over younger generation

By **CHEN NAN**
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SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

China's cultural authorities have released a comprehensive three-year action plan aimed at revitalizing the country's traditional dramatic arts and boosting their appeal among younger audiences.

In recent years, traditional arts have faced fierce competition from digital entertainment, forcing a rethink of how to engage viewers.

To address this modern dilemma, the Three-Year Action Plan for the Revitalization of Drama (2026-28) was released in February by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles.

The plan sets forth 24 measures across seven areas, including improving the development and training of theater troupes and their repertoires, cultivating new artists and better engaging the public.

To ensure these art forms remain relevant, theater professionals have emphasized the need for works that resonate with contemporary audiences and the importance of cultivating new viewers through educational institutions. They've also highlighted embracing technological innovation to expand artistic expression and create a sustainable ecosystem for the dramatic arts.

According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, among China's 348 traditional opera types, roughly one-third are considered rare. Some exist in only a single troupe nationwide.

"Theater troupes across all levels are tasked with identifying enduring works, organizing research and promoting performances, with an emphasis on standardizing the transmission of key classics," the plan said.

Authorities are also focusing on rescuing and revitalizing precious historical materials.

"Cultural, tourism and publicity departments are coordinating with theater groups, research institutes, museums and libraries to collect, study, publish and exhibit traditional scripts, scores and archives," the plan said, noting that special attention is being given to preserving the audiovisual recordings of veteran performers, and oral histories of notable artists.

Local governments are encouraged to enact regulations to support the protection and development of regional opera forms. Experts say these measures aim to ensure China's opera heritage is systematically preserved and dynamically transmitted to future generations.

Liu Tong, director of the Chinese opera expert committee of the China Education Federation of the Arts, highlighted the plan's emphasis on "tailoring strategies to local conditions and specific troupes".

"Drama troupes across the country vary greatly — some are well-resourced, others face dual pressures of limited funding and talent shortages. Rare genres are particularly vulnerable; if key performers leave, the art itself may disappear," he said.

Liu said the plan's proposals, including a genre preservation program, a classical repertoire library and targeted support, respond directly to these realities, noting that troupe management requires more than funding.

"Effective governance must balance artistic principles, repertoire planning, market engagement and talent continuity," he said.

Shang Wenbo, director of the Taizhou Luantan opera troupe, has firsthand experience of pulling a dying art form back from the brink.

The group, a representative of national intangible cultural heritage, was dormant for nearly 30 years and faced significant hurdles, including the loss of performers, shrinking audiences and market decline.

Taizhou Luantan is a regional form of Chinese traditional opera originating from Zhejiang province. Featuring a flexible, improvisational style that blends local folk songs, dialect and storytelling, its themes are drawn from everyday life and local history.

"Our survival isn't luck, but is about finding a path that works for us," Shang said.

Under a hybrid public-private model, the troupe modernized its operations and implemented targeted talent development, producing a steady stream of original works. As a result, young actors gained practical experience, and the productions reached national stages and gained commercial success.

"The plan's support for grassroots troupes and reform is both encouragement and guidance," Shang added.

A major priority of the plan is the systematic training of young theater talent. This includes multitiered programs targeting primary schools, secondary schools and higher education institutions, combining academic instruction with hands-on performance experience.

According to Liu, China's traditional opera education system is facing a talent shortage, with only 1,670 students currently enrolled in vocational opera programs nationwide, which is far below industry demand.

He emphasized that the key lies in increasing student participation, calling for optimized enrollment policies. Measures should include tuition reductions, living allowances and other incentives to attract young people, particularly to smaller, less-known opera genres.

Liu said that deepening cooperation between opera schools and primary and secondary schools is of critical importance, as it creates a pipeline from early interest to professional training.

Wang Rongrong, a veteran Peking Opera actress with the Jingju Theatre Company of Beijing, highlighted the plan's emphasis on "master-apprentice" relationships, which allow young actors to inherit both technical skills and interpretative wisdom from veteran performers. She noted that these relationships are particularly critical for rare genres.

Peking Opera, or *jingju* in Chinese, dates back more than 200 years and was recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010. It brings together the art forms of singing, dancing, martial arts and acrobatics.

The plan also encourages cross-troupe exchanges, summer academies and intensive workshops, providing young actors with exposure to a variety of genres and performance techniques. Digital platforms are set to complement these efforts, with online master classes, artificial intelligence-assisted rehearsal tools, and virtual performance spaces to allow students to learn even when geographic constraints or limited local resources exist.

Recognizing that private theater troupes face persistent challenges, such as shortages of scripts and limited access to high-quality original works, the China Theatre Association launched the "One-Yuan Seed Plan" on Feb 24.

The initiative, which is also highlighted in the plan, aims to leverage the association's professional and resource advantages by inviting renowned playwrights to submit works suitable for private troupes. In a symbolic gesture, the performance rights are transferred for a nominal 1-yuan (15 cents) copyright fee, helping local and county-level private troupes gain access to tested and acclaimed works.

Chen Yongquan, vice-chairman of the association, said that the plan will authorize and publish 100 works in stages. The first batch includes 20 plays, spanning contemporary, historical and folk themes, all recognized for their quality and audience appeal.

So far, 35 private troupes have expressed interest, showing enthusiasm for performing classic and popular works. Chen noted that thriving private troupes are vital to cultural development and the broader arts ecosystem.

"They strengthen the foundation of Chinese drama, promote public engagement with traditional culture, and expand access to high-quality cultural services," he said.

Drama's long-term revival depends on the quality of productions, according to the plan, and as such it prioritizes improving repertoire quality through script evaluation, guided creative processes and funding incentives.

"A new initiative aims to improve the script review system. Productions must start with strong, well-vetted scripts. Script evaluation will become a prerequisite for staging plays. A national platform will be built to collect and promote outstanding scripts. This platform will connect playwrights with theater troupes," the plan said.

The plan also emphasizes the role of digital innovation and modern media in expanding the reach of dramatic arts. Traditional outlets such as radio, television, and film will be utilized to promote theater, with provincial TV stations encouraged to launch dedicated opera programs. Concurrently, technology is playing a larger role in audience development. Theater troupes are being supported in using the internet and artificial intelligence to reach broader demographics, while online performances and livestreams will be standardized to ensure quality and industry impact.

Feng Yuanzheng, president of the Beijing People's Art Theatre, and also a veteran actor and director, said: "Content is always the top priority. Only compelling works that combine artistic excellence with contemporary relevance can attract and retain audiences.

"I experimented with AI-generated scripts, and while the results were technically excellent, they lacked soul. Original scripts carry the emotions, quirks and personality of the author — something no machine can replicate," he said. "Scripts written by humans breathe life into stories. The precision of AI cannot replace the lived experience and emotional depth that make characters resonate with audiences."

To cultivate future audiences, the plan calls for strengthening general theater education in schools. Programs that bring performing arts to campuses will be expanded to offer students diverse ways to watch, participate, and engage. Additionally, schools with sufficient resources are encouraged to establish drama clubs to nurture young talent and future theatergoers.

Industry professionals emphasize that making productions accessible to younger viewers is critical. Kunqu Opera performer Ke Jun highlighted the success of youth-focused productions — such as a teen version of *The Peony Pavilion* — which attracted hundreds of thousands of young viewers. By utilizing online streaming as a "second stage", troupes can reach distant audiences and foster a new cycle of engagement.

To lower barriers and integrate traditional arts into everyday life, Shanghai Yue Opera House director Xu Biaoxin called for utilizing accessible digital formats. These include short videos, livestreams, behind-the-scenes content and performer personal branding, ensuring that classical performing arts remain relevant to modern, younger audiences.

Theater works to pass torch to new talent

By **CHEN NAN**

This March, Beijing's audiences flocked to the theater, eager to witness a performance that has enchanted generations.

Since its premiere in 1958, Lao She's *Teahouse*, brought to life by the Beijing People's Art Theatre under the meticulous guidance of directors Jiao Juyin and Xia Chun, has held a mirror to nearly half a century of China's social transformations. Yet, beyond its historical narrative, it is the dedication of the theater's actors — both veteran and young — that keeps this masterpiece alive.

The theater has long upheld a near-sacred tradition: once a production takes root, the core cast, stage design and performance style remain steadfast. This disciplined continuity ensures that each audience experiences the authenticity of old Beijing.

"Our goal is for the audience to feel the original spirit of the teahouse — without distortion, without modern embellishments," said actor Yang Lixin, who is also the restaging director of *Teahouse*.

For decades, actors like Liang Guanhua, Pu Cunxin and He Bing have embodied iconic characters with unwavering commitment. Liang, who has portrayed the second-generation Wang Lifa since 1999, meticulously records every performance in a personal log, reflecting on decades of insight and subtle refinement. Pu, now the chairman of the China Theatre Association, treats each staging as a fresh ascent, approaching every show with the immediacy of a first encounter with the audience.

Yet, the theater's leadership recognized that classical theater could not survive without thoughtful succession. To pass the torch to the younger generation, the Beijing People's Art Theatre revived its actor training programs in 2019 after a 30-year hiatus. The new cohort underwent rigorous instruction, including one-on-one mentorship, master classes, and immersion in real-life experiences.

"The challenge for young actors is not merely to imitate, but to understand and inhabit the essence of these roles," Pu said. "They must bring their own vitality and sensitivity, while honoring the rhythm, nuance and humanity of the characters."

Through this blend of tradition and innovation, the theater's younger performers stepped into secondary roles, learning the discipline, empathy, and interpretive depth that defined the institution. Actor Yang Mingxin described rehearsals as a living classroom where stage veterans, directors, and designers collaborated to create an environment of learning by observation and practice.

Today's theater-goers, especially younger ones, judge performances on merit rather than resemblance to legendary predecessors. This shift gave emerging actors room to explore and contribute their unique voices to the continuum of Chinese theater.

According to Feng Yuanzheng, a veteran actor, director and president of Beijing People's Art Theatre, the most urgent issue facing the theater is how to enable young actors to take the reins as soon as possible. In recent years, the theater has been actively exploring actor training and has boldly involved young actors in the creation of new productions.

In this interplay between old and new, the Beijing People's Art Theatre demonstrates the delicate art of cultural stewardship: honoring the past while empowering the next generation.

Feng said the current challenge is how to encourage today's young playwrights — or young people who enjoy creating — to develop works with contemporary significance.

In 2024, the theater held a director-playwright training program and one of the biggest challenges for young participants was committing themselves fully, Feng said.

"It is very difficult for a young person to spend three years completing a script; even half a year feels long to them," he said. Feng added that, for actors, the most persuasive way to win audience acceptance is through fully realized characters. And for a theater, the most effective way to gain audience recognition is through the quality of its productions.

Policy Digest

Subsidy program to aid phase-out of old commercial trucks

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

The Ministry of Transport and the National Development and Reform Commission have issued a notice rolling out a 2026 subsidy program to accelerate the replacement of old commercial trucks.

The program, effective throughout the whole year, provides financial incentives for scrapping and replacing heavy- and medium-duty trucks that comply with the older emission standards. A focus is promoting the transition to new energy vehicles, with priority support given to the purchase of electric trucks.

The subsidy amounts vary based on the vehicle type, scrapping time and the type of new vehicle purchased. The maximum combined subsidy for scrapping an old truck and purchasing a new electric truck can reach up to 140,000 yuan ($20,500) per vehicle .

Funding for the subsidies will be allocated to local governments through ultra-long-term special treasury bonds. If the central government allocation is exhausted, any additional funding required must be covered by local finances.

Initiative to boost deep AI integration with industrial growth

China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the National Data Administration have launched an action plan to foster synergistic development between artificial intelligence models and data resources to empower new industrialization.

The initiative targets 20 key manufacturing sectors, including steel, automobiles, medical equipment, aerospace and electronic components. Its core objective is to establish a self-reinforcing loop that connects data, AI models and practical industrial applications by the end of this year.

Key tasks outlined include building high-quality general and specialized industry datasets, and developing industry-specific models and intelligent agents.

According to the established timeline, provincial authorities and relevant State-owned enterprises directly administered by the central government are required to submit detailed implementation plans by May 30, provide a mid-term progress report by Aug 30, and submit a final summary by Nov 30.

CHINA DAILY

Z WEEKLY

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

Social Media Digest

Earphone renaissance

No charging, no device pairing — just plug in your earphones and enjoy the music. After being overshadowed by wireless Bluetooth earbuds for nearly a decade, wired earphones are making a comeback in 2026.

According to the market research firm Circana, sales of wired earphones rose by 20 percent in the first quarter of this year.

On the social media platform Xiaohongshu (RedNote), the hashtag "wired-earphone outfits" has also gained popularity, with young netizens creatively incorporating them into their style — using them as necklaces, belt decorations, and even hair accessories — bringing back the Y2K aesthetic.

So, what's driving this revival? Many people say Bluetooth earbuds are easy to misplace and require constant charging, while wired earphones are simple, reliable, and always ready to use.

In today's fast-paced digital world, the ever-present earphone cable has come to symbolize effortless, dependable freedom — with a touch of nostalgia and retro charm.

As one Xiaohongshu user puts it: "With wired earphones, you can enjoy lossless audio on music apps. And when you're with someone you like, you can share one side of the earphones. You sit close and enjoy the music together — it's really romantic."



Young people are embracing wired earphones for style and simplicity. VCG

Apple wisdom

What's the secret to happiness?

"When you have an apple, just enjoy the apple."

The simple yet thoughtful answer didn't come from a philosopher, but from a primary school student.

In April, during the annual Crabapple Blossom Season Campus Open Day at Tianjin University (TJU), an interactive board was set up at the university library for an activity titled "Quick Answers to Life's Puzzles".

University students wrote down their concerns, while younger children responded with candid and unfiltered honesty.

One university student asked, "What should I do if I can't find inner joy?" A child replied, "Watch *Peppa Pig*."

A high school student asked, "How can I get into TJU?" — referring to admission to the prestigious university. A primary school student responded humorously: "I got in on Open Day."

The cross-generational exchange quickly went viral online, attracting more than 100,000 likes on the Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu.

Che Yifan, a library staff member at TJU, said the team hadn't expected such widespread attention.

"The original idea was simply to create a relaxed space for people of all ages to communicate," Che explained. "We hoped it would help students see their worries from a different perspective."

In a commentary shared on its official social media account, the university described the library as "the heart of the university".

"When members of the public come here with curiosity and hope, we want this heart to beat for society," the university wrote. "Culture knows no age or boundaries. It nurtures everyone equally, helping people become warmer, stronger, and more confident."

MENG WENJIE



Even the youngest minds can offer insights adults never expect. VCG

Music bridges cultures in Nanning

From Rio to Nanning, young musicians share melodies, dance, and laughter, bringing Brazilian and Chinese cultures together on stage.



Members of Brazil's Forte de Copacabana Orchestra sing the Chinese folk song *Mo Li Hua* (Jasmine Flower) in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on April 16. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By ZHANG LI in Nanning
zhangli@chinadaily.com.cn

Marcia Melchior, artistic director of Brazil's Orquestra Forte de Copacabana, or the Forte de Copacabana Orchestra, watched the young musicians on stage. A clear vocal melody rang out, followed by a graceful tune that filled the air. Brazilian performers danced to the rhythm, and local Chinese youth joined in, forming a circle and moving freely to the beat.

"This is more than just performing," Melchior said. "Music is universal; it connects people. Even without a common language, people can feel it with their hearts."

The scene unfolded at the opening ceremony of the 2026 Guangxi Sanyuesan Festival in Nanning, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on April 18.

Traditionally celebrated on the third day of the third month on the Chinese lunar calendar — which fell on April 19 this year — the festival is a time for the Zhuang ethnic group to honor their ancestors and express love through singing.

From April 15 to 20, the Forte de Copacabana Orchestra was invited to participate in the festival and join cultural exchanges with local youth.

Based in Rio de Janeiro, the orchestra is composed of young musicians aged 13 to 25. Recognized as part of the Cultural and Intangible Heritage of the State of Rio de Janeiro, it serves as an important messenger of friendship between Chinese and Brazilian youth.

During the festival, the orchestra combined classical music with the passionate rhythms of Brazilian samba, performing melodies familiar to both Brazilian and Chinese audiences. Upbeat Brazilian classics brought energy to the stage, while *Flor de Lis* (Lily Flower) echoed the Chinese folk song *Mo Li Hua* (Jasmine Flower), creating a musical dialogue across cultures.





Above: Brazilian performers and Chinese youth take part in embroidered ball throwing. **Below:** Brazilian performers join local children for cultural activities. **Bottom:** Members of the Forte de Copacabana Orchestra perform at the Nanning Youth Activity Center. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Singer Michelly Gondim admitted that learning to sing in Chinese in a short time was not easy, but the challenge made it even more memorable.

"This is an incredible experience. Being able to share these cultural elements with Chinese artists is truly special," she said.

At the Nanning Youth Activity Center, Brazilian musicians performed Chinese songs alongside children dressed in traditional local ethnic costumes. The musicians played and sang as the children added harmonies, their instruments and voices blending into a warm melody.

Gondim said she was deeply moved by the children's dedication and the audience's enthusiastic response. "It made us feel close right away," she added.

Violinist Bruna Zurmele recalled how quickly the children learned Brazilian rhythms during rehearsals. "One young boy even picked up a hand drum and joined us on stage, keeping perfect time with the samba beats," she said. "That moment really stayed with me."

She added that Guangxi's climate and scenery reminded her of her hometown, Rio de Janeiro, making her feel right at home. She was also touched by the warmth and hospitality she encountered throughout the trip.

"Everywhere we played, people came over to watch and interact with us. Their kindness left a lasting impression," she said.

During the intangible cultural heritage session, Brazilian guests and Chinese youth participated in traditional activities such as three-person board-shoe racing, embroidered ball throwing, and *touhu*, or pitch-pot. They also tried Zhuang brocade weaving, fan painting, tea art, and local delicacies, immersing themselves in the charm of Guangxi's traditional culture.

Cellist Thiellen Sena said the visit gave her a more vivid understanding of China and inspired her to learn more about its culture.

"I started from scratch, learning and experiencing everything along the way," she said. "The whole process was just fascinating."

Xinhua contributed to this story.



Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

Z WEEKLY

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

Slow living shapes young lifestyles

From crochet to ancient wellness rituals, a new generation discovers old-school lifestyles, weaving heritage and mindfulness into everyday routines.



By **XIONG XINYI** and **CHEN XUE**

Tulip (pseudonym), based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, still treasures her first crochet piece: a navy-blue coaster she made in high school, with guidance from an older friend. What started as a simple hobby seven years ago has since grown into a full-time career.

"The internet moves too fast," she said. "People are trapped in constant anxiety. But crochet is inherently slow — it can't be rushed. It's about weaving together fragmented moments, stitch by stitch."

Known by the handle Qingzheng Mozai on social media, Tulip represents a rising wave of young Chinese embracing an "old-school life" as a counterbalance to the relentless pace of modern life. This philosophy encompasses crafts, food, and personal rituals, forming a holistic approach to living.

The scale of this shift is evident in the numbers: a 2025 survey by China Youth Daily found that 89.9 percent of 1,337 young respondents said they liked visiting local food markets while traveling. Similarly, content related to crochet has attracted billions of views across platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin, according to a March report by China News Service.

A former fashion design student, Tulip struggled with crochet during her university years, receiving poor grades in related courses. But she didn't give up. She began posting her work online, looking for a community of like-minded people. The support she found there helped her improve, both in her crochet skills and in her understanding of the deeper value crochet brought to her life — a sense of peace.

"I used to fear heavy workloads," she admitted. "But crochet showed me how to take things step by step. No matter how heavy the load, it eventually gets done."

Her passion for crochet even led her to translate a foreign crochet pattern book into Chinese — a task that required not just language skills but also a deep, practical knowledge of the craft, as many international patterns didn't have Chinese editions.

"It taught me to stay true to my own vision," she said.

> "In an age of constant connectivity, bathing is one of the few things that forces us to strip away everything — clothes, phone, and social roles."
>
> **Yang Wenxi,** a lifestyle influencer



Above: Yang Wenxi writes Spring Festival couplets in traditional Chinese calligraphy.
Right: Yang wears traditional Chinese clothing as part of her daily routine at home. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Embracing wholeness

Food has long been a vessel for memory and connection, a sentiment deeply understood by Huang Chengjuan, the creator behind the Yan Jiu Suo account, and Lu Shi Yue (her social media pseudonym). Both of them cherish the slow, mindful preparation of traditional foods.

Huang, based in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, made a dramatic shift from being a vice president at a gaming company to becoming a full-time food creator after the birth of her son. At that moment, she realized she wanted more than just a career — she wanted to build something that could carry stories and memories.

"I could see exactly what my future would look like," she recalled, recognizing that food offers more than just nourishment — it carries the weight of tradition and shared experiences.

Through her social media platform, Huang shares her journey of researching and recreating traditional Chinese delicacies, bringing ancient flavors back to life for a new generation.

"Young people don't just want to learn how traditional dishes are made," she observed. "They want to understand the culture behind these foods, take what resonates with them, and incorporate the essence of traditional living into their daily lives."

Part of Huang's mindful approach to food includes visiting local food markets, where she shops not just for fresh ingredients, but also for a human connection.

"Chatting with vendors about flavors, origins, and seasonal availability offers a quiet wisdom that you can't find in a shopping app," she said.

Lu Shi Yue, based in Dali, Yunnan province, shares a similar ethos but with a unique twist: her culinary creations are deeply influenced by Chinese literature.

For example, she has recreated wisteria cakes, a pastry filled with wisteria petals that was popular during the Republic of China period (1912-1949) but is rarely seen today. This project, like many others, is part of her exploration of how food intersects with stories and culture.





Above left: Tulip (pseudonym) poses with yarn and crochet tools. **Above right:** Lu Shi Yue (pseudonym) makes spring-inspired wisteria cakes. **Below:** Huang Chengjuan enjoys home-cooked traditional Chinese dishes. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Lu moved from Beijing to Dali in 2023 in search of a slower pace of life. She soon realized, however, that the real challenge wasn't slowing down — it was confronting the fragmentation that comes with modern life.

"People are constantly interrupted by notifications, short videos, and the endless scroll. That's what really exhausts us," she explained. "What we're seeking is wholeness. When we complete something, whether it's a dish or a book, there's a sense of fulfillment in seeing the whole picture come together."

This is why so many of her followers recreate her dishes and engage with her work on a deeper level. They find not only a connection to the past and to literature but also a sense of belonging in the present.

"Wholeness may seem slow, but it's actually the quickest way to recharge," Lu added.

This same philosophy shapes the life of Yang Wenxi, known online as Zhu Le Tang, based in Chengdu, Sichuan province. She has found the power of slowing down through an ancient wellness ritual: bathing.

Yang is passionate about baths to the point that she installed a private one at home. "In an age of constant connectivity, bathing is one of the few things that forces us to strip away everything — clothes, phone, and social roles," she said.

She has since developed a system of slow, body-centered self-care inspired by ancient Chinese wellness traditions. For example, during spring, a season traditionally associated with renewal in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), she incorporates haircombing into her daily routine to help support *qi*, or vital energy.

She also revives small, personal rituals, like warming clothes over incense, reconnecting with the ancient wisdom that helps her navigate the stresses of modern life.

In addition to bathing, Yang has also taken up calligraphy, which she said helps her "switch my racing mind into energy-saving mode".

"When we write, take baths, burn incense, or simmer soup, we use these 'slow motions' to recalibrate a rhythm that's been disrupted by fast-paced life," Yang explained.

She has also noticed that when young people like her turn to older lifestyles, it's not about trying to relive the past. "We're simply borrowing wisdom and strength from them to make our present lives more comfortable — and more truly our own," she said.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

Z WEEKLY

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

Nanyin finds new voices

A new generation breathes life into centuries-old Nanyin melodies, sharing them with global audiences in a fresh, modern way.

By **GUI QIAN**
guiqian@i21st.cn

When Zheng Mingming was about 5, she loved sitting next to her grandmother, listening to her sing ancient songs in the Minnan dialect. Her grandmother, a "resident musician" at a Nanyin hall in Quanzhou, Fujian province, had hundreds of songs memorized.

Whether at family gatherings, festivals, and quiet afternoons at home, Nanyin music was the soundtrack to Zheng's everyday life.

Little did she know that this family tradition, passed down through five generations, would one day lead her to perform on a world-renowned stage.

On March 28 and 29, at Hong Kong City Hall, Zheng, a member of the modern Nanyin ensemble Tiam Drop, played the Nanyin *pipa*, a crooked-neck lute held horizontally, accompanied by five fellow musicians. More than 400 audience members from around the world listened intently and responded with thunderous applause.

The performance was part of the 54th Hong Kong Arts Festival, which featured about 1,200 outstanding international and local artists.

For the first time ever, Tiam Drop, a youth troupe founded in 2021, brought Nanyin to this prestigious Asian arts event.

Often referred to as a "living fossil" of Chinese music, Nanyin originated in Quanzhou and is one of the oldest known music genres in China, with a history of 800 to 1,000 years. Traditionally performed in the Minnan dialect, it features instruments like the *pipa*, *dongxiao* (a vertical bamboo flute), *erxian* (a two-stringed instrument), and *sanxian* (a three-stringed instrument).

In 2006, Nanyin was included in the first batch of China's national-level intangible cultural heritage list. In 2009, it was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Growing up in Quanzhou, Zheng was deeply immersed in Nanyin. Every spring and autumn, local Nanyin musicians would hold ceremonies honoring Meng Chang, the god of music. During celebrations such as the Birthday of the Buddha, families would prepare dishes to share, while the community gathered to sing, play Nanyin, and enjoy a meal together.

"Nanyin is not just music; it's a way of life, filled with human warmth. It encompasses a complete universe — music, rituals, culture, and so much more. There's no end to it," Zheng said.



Members of Tiam Drop, an ensemble that brings a modern touch to Nanyin, a centuries-old music genre from Quanzhou, Fujian province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



> "Nanyin is not just music; it's a way of life, filled with human warmth. It encompasses a complete universe — music, rituals, culture, and so much more. There's no end to it."
>
> **Zheng Mingming,** a musician and member of the Nanyin ensemble Tiam Drop

Many Nanyin lyrics are drawn from ancient tales, such as the Minnan love story of Chen San and Wu Niang. This story has inspired hundreds of songs passed down through generations, with each performer adding their own layers of emotion and detail.

"It's like reading a book, but even more enjoyable because you can sing and play it," Zheng explained.

"In Nanyin, time seems to fly," she added. "Each time you master a song or an instrument, you uncover new challenges — it's like leveling up in a game."

She noted that there are about 6,000 existing Nanyin songs, with some suites taking more than 40 minutes to perform.

The music 'chef'

Cai Kaidong, the founder and producer of Tiam Drop, was initially baffled by Nanyin's intricate musicality. A seasoned musician with experience performing with bands, arranging music, and producing albums for well-known groups, he realized he couldn't recall a single melody after listening to a Nanyin piece nearly 10 times.

This revelation made him question why so many people, even professionals like himself, found Nanyin so difficult to grasp.

"It's not that Nanyin isn't good," he explained. "It's just that our ears are so accustomed to the 'cooking style' of modern music."

He was referring to Nanyin's melody-centered texture, which differs from the harmonic progressions and strong rhythmic structures familiar to modern pop listeners.

"Nanyin is like raw meat from ancient times — pure and uncooked — while modern listeners are used to processed meat," he explained, using a culinary analogy. "What we need to do is provide 'chopsticks' in the form of arrangements to serve it to the audience."

However, Cai is determined not to turn Nanyin into something it's not. So, he has adopted the principle of "no changes, only arrangements" for Tiam Drop. The lyrics, melody, playing techniques, and tonality remain unchanged, but two subtle elements are introduced. First, bass harmony using the *daruan*, a long-lost Chinese plucked instrument. Second, a rhythmic framework with the cajon, whose neutral tone ensures that no foreign musical style is imposed.

"The *daruan* is a native instrument, yet not a single song featuring it has survived. This works in our favor, as it won't alter the core or style of Nanyin," Cai explained.

"The cajon is like plain boiled water. I don't want it to stand out; it shouldn't have any 'flavor'. I only use it to offer a subtle 'hint' at key moments — such as the start of a new section or a shift in emotion," he added.

These arrangements give Nanyin a clear structure — beginning, development, climax, and ending — making it more accessible to younger audiences.

At the Hong Kong Arts Festival, Tiam Drop even led an interactive session, teaching over 400 people to sing along. The experience was so moving that Cai removed his in-ear monitor and stood on stage, stunned.

On March 30, Tiam Drop hosted "Echoes of a Millennium: Nanyin" sharing session at the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, where Legislative Council member Kenneth Fok Kai-kong tried the instruments and later praised the group on social media: "This unwavering commitment and passion for culture truly deserve our full support."

Cai remains grounded in his mission.

"Every generation has its own role to play, and what it does will be remembered," he said.

"Our generation just needs to approach traditional Chinese music with sincerity, responsibility, and respect."

Shining Wisdom

China's governance model offers lessons for the world



Rafael Henrique Zerbetto

Over my 10 years in China, I paid close attention to the country's poverty alleviation work and had the chance to visit some of the last villages lifted out of poverty, in places such as Guizhou province and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Walking through the narrow lanes of these rural communities, I saw local committees coordinating efforts to create jobs, develop tourism, improve education, and protect the environment — all tailored to each village's unique needs.

Wherever I went, even in the most remote areas, I met officials who knew their communities deeply, and I began to understand how China's governance system turned national strategy into local action.

I also kept up with the publication of all the volumes of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* and read many of President Xi's other books. I even contributed to editing and proofreading translations of his works into Portuguese.

These experiences helped me grasp the philosophy behind China's whole-process people's democracy, a system that allows citizens, including ethnic groups, to participate at every stage of policy-making — from planning to implementation — unlike Western representative democracy, which relies heavily on elections.

The accessibility of governance theories through President Xi's writings has made this participation more possible and active. Ordinary citizens are not only able to understand the rationale behind policies, but they can also suggest improvements and see their ideas reflected in both local and national initiatives.

Even as a foreigner, I found this system transparent and inclusive: I could attend public briefings, read official reports, and discuss policy limitations with local committees, contributing ideas to make daily life smoother for the international community and the country more attractive to international talent.

I witnessed firsthand how policies moved beyond theory into practice.

In one village, for example, a small cooperative was established to process local agricultural products. I watched as villagers who had spent decades in poverty were now operating machinery, negotiating with buyers, and learning digital marketing strategies. I realized that the state's efforts aimed to empower people with knowledge, skills, and sustainable livelihoods — not just provide financial aid.

By comparison, poverty alleviation in Brazil often comes in the form of conditional cash transfers. While such programs can improve consumption and provide temporary relief, they are not connected to a broader development plan. Seeing China's tailored, multi-sectoral approach made it clear why its overall efficiency and long-term impact far surpassed that of Brazil.

As a Brazilian, I felt especially proud when President Xi chose the 19th G20 Summit in Brazil in 2024 to deliver two important speeches. In one, he spoke on the fight against poverty and hunger, sharing China's successful experiences in supporting the Global South. In the other, he addressed the need to reform global governance, advocating for multilateralism and the strengthening of a rules-based international order.

Through it all, I came to deeply appreciate the holistic nature of China's governance model. Poverty alleviation, economic growth, social participation, international diplomacy, and citizen empowerment were all interconnected.

As an observer, reader, and contributor, I came to see that this system — rooted in China's long history and adapted to modern challenges — offers valuable lessons for the world.

This is why I believe that translations of President Xi's books will help foreigners better understand China's policies and promote international cooperation.

By the end of my 10 years, I realize that governance is more than just laws, policies, or speeches. It is the delicate weaving together of strategy and human experience — a village lifted out of poverty, a citizen's voice heard, a foreigner's suggestion considered — all forming a living, evolving tapestry of collective progress.

Written by Rafael Henrique Zerbetto, a Brazilian foreign languages expert at the Asia-Pacific Center of the China International Communications Group and a board member of the Brazilian Citizens Council of Beijing. He was one of the recipients of the Chinese Government Friendship Award in 2025.

Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM

SPORTS

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:43 PM



The 2026 Asian Skateboarding Championships in Meishan, Sichuan province, featured three disciplines: park, street and game of skate flatland battle, divided into men's, women's, junior boys' and junior girls' categories, with a total of 11 gold medals up for grabs.

Online
See more by scanning the code.

SKATEBOARDING

CONTINENT GETS ON BOARD

Kids grind for glory at inaugural Asian championships in Meishan

By **PENG CHAO** in Meishan, Sichuan province
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Zheng Haohao stood at the edge of the concrete bowl, took a deep breath, and then dropped in.

What followed was pure flow, capped by a smooth 540-degree spin and a clean landing.

The crowd erupted.

"I'm thrilled, and honestly a little surprised by my own performance," said the 13-year-old after taking third place in the women's park final at the recent 2026 Asian Skateboarding Championships in Meishan, Sichuan province.

"I used to be afraid of the 540, because you have to rotate in the air. I'm glad that I finally found the courage to get past it."

Zheng's passion for skateboarding began six years ago, when she received a board as a birthday gift from her mother at age seven.

At nine, the skater from Huizhou, Guangdong province, competed in the women's park event at the 2021 National Games.

Her career highlight came at age 11, when she represented China at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Zheng was the youngest athlete across all sports at the Paris Games, and the youngest-ever Chinese Olympian.

Thanks to pioneers like Zheng, since the sport's first inclusion at the Tokyo Olympics, skateboarding has gained increased popularity among a new generation and seen a pool of budding talent emerge.

An example and idol

Despite being labeled a prodigy by many, Zheng said her journey has been anything but easy.

There were tough days, she admitted, when she would cry after practice because she just couldn't land her tricks.

"Talent alone isn't enough," she said. "What really matters is who works harder, plays smarter and loves the sport more."

Zheng said she skates out of love, not obligation.

"As long as you stay passionate, no matter how many times you fail, you'll always believe that, maybe, the next one will land. You just have to keep trying," she said.

For her, the appeal of skateboarding lies in the thrill of pushing her own limits.

"That sense of freedom when you're in the air — you can't get it anywhere else," she said.

Zheng also loves the social aspect of skateboarding. The sport, born on the streets, has helped her build friendships with skaters from around the world.

"We may be rivals on the course," she said, "but off it, skateboarding brings us together as friends."

When she first picked up her board, Zheng was often the only girl at the skatepark. However, the once male-dominated sport, she noticed, is now attracting an ever-increasing number of girls. In fact, many have given the sport a try after seeing Zheng compete in Paris.

"I'm really happy to do my little bit for Chinese skateboarding. It gives me a sense of pride to inspire more kids, especially girls, to pick up the sport," she said.

Zheng's idols are Gu Ailing, China's Winter Olympic freestyle skiing champion, and Zheng Qinwen, the country's first Olympic tennis singles gold medalist.

"Their fighting spirit inspires me," she said. "I want to be like them someday — winning a major title for my country."

Zheng recalled her mother's playful encouragement: "Gu Ailing has a nickname — 'the Frog Princess', so, I guess that makes you the 'Tadpole Princess'."

She said her love for skateboarding won't end. After she retires, she says her dream is to become a female judge at international bowl events after retiring.

"That would be awesome — because, so far, I've never seen (a female judge)," she said.

'Just cool'

Yu Jinmo, also 13, fell in love with the sport for a simpler reason: "It's just so cool."

At age six, she was walking past a square with her parents where an older boy was skateboarding and she was instantly drawn to it. So, her parents took her to a skateboard club, where she started practicing.

In 2022, Yu earned a spot on the Sichuan provincial skateboarding team. That same year, she claimed a gold in skateboarding at the National Roller Skating Championships.

At the 2026 Asian Skateboarding Championships in Meishan, she finished second in the game of skate competition.

Yu enjoys trying new tricks — especially ones that no one else has done — even if it means risking poor results in competitions or a greater chance of injury.

"As long as a move looks cool, I will definitely give it a shot," she said.

Yu has suffered multiple injuries. The worst was when she missed a rail during a competition, fell, and landed on her chin.

She bled heavily and was taken to the hospital by ambulance.

That, however, hasn't kept her off her board.

"If you truly love the sport, those injuries don't really matter," she said.

Yu said her skateboarding experience has taught her a simple lesson: stick to what you love, and don't worry about what others say.

"My grandma used to be a little bit against me learning skateboarding, but, after seeing what I've achieved, she's now come around to support me," she said.

'Keep going'

Wu Bowen, 19, was also into skateboarding because it looked cool. However, he didn't take it up for medals, but to escape weekend homework.

"My parents noticed my athletic talent, so they supported me," said the youngster from Nanping, Fujian province. "I just thought it was fun."

Wu started at around 13, which is pretty late compared to most skaters, but, just 15 months later, he took sixth place at the 2020 National Skateboarding Championships.

In 2025, he won gold in men's park at the national championships.

"Most of my rivals have been skating for nearly ten years, but that doesn't scare me," he said.

"I can land the hardest tricks, the highest jumps, and the biggest moves — and I'm pretty consistent."

Wu said he had never performed so well and so flawlessly as he did at the Meishan event, despite only finishing third in the men's park final.

"I was so nervous in the prelims that I messed up my first run. Then I told myself: don't treat it as a competition, just enjoy it," he said. "Results matter, but what's more important is showing what you've got."

The competition was special for him, as the stands were filled with spectators — no longer just a few familiar faces.

"Every time I landed a trick, cheers erupted. That was a one-of-a-kind experience," he said.

Wu used to be a person with no big dreams. Skateboarding gave him a concrete goal: to perform on an international stage and bring honor to his country.

The teen noted that most Chinese athletes retire by the time they reach their early 20s, but he doesn't plan to follow suit.

"The sport has a high age ceiling. Overseas, some guys are still skating in their 50s," he said.

"I enjoy every bit of progress. As long as I see myself improving, I'll keep going."

Competitive location

While skateboarders compete for their dreams in Meishan, the host city is paving the way for more to follow.

Li Rui, deputy director of Meishan's education and sports bureau, said the city has built the Meishan International Roller Skating and Skateboarding Center — an Olympic-standard venue — to promote the sport's development.

The five-day event last month — Asia's first continental championship just for skateboarding — was the venue's inaugural competition and welcomed 172 athletes from 13 countries and regions.

"Our city may not be strong in traditional sports, but we have an edge in action sports like skateboarding," Li said.

In Meishan, skateboarding is a hit among students and young professionals. The city is home to more than 5,000 regular skaters and over 10 skateboard clubs and grassroots organizations.

The city has been promoting the sport in schools, neighborhoods, and malls, while adding skate spots in sports parks and plazas.

Training programs and youth summer camps are also underway to build a broader base for the sport, Li said.

"The goal of hosting the championships is also about using the event's exposure to boost skateboarding at both the professional and grassroots levels," he added.

The event brought not only sporting excitement, but also economic vitality, Li said. It attracted over 50,000 spectators and sports fans, generating over 80 million yuan ($11.7 million) in direct spending on tourism, dining, accommodation and shopping.

"I took my family out for a meal one night, and the tables around us were packed with Koreans, Filipinos — you name it," Li said. "That's proof of how the event drove up local spending."

Liao Jincheng, deputy general manager of Meishan Sports Industry Development and Investment Co Ltd, who oversees the venue's operations and training programs, said tickets for the semifinals and finals were completely sold out.

He said the venue will host professional teams for training camps and work with schools, youth centers, and skating associations to maximize its usage.

Right next to the skateboarding venue is a world-class rock climbing gym boasting 7,200 square meters of climbable surfaces — one of the largest facilities of its kind in the world, Liao said.

"Under Meishan's development plan, the venue's surrounding area will turn into a hub for action sports," Liao said. "Hopefully, one day, we'll see a national or world champion come from here."

A skate place to visit

What:
Meishan International Roller Skating and Skateboarding Center.

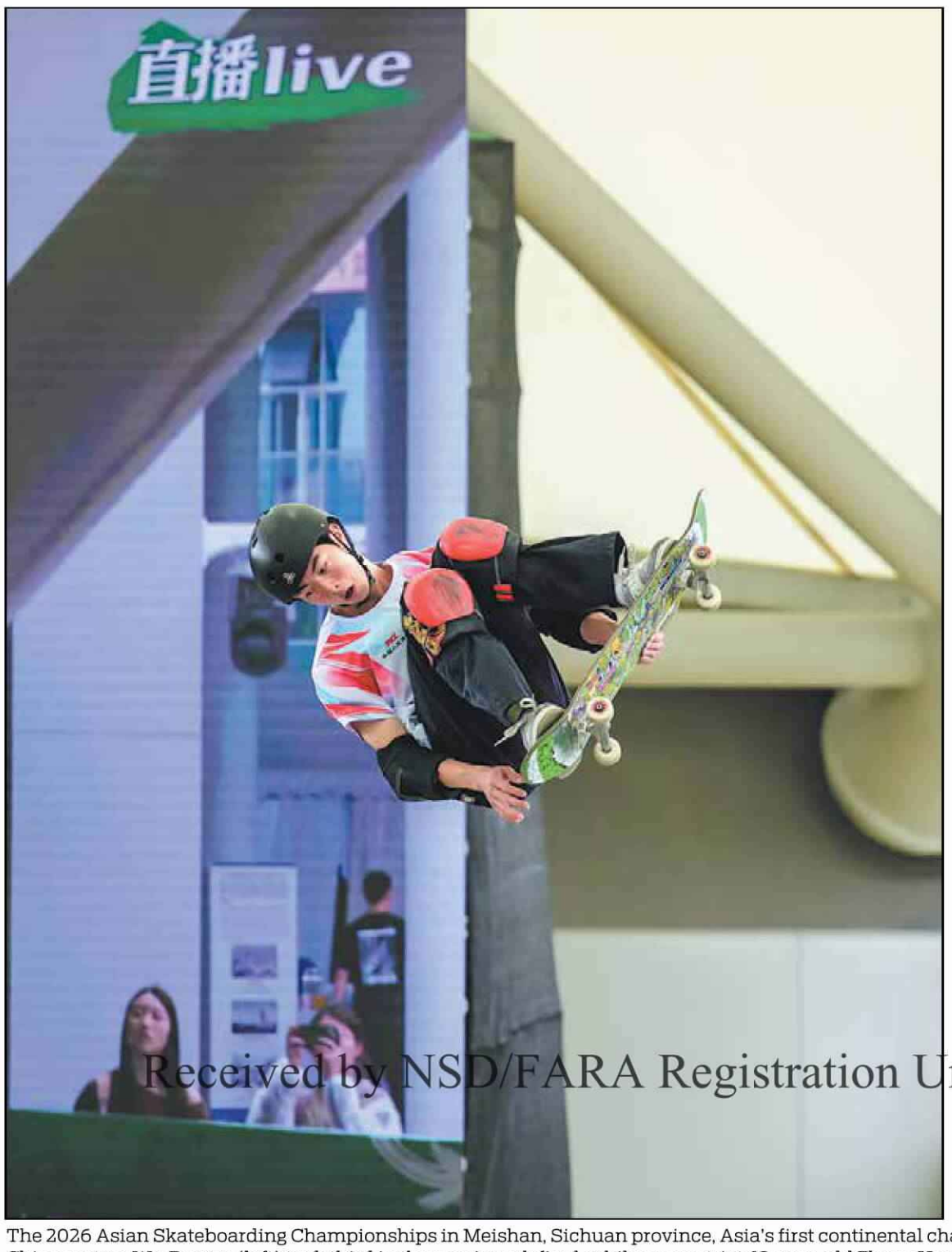
The Olympic-standard venue recently played host to the 2026 Asian Skateboarding Championships, Asia's first continental championship just for skateboarding.

Where:
Meishan city, Sichuan province.

How to get there:
Take a high-speed train to Meishan from Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport, or other train stations in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, with journeys ranging from 20-40 minutes.

Other attractions:
The city is also home to Meishan International Climbing Center, one of the world's largest rock climbing facilities, boasting 7,200 square meters of climbing surfaces and host of the 2026 World Climbing Asia Championship.

Famous scenic spots nearby include the Temple of the Three Sus, Wawu Mountain, Liujiang Ancient Town and Heilongtan Lake.







The 2026 Asian Skateboarding Championships in Meishan, Sichuan province, Asia's first continental championship for skateboarding, welcomed 172 athletes from 13 countries and regions. Among them, Chinese stars Wu Bowen (left) took third in the men's park final, while compatriot, 13-year-old Zheng Haohao (bottom right) took third place in the women's park final. ALL PICTURES PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Russia and Ukraine trade ceasefire breach charges
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Epic revival
Acclaimed dance show based on legendary battle tours 23 cities
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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日報 MONDAY, MAY 11, 2026

RCEP seen as key anchor for Asian growth

Agreement set to help global economy cope with geopolitical shifts, growing challenges

By **MA SI, WANG KEJU** and **CHEN BOWEN** in Haikou

As the world's largest free trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is set to play an even more prominent role in anchoring Asian economic integration and helping the global economy navigate geopolitical shifts and mounting challenges, officials and experts said.

Highlighting the RCEP's role as a powerful counterweight to trade unilateralism, they called for it to evolve from one of "scale advantage" to one of "functional and quality enhancement" — while also urging greater efforts to leverage Hainan Free Trade Port as a key gateway connecting China with other RCEP member economies.

The remarks were made at the 2026 RCEP Media and Think Tank Forum, which opened on Saturday in Haikou, Hainan province. With the theme of "Working Together to Address Challenges and Promote Development", the forum was hosted by China Daily and the China Institute for Reform and Development.

Liu Xiaoming, governor of Hainan, said covering 30 percent of the world's population and economic output, the RCEP is the free trade agreement with the greatest potential. It has played an irreplaceable role in maintaining global economic stability and has also become a key driver of Hainan's export-oriented economy.

"Hainan Free Trade Port demonstrates China's resolve to expand opening-up and advance economic globalization. We stand ready to work with all RCEP parties to jointly forge a new pattern of regional development through closer coordination," Liu added.

The governor said that Hainan has seen growing economic vitality since the island-wide special customs operations were launched in December, offering favorable trade policies such as tax reduction and duty-free measures.

Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, said that over the past year, Asia has contributed over 60 percent to global economic growth, a result of joint efforts by China and other Asian nations.

"China has always championed open regionalism and true multilateralism, and the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port stands as a vivid example of this commitment," Qu said.

He said that China Daily has been deeply engaged in the building of the Hainan Free Trade Port International Services portal.

"Confronted with high walls of trade barriers, what we need is not to build walls to protect ourselves, but to pave roads and build bridges," he said, calling on media and think tanks to use professional insights to dispel misinformation and to tell authentic stories of regional economic cooperation.

Inside
See more, **pages 3, 4**

Qu also highlighted the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 Upgrade Protocol, which, for the first time, includes emerging areas such as digital economy, green economy, and industrial and supply chain connectivity. "With everyone's efforts, I believe the fruits of technological innovation will cross borders and benefit all."

The RCEP, which is aimed at gradually eliminating tariffs on over 90 percent of goods traded among its 15 members, has delivered tangible results since coming into effect in 2022. Intra-regional trade surged from $4.9 trillion in 2021 to $6.1 trillion in 2025, a 24 percent increase, while its share of global trade rose from 27.2 percent to 29.1 percent.

Yose Rizal Damuri, executive director of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia, said: "Geopolitical competition is becoming more intense and more varied. Emerging industries are reshaping global landscapes, and contradictions in energy and food markets are worsening.

"This means that regional integration — such as the RCEP — is precisely what the current moment calls for. The institutional framework is providing member economies with a combination of growth opportunities, policy predictability and supply chain resilience."

Chi Fulin, president of the China Institute for Reform and Development, said, "China's vast market has become the largest source of certainty for RCEP's development."

"The next five years are crucial for China to build a strong domestic market. The efforts to accelerate China's tariff reduction commitments under the RCEP framework, especially on intermediate goods, and to further open up services trade will provide enormous new growth engines for RCEP cooperation," Chi added.

Chi also highlighted the strategic role of the Hainan Free Trade Port. "As a major gateway, Hainan is well-positioned to pioneer breakthroughs in finance and data flows, and serve as a vital platform linking the Chinese market with ASEAN, thus better safeguarding regional industrial and supply chain stability."

Lyu Bin, president of the China Oceanic Development Foundation, said, "Most RCEP members are ocean-based economies, and the ocean plays a vital role."

He called for more efforts to expand RCEP cooperation in mariculture, marine ecotourism and disaster prevention, as well as leveraging digital technologies to build smart ports and offshore new energy supplies.

Contact the writers at masi@chinadaily.com.cn



Guests attend the 2026 RCEP Media and Think Tank Forum in Haikou, Hainan province, on Saturday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Passengers evacuated



Passengers carrying their belongings in plastic bags are evacuated from the hantavirus-hit cruise ship MV *Hondius* at the Granadilla Port in Tenerife, Spain, on Sunday. The passengers, none of whom were showing symptoms of the virus, were taken to Tenerife airport in military buses to be evacuated from the island in government planes sent by their respective countries. CHRIS MCGRATH / GETTY IMAGES **See story, page 5**

Deep-sea mission marks intl advance

By **LI MENGHAN**
limenghan@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese scientific research vessel *Tansuo 1* arrived in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Sunday after completing the first China-Chile joint manned deep-sea expedition to the Atacama Trench off the coast of Chile, marking a major step forward in international marine scientific cooperation and China's active participation in global ocean governance.

The hadal trench — the ocean's deepest layer below 6,000 meters — is one of the least understood scientific frontiers, but it is key to studying life under extreme conditions, uncovering the mechanisms of earthquakes and tsunamis, and identifying unique genetic resources.

The 156-day expedition, led by the Institute of Deep-Sea Science and Engineering of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, set sail from Sanya, Hainan province, on Dec 6. It covered more than 40,000 kilometers — equivalent to circling the Earth — and involved 83 researchers from China, Chile, Germany, Denmark, Canada and Spain.

The expedition focused on the Atacama Trench — which reaches depths of over 8,000 meters and holds significant scientific value for biodiversity and geology — and the largely unexplored Mussau Trench in the western Pacific, an area key to understanding tectonic plate formation.

During the mission, China's domestically developed manned submersible *Fendouzhe*, carried by *Tansuo 1*, completed 63 dives, 50 of which exceeded 6,000 meters. The team collected a large number of biological and geological samples, as well as high-definition underwater footage, laying a solid foundation for multidisciplinary research in deep-sea geology, biology and environmental science.

In a breakthrough, scientists identified for the first time the deepest chemosynthetic ecosystem in the Southern Hemisphere — a system sustaining life on the seafloor without sunlight or photosynthesis — providing crucial evidence for the hypothesis of a global chemosynthetic corridor on Earth.

Additionally, researchers discovered several species of deep-sea snailfish and captured numerous images of benthic animals, most of which were identified as new species, highlighting the region's rich fish biodiversity. They also identified fault ruptures on the seafloor caused by historical major earthquakes, offering valuable evidence of how seismic activity shapes deep-sea geomorphology and affects biological habitats.

Due to ultrahigh pressure, extremely low visibility and frigid temperatures, deep-sea exploration is considered even more challenging than space exploration. However, China's homegrown submersible *Fendouzhe* has addressed many of these challenges, enabling operations at full ocean depth.

Building on this capability, the Institute of Deep-Sea Science and Engineering launched the Global Hadal Exploration Programme in 2022 to bring together global expertise to explore, understand and protect deep-sea environments.

The program was officially endorsed by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), marking significant recognition of China's leadership in international deep-sea cooperation.

As a flagship operation of the program, the joint expedition has provided valuable experience in global deep-sea scientific data sharing, talent cultivation and long-term seafloor observation.

The mission aligns with China's emphasis on fundamental research, deep-sea exploration and global scientific cooperation outlined in the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), demonstrating the country's commitment to active participation in global ocean governance and international mega-science cooperation.

HENAN THEATER CLUSTER REVIVES HISTORY

Immersive storytelling transcends language to thrill audiences

By **LI LEI** in Beijing
and **SHI BAOYIN** in Zhengzhou

A general swears an oath to his troops: anyone who tramples the wheat will die. Moments later, his own horse bolts, flattening the precious stalks. The stage — dark, charged — holds its breath. To honor his word without sacrificing his life, the warlord Cao Cao draws his sword, seizes his hair, and slices. In ancient China, cutting one's hair was almost as shameful as losing one's head. With that single gesture, 1,800 years collapse. For a moment, the boundary between stage and history blurs. The field beneath Cao Cao's feet is no longer a set; it feels real.

This is *Echoes of Guandu: Where Wheat Whispers History*, a 35-minute play staged on the very battlefield where history once pivoted. It's one of nearly 800 minutes of back-to-back daily performances at "Unique Henan: Land of Dramas", a dizzying complex of 21 theaters and 56 interlocking spaces in Zhengzhou, the capital of Central China's Henan province. This is the kind of place where stories don't simply unfold — they sit down beside you and stay with you forever.

Outside the entrance, visitors first encounter a seven-hectare field that changes with the seasons — red sorghum one season, golden wheat the next — stretching before a 328-meter-long rammed-earth wall. Walk through the gate, and the theater's grid spaces open up. Inside, history does not sit quietly behind glass. It erupts from the stage, rises from the earth and whispers from the seat beside the viewers.

Performers shout in Chinese, and few foreign visitors follow every word. Yet many walk out with tears in their eyes.

"It's difficult for overseas students to fully understand the performances, but they really put thought into following the stories," said Bian Ting, a Chinese-Spanish educator who runs a Mandarin language school in Spain.

*See **Theater**, page 3*

Online
See more by scanning the code.

WORLD WATCH
By Lawrence Loh

Sustain momentum of triumph over poverty

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the monumental declaration by President Xi Jinping, in February 2021, of China's complete victory in the fight against absolute poverty. The country's alleviation of the poverty problem over its recent history is nothing short of a miracle that holds valuable lessons for all countries.

The victory was the culmination of an eight-year campaign that lifted nearly 100 million rural residents out of absolute poverty across the entire country. It came on the heels of a critical turning point in 2012, when targeted poverty alleviation became a central political priority.

The phenomenal triumph over poverty is a most dramatic transformation of the mass poverty situation since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

*See **Poverty**, page 3*

China visit

US President Donald Trump will pay a three-day state visit to China from Wednesday, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson announced on Monday.

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Newsstand prices:
US $1 Canada C$1; UK 1£ EU 1€
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Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

INDEPTH

Access to Chinese EVs drives debate in US

Unavailability of vehicles stokes frustration as free market tested

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



Visitors view the models of Chinese EV brand XPeng at the 2026 Brussels Motor Show in Belgium on Jan 10. PENG ZIYANG / XINHUA





Left: Visitors learn about a Geely electric car during an event in Madrid, Spain, on March 25. CHENG MIN / XINHUA **Right:** A woman tries a Xiaomi SU7 in Barcelona, Spain, during Mobile World Congress on March 5, 2025. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

Jose, a landscape worker in Houston, Texas, recently visited his grandparents and cousins in Mexico.

"I am a little jealous of my cousin's truck," Jose told China Daily. "He's driving a Changan Hunter. It feels so luxurious."

Jose said he's amazed by the standard features packed into the Hunter truck imported from China. They include a tailgate that converts into a step to make it easier to get into the truck bed, a bed cover to secure items, a large touch screen, a 360-degree camera with a backup camera view, and heated seats. The vehicle is also marketed as an extended-range electric vehicle, a groundbreaking achievement in the pickup truck category.

"My cousin paid about $30,000 for that truck. Here, that's barely enough for a base model of a similar truck," Jose said. "I wish we had prices like that here."

Those features that Jose covets can be obtained on a similar United States-made truck through premium packages and aftermarket additions. The caveat lies in the price: similar US trucks with similar features would cost around $45,000 to $50,000, an amount Jose said he can't afford.

Following Mexico, Canada recently opened its market to Chinese EVs and lowered the tariff from 100 percent to 6.1 percent.

Tesla announced it is launching its China-made Model 3 in Canada at a record low price of C$39,490 ($29,040). In the US, the same car is priced at $42,490, according to electrek.com, making it $13,450 cheaper in Canada.

In February, The Wall Street Journal's senior personal technology columnist Joanna Stern wrote a report titled "I test drove a Chinese EV. Now I don't want to buy American cars anymore".

She drove a Xiaomi SU7 Max for two weeks in New Jersey, borrowed from a friend who got a temporary permit to drive it in the US.

The opening of Stern's report sounded like a love letter: "Now, every time I climb back into my Ford Mustang Mach-E, I can't stop thinking about you — your long range, your modular interior, your absurdly large infotainment screen," she wrote. "Please come back to America ... for me."

It's the same car that Ford CEO Jim Farley tried for at least half a year, and loved.

"I don't like talking about the competition so much, but I drive the Xiaomi," he said on "the Fully Charged podcast" over a year ago. "We flew one from Shanghai to Chicago, and I've been driving it for six months now, and I don't want to give it up."

Praising the Xiaomi SU7 as a "high quality, great visual experience", Farley said he drove it "because of the competition". "To beat them, you have to know them," he said.

Strong appeal

Chinese EVs are known for their innovation, competitive pricing, and advanced software integration.

While consumers in many other countries have embraced them, people in the US — consumers, analysts, elected officials, and auto industry figures — are still debating whether or not to let them into the country.

The biggest group wanting Chinese imports are consumers, most of whom, unlike Stern and Farley, haven't had a chance to lay their eyes on a Chinese EV.

But they are aware of them, and many want to buy one, according to a consumer survey released in February by Cox Automotive, a global leader in auto service and technology.

Roughly 47 percent said they'd buy a Geely Xingyuan over Tesla's Model Y, while 38 percent would opt for a BYD Seagull over the same Tesla.

Overall, 38 percent of those surveyed said they are very likely to consider a Chinese brand in the US. Among Gen Z, the percentage was as high as 69 percent — their enthusiasm largely due to their embrace of new technology and green energy, experts said.

The 2025 Dave Cantin Group Market Outlook Report showed that 40 percent of US consumers would consider buying a Chinese-made vehicle.

In April, the WSJ reported about people with dual citizenship driving Chinese EVs bought in Mexico into El Paso, Texas, for their daily cross-border commutes. The article drew almost 2,000 comments from readers.

A sample analysis of the comments using artificial intelligence showed those favoring an open market outweighed those wanting a ban for "national security" reasons.

The "most liked" comment said: "Sure. Let's prohibit imports instead of building better cars. American cars are not only more expensive; they are actually worse quality."

The reason is straightforward: no new car sold in the United States today has a sticker price below $20,000, while Chinese brands sell capable EVs in Mexico and elsewhere starting around the same price.

The average new car in the US had a list price of $51,456 in March, according to the vehicle valuer Kelley Blue Book.

"If US automakers aren't going to make small, affordable cars, why shouldn't we consumers be able to buy imported Chinese cars? I don't want an SUV or truck," said one of the most liked comments.

US automakers have relied heavily on expensive models to make profits in recent years. Yet, "we've reached peak truck, as consumers finally push back and demand more vehicle options, particularly sedans, that are more affordable, leaving some dealers struggling with their product mix," the 2025 Market Outlook Report said.

Affordability a key factor

Auto affordability has become a serious issue in the US. A modeling study by Plante Moran found that a third of the US population can't afford new vehicles, CNBC reported in January.

"Affordability is reshaping purchase decisions, driving interest in cheaper Chinese vehicles," Dave Cantin Group President Brian Gordon said when the 2025 Market Outlook Report was released in August.

However, US automakers are not willing to give US consumers the options to buy Chinese EVs.

"We should not let them into our country because (of) the economic impact," Ford CEO Farley said in a Fox TV interview in mid-April. "Manufacturing is the heart and soul of our country, and for us to lose that to those exports would be devastating for our country."

Many readers of the WSJ article said that banning Chinese EVs undermines the principle of a free market and the competitiveness of the US auto industry.

"Let's see ... should we protect a handful of billion dollar corporations (the US automakers) or should we protect millions of US citizens who want/need an affordable car? I favor the little people but I'm pretty sure Congress does not," wrote Simon Smith in the comments section.

"Let them in! If US automakers can't build a quality, affordable product, they deserve to lose the market. What happened to free markets?" asked Claude Whitworth.

Noah Smith, an economic analyst, former assistant finance professor and Bloomberg economic columnist, argued that the presence of Chinese EVs will benefit the US overall.

"The main reason to let in Chinese EVs is that the United States needs to embrace EVs in general," Smith said in a January blog.

He argued that if the US keeps driving combustion cars while the rest of the world switches to EVs, its automotive technology "will be orphaned from the rest of the world".

"One way Chinese EVs would benefit America is by forcing Detroit to compete," Noah Smith wrote, reasoning that competition would force US automakers to make big investments in EV innovation and technology and "keep doing this until it worked".

> Let them in! If US automakers can't build a quality, affordable product, they deserve to lose the market. What happened to free markets?"
>
> **Claude Whitworth,** a reader of Wall Street Journal

The US is not in a good position when it comes to EV innovation and production. According to analysis from E2's Clean Economy Works tracker, US companies announced just $12.3 billion in new clean-energy and battery investment in 2025 — the lowest annual figure since the project began.

Meanwhile, cancellations and downsizing reached $34.8 billion, with the EV battery sector losing $21 billion in committed capital.

The contraction was, to a great degree, due to domestic policy changes with tax credits for solar, wind and EVs compressed or rolled back.

Meanwhile, China is forging ahead with new EV technologies.

At the 2026 Beijing Auto Show that ended on May 3, CATL unveiled six new battery technologies in a single day, including a third-generation Qilin cell rated for more than 1,000 kilometers of range, a Shenxing fast-charging cell that reaches 98 percent of a full charge in six minutes and 27 seconds, and a 350 watt-hour-per-kilogram condensed-state cell that is good for 1,500 km.

BYD founder Wang Chuanfu, while launching the second-generation Blade Battery, put the design philosophy plainly: "The only way out is to make charging as fast and convenient as refueling a gas car."

Protectionism vs practicality

While the US public is warming toward Chinese EVs, some US politicians want a complete ban on them.

On April 29, Republican Senator Bernie Moreno and Democratic Senator Elissa Slotkin introduced a bipartisan bill — the Connected Vehicle Security Act — that would ban vehicles, connected vehicle technologies such as software and data systems made by China or in partnership with China from the US. They cited national security and job protection as the primary reason for this bill.

The bill has been endorsed by the United Auto Workers union. "Our national and economic security relies on a strong US auto industry," said UAW President Shawn Fain.

"General Motors supports policies that protect and strengthen American manufacturing and the global competitiveness of US automakers," GM said in a statement.

Job security is sometimes at odds with innovation, some investment analysts said. New technology means disruption, and disruption means changes to existing orders.

Many experts agree that China's EV advance has been driven primarily by competition.

However, American consumers may not be able to get what they want, at least in the short term, the 2026 Market Outlook Report from Dave Cantin Group predicted.

"While a highly limited, regulated and negotiated entry remains a small possibility in 2026, we don't see this impacting the retail landscape for another three to five years in the US," the report said.



A driver presents a newly launched Chinese-made new energy bus in Copiapo, Chile, on Oct 16. A fleet of more than 120 Chinese-made new energy buses were deployed. XINHUA

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

TOP NEWS



First responders and residents search through rubble on Saturday at the site of an Israeli airstrike in the southern Lebanese village of Saksakieh. At least 15 people were killed in a series of Israeli airstrikes in southern Lebanon, including one child, and several children were among the injured. AFP

Iran sends response to US peace proposal

The only path to ending the war is Washington's retreat, expert says

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE
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Iran has sent its response to a United States proposal aimed at ending the war in the region, the Islamic Republic News Agency said on Sunday. The response, details of which are awaited, was sent to mediator Pakistan, and will focus at this stage on ending the war, IRNA said.

Earlier on Sunday, Iran reiterated that any attack on its oil tankers or commercial vessels would be met with attacks on US bases in the region and enemy ships. The warning came after US forces struck two Iranian oil tankers, claiming the vessels were trying to breach the US blockade of Iran's ports — while insisting a fragile month-old ceasefire remains in effect.

"Any aggression against our vessels will be met with a heavy and decisive Iranian response against American vessels and bases," Ebrahim Rezaei, spokesman for the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, wrote on social media, saying that as of Sunday, Tehran's "restraint is over".

On Sunday, a bulk carrier reported being struck by a projectile off Qatar's coast, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations said. Also, the United Arab Emirates' air defenses dealt with two drones coming from Iran on Sunday, the latest in renewed attacks on the oil-rich Gulf country.

Since the US and Israel launched military strikes against Iran on Feb 28, Iran has largely blocked the Strait of Hormuz to global energy shipments. Saudi Aramco, a majority state-owned petroleum and natural gas company, said in a statement on Sunday that the world has lost around 1 billion barrels of oil over the past two months. Before the conflict, the narrow waterway carried one-fifth of the world's oil supply.

In another development, Iranian officials signaled an elevated strategic status for the strait, one that could rival the significance of Iran's nuclear program.

"In reality, it is a capability on the level of an atomic bomb, because when you have a capability that can affect the entire global economy with a single decision, that is an enormous capability," Mohammad Mokhber, who served as the acting president of Iran in 2024, told state-linked Mehr News Agency on Friday.

A Qatari liquefied natural gas tanker was sailing toward the strait on Saturday en route to Pakistan, according to LSEG shipping data. Sources said the move was approved by Iran to build confidence with Qatar and Pakistan, both mediators in the ongoing conflict. A Panama-flagged bulk carrier bound for Brazil passed through the Strait of Hormuz using a route designated by Iran's armed forces, Iran's semi-official Tasnim News Agency reported on Sunday.

Meanwhile, a CIA assessment indicated that Iran would not suffer severe economic pressure from the US blockade for about another four months, Reuters reported.

Separately, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Saturday that Moscow is ready to transport and store Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium, adding that he hopes the conflict will end "as quickly as possible". There was no immediate comment from Iran.

The war will likely end in Washington's retreat, said Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, as the US cannot continue the conflict without triggering disastrous consequences.

"A renewed escalation would likely lead to the destruction of the region's oil, gas and desalination infrastructure, causing a prolonged global catastrophe. Iran can credibly impose costs that the US cannot bear and that the world should not suffer," he wrote in a commentary, coauthored with analyst Sybil Fares, for Al Jazeera on Saturday.

"The only path, and the one the US seems to be taking, is a retreat, with Iran in charge of the Strait of Hormuz, and with none of the other issues between the US and Iran settled," they added, calling it "neither a war of necessity, nor a war of choice — it was a war of whim. The underlying premise was hegemony".

Vast potential seen in blue economy cooperation

By ZHANG CHENXU in Beijing, **MA SI** and **CHEN BOWEN** in Haikou

There is immense potential for China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to deepen cooperation in the blue economy sector and build a more integrated common market, a move that will strengthen regional resilience against external shocks and inject fresh momentum into regional growth, officials and experts said on Sunday.

Speaking at the China-ASEAN Blue Economy Cooperation Dialogue in Haikou, the capital of Hainan province, they said that rising geopolitical uncertainties, growing protectionism, and mounting energy and supply chain risks have underscored the need for both sides to further explore cooperation potential in the areas of marine energy, port logistics, shipping, marine tourism and coastal industries.

Against this backdrop, the Hainan Free Trade Port, with its unique location and policy advantages, is expected to serve as a strategic hub for deeper China-ASEAN blue economy cooperation, they added.

According to the World Bank, the blue economy, also known as the marine economy, refers to the "sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems".

Wang Bin, a member of the Standing Committee of the Hainan Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China and head of the provincial Party committee's Publicity Department, said that Hainan serves as an important gateway for China's opening-up to ASEAN.

"Hainan is making every effort to promote high-quality marine development and play an active role in China-ASEAN cooperation," Wang said.

Sharing a similar view, Lyu Bin, president of the China Oceanic Development Foundation, said the Hainan FTP offers a rare opportunity to address bottlenecks that have constrained China-ASEAN blue economy integration, thanks to its unique opening-up arrangements and policy environment.

Chi Fulin, president of the China Institute for Reform and Development, said that such foundational strengths allow Hainan to function as a strategic hub for the emerging China-ASEAN blue economy common market.

"A common market for China-ASEAN blue economy would put the region in a stronger position to weather external shocks and sustain stable growth," Chi said. "It would also open up new room for cooperation and promote closer integration of industrial and supply chains."

Hainan's burgeoning marine economy is also bolstering confidence in the push for deeper regional cooperation. The province's gross ocean product rose 7.9 percent year-on-year last year, making it one of the mainstays of local growth, official data showed.

Emerging sectors are driving the expansion, with the deep-sea oil and gas industry posting robust gains in reserves and output. The independently developed Deep Sea No 1 gas field, China's first ultra-deepwater project, recently completed its 100th crude oil shipment since its commissioning in 2021.

That optimism over the common market on the blue economy was also shared by officials and experts from ASEAN countries.

Unny Sankar Ravi Sankar, minister of economic affairs at the embassy of Malaysia in China, said the blue economy offers one of the most promising pathways for China and ASEAN to build a more integrated common market.

"The blue economy will transform the development landscape of the entire region," Sankar said.

China and ASEAN together form one of the world's most dynamic maritime regions, creating vast room for deeper blue economy cooperation and regional integration, said Rokhmin Dahuri, former minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries of Indonesia.

Yet the promising outlook also underscores the need to address the structural challenges facing the blue economy.

Dahuri said the sector is still confronted with pressing challenges, including overfishing, marine pollution, habitat degradation and biodiversity loss.

To deal with these challenges, he said, there is a need to strike a balance between economic growth and environmental protection.

"China can play an important role in cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence, smart digital applications, drones and robotics," Dahuri said, adding that such technologies could help countries tap the potential of the blue economy in a more sustainable way.

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Poverty: China achieves UN goal a decade before deadline

From page 1

The hallmarks of the targeted poverty alleviation approach are the precision data-centric emphasis on six areas — accurate identification of poor households, targeted projects, efficient capital use, household-specific measures, appropriate cadre deployment, and goal fulfillment.

In addition, the operational focus is built on a model that covers industry-led poverty alleviation, relocation from uninhabitable or ecologically fragile areas, compensation for ecological protection, education to break intergenerational poverty, and social security for those unable to work.

The success of the national poverty alleviation plan is due to a unique dual-pillar model of growth plus governance.

The critical impetus is built on economic growth in agriculture and industry, as these areas have created jobs that in turn generated income opportunities.

In parallel, a well-coordinated system was fostered to implement the desired agenda under which millions of grassroots cadres were coordinated and mobilized to reach out to the highly localized grassroots levels.

The entire setup has been rooted in a people-first, livelihood-centered governance philosophy.

Even five years down the road since the announcement of victory over absolute poverty, the strong dual-pillar fundamentals have served well to sustain the momentum of income progress for those lifted from poverty. In the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, regular mechanisms will be developed to prevent relapses into poverty. The possibility of poverty relapse will also be avoided through increased development-based assistance, rather than one-off subsidies, to assure long-term growth capacity in formerly poor areas. In addition, key rural counties will continue to be revitalized to mitigate any reversion to the former situation.

The five-year plan specifically considers employment as the first line of defense, whereby high-quality, full employment is front and center for improving livelihoods. Furthermore, skills upgrading is a central focal point that will link job quality with job security, as jobs are indeed the best buffer for sustainable poverty alleviation.

Yet another major stipulation of the plan is to refine income distribution, which will shrink the extremes of wealth and poverty alike.

This reframes poverty as an issue of income distribution and not as a separate "silo" policy matter. The integrated thinking has signaled that poverty, as a resolved problem, is being mainstreamed into the broader economic policy framework, thus institutionalizing its place in the overall national strategic blueprint.

The Chinese development story has thus moved from a "war on poverty" to an "enhancing social harmony and sustainable development" narrative, in which the social sustainability aspects of employment and empowerment, as well as prosperity with protection, are the mainstay. The major recognition is that humans will be a core capital that is crucial for national advancement. This recasting consolidates all previous poverty alleviation efforts into forces that will eventually turn China into a great modern socialist country.

Indeed the complete victory in the fight against absolute poverty has enabled China to achieve the no-poverty goal set by the United Nations in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And China has done so a full decade before the deadline. The speed and scale of China's poverty reduction are probably unparalleled in world history.

A famous proverb says that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The human society of China has resolutely resolved one of its weakest links, poverty, and is on track in its quest for high quality of life for all.

Victory is sweet, and China will probably not rest on its laurels. Achieving a miracle may be easier than sustaining the miracle. But with the current leadership's resolve and the people's determination, poverty may well be relegated to a chapter in the Chinese history book.

The author is director of the Centre for Governance and Sustainability as well as professor in practice of strategy and policy at National University of Singapore's Business School. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Theater: Overseas Chinese reconnect with roots



An aerial drone photo taken on May 1 shows "Unique Henan: Land of Dramas", a large immersive theater complex in Zhengzhou, Henan province. GUAN YANGYANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

From page 1

She visited the Unique Henan theater complex for the second time after having brought her students there last year. "It makes history come alive for them," she said.

Bian was part of a group of 40 overseas Chinese school leaders on a weeklong inspection of international study travel offerings.

The group visited the theater complex and other cultural sites to explore potential study-tour collaborations.

Opened in 2021, the Unique Henan theater complex is unlike most attractions that draw overseas visitors. In the interlocking grid spaces and theaters — one of the largest theater clusters in China — wheat seeds rain down as villagers tell stories of famine and survival, while railway workers sprint across tracks that seem to extend into the audience. In one theater, visitors sit in a classroom where chalk dust hangs in the air, as actors playing teachers turn the story into a lesson in entertainment.

Many described it as a place where they feel history rather than simply learn it.

This captivating world was brought to life by Wang Chaoge, a director known for creating immersive performances across China. By the end of 2025, the complex had logged more than 58 million visits.

Liu Kaipeng, the complex's brand director, said that more than 80 percent of visitors come from outside Henan, and people from over 50 countries and regions have visited the site.

Currently, no simultaneous translation is provided, yet the set design and emotional performances largely transcend language.

"We now offer multilingual directional signage and optimized payment systems. Next, we will work with overseas influencers to help visitors from all cultural backgrounds understand Central China's culture," Liu said.

For now, overseas Chinese visitors are spreading the word themselves.

"This theater truly provides an immersive experience. It has deepened my affection for Henan," said Apple Rouse, vice-president of the US-based Chinese American Youth Association, who returned to Henan after more than two decades. "As an overseas Chinese, I feel deeply proud of how China has developed."

Chen Shuo, who runs several Mandarin language schools in Italy, said during his first trip to Henan: "I didn't think much when I first arrived, but the moment I stepped through the gate and saw that wheat field, something changed. Walking through the field into the city, passing every theater — I wanted to explore each one."

For Hardy Wang Haoyu, vice-president of the Canada-based North American Youth Federation, the experience reshaped his thinking about identity.

"After three decades overseas, I've come to see China not just as our path back, but sometimes as our way forward. Some of the answers we're looking for may actually lie in China," he said. "For those of us living in the West, China can be a solution to the challenges we face."

Qi Xin in Zhengzhou contributed to this story.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

RCEP MEDIA & THINK TANK FORUM



Liu Xiaoming, governor of Hainan province, addresses the 2026 RCEP Media & Think Tank Forum in Haikou on Saturday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

RCEP gearing up for bloc's next phase

Forum explores ways to improve world's largest free trade pact amid challenges

By WANG KEJU in Haikou
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The world's largest free trade pact is gearing up for its next phase amid growing protectionism and other challenges, a forum in Hainan heard.

Experts weighed in, calling for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership to expand its membership, focus more on the service industry and keep pace with other trade agreements.

They discussed the present and future of the agreement at the 2026 RCEP Media & Think Tank Forum held in Haikou, Hainan province, over the weekend. The event was hosted by China Daily and the China Institute for Reform and Development.

The sustained efforts of China, as a key player of the bloc, to advance high-standard opening-up, they say, would allow other member economies to share in its massive market for inclusive development.

RCEP economies are projected to grow at a rate of about 4.5 percent this year, with their contribution to global economic growth expected to remain at over 32 percent, according to the RCEP Industry Cooperation Committee.

By contrast, the IMF in April cut its global growth forecast for 2026 to 3.1 percent, citing the severe disruptions caused by conflicts in the Middle East.

RCEP members are looking at how to improve the pact amid a worsening external environment as the trade agreement enters its next phase following a general review in 2027, according to experts.

It will be the first time for such a review since the agreement came into effect in 2022.

Expanding RCEP membership is high on the agenda, as it will not only broaden the pact's footprint, but also strengthen its resilience against rising protectionism, said Wang Yiming, former deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council.

The RCEP opened its doors to welcoming new members since July 2023. China's Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Chile and Bangladesh have expressed their interest in joining the RCEP.

"The RCEP's attractiveness and influence are continuously increasing. More and more economies are submitting applications," Wang said. "We need to actively respond to these applications and push for the expansion of RCEP membership."

But growing membership cannot address the pact's structural weaknesses, said Zhao Jinping, vice-president of the China Association of Trade in Services.

The agreement faces a significant gap in services trade, where RCEP commitments lag behind those of other major trade pacts, he said.

In 2024, services accounted for 26.4 percent of total cross-border trade worldwide, a historic high, according to WTO data. Yet the share of services in RCEP's total trade remains relatively lower.

The scheduled general review could serve as "a critical window" to expand commitments to the service industry, expanding intra-regional trade and investment, Zhao said.

Digital transformation

Lee Hee-sup, secretary-general of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, said that digital commerce, cross-border data flows, green development and innovation-driven industries are emerging as new growth drivers.

The pact should actively promote digital transformation to stay relevant in a fast-changing global landscape, he added.

The China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 Upgrade Protocol, signed last October, could provide experience that the RCEP can draw from, observers note. The China-ASEAN agreement has incorporated the digital economy, green economy and supply chain connectivity into its framework — areas that are also at the forefront of the RCEP's next phase.

China, with its continuous efforts to advance high-standard opening-up and open its door wider, will enhance market connectivity, factor mobility and regulatory alignment between China and other RCEP economies, said Guo Da, executive president of the Hainan Institute for Free Trade Port Studies.

Data from the RCEP Industry Cooperation Committee showed that in the first quarter, China's trade with other RCEP members surged 20.2 percent year-on-year to 3.73 trillion yuan (about $515 billion), with imports jumping 25 percent.

What they say



Geopolitics is the occasional typhoon outside. RCEP is not the roof — it is the room where neighbors keep talking positively and trading while the storm passes ... That is the accumulated wisdom of Asian diplomacy.
Wilson Lee Flores, *columnist for The Philippine Star*



As a frontier and test bed for China's reform and opening-up, Hainan can act as a core hub connecting the Chinese mainland with other RCEP members, much like Singapore and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region have facilitated exchanges between the Chinese mainland and Western countries.
Tu Xinquan, *director of the China Institute for WTO Studies at the University of International Business and Economics*



The RCEP upgrade could have big goals, but not too many. It should avoid turning into a wish list. Before piling on new issues, member economies must first resolve existing pain points: improving the utilization of rules of origin, addressing disparities in implementation capacity, and tackling nontariff measures. These may sound technical, but they are extremely practical and fundamental to the agreement's effectiveness.
Yose Rizal Damuri, *executive director of Center for Strategic and International Studies, Indonesia*



Hong Kong has long aspired to join the RCEP and looks forward to cooperating with Hainan to achieve a "one plus one greater than two" effect. Hong Kong can be a great partner for Hainan. For instance, in the commercial space sector, Hong Kong's financial and service strengths can be effectively aligned with Hainan's Wenchang commercial space launch site to facilitate cooperation.
Nicholas Kwan, *deputy head of the chief executive's policy unit of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*



In a world where geopolitical events unfold almost every day, the RCEP has emerged as a vital anchor for multilateralism, proving that despite political differences and uneven levels of development, regional economic cooperation and integration remain not only possible but essential.
Yu Hong, *senior research fellow at the East Asian Institute of the National University of Singapore*

From durian to cars: Partnership tells success stories of agreement

By CHEN BOWEN and **MA SI** in Haikou

From duty-free durian to new energy vehicles, real-world stories prove the value of the world's largest trade pact, speakers said at an event in Hainan on Saturday.

The panel on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership was part of the 2026 RCEP Media & Think Tank Forum in Haikou, Hainan province.

Supachai Wuthichuwong, a member of the editorial board of Thailand's MGR Online, offered concrete evidence of those benefits.

"Taokaenoi, the largest seaweed manufacturer in Thailand, has been importing seaweed from South Korea and benefited from RCEP rules' zero tariff," he said. "It processes the raw material and makes popular seaweed snacks that are sold globally."

China has imported durian from Thailand duty-free, while Thailand has imported new energy vehicles from China duty-free, which are the kinds of examples the media should use in the RCEP region, he added.

Ko Ko Maung, executive board member of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, called RCEP "a strategic framework for shared prosperity".

Participants challenged the view that the RCEP is a conventional trade deal in the discussion.

"That is technically correct but analytically incomplete," said Wilson Lee Flores, columnist for The Philippine Star. "RCEP is better understood as an institutional stress test — can 15 economies with different political systems, income levels, legal traditions and strategic cultures cooperate without a centralized authority?"

Flores contrasted Europe's model of treaties, courts and bureaucracy with Asia's approach of flexibility, gradualism, consensus and patience.

"When we ask why progress on rule upgrades, a secretariat or membership expansion seems slow, we must first ask: slow by whose clock?" he said.

"In the Philippines, many small farmers still ask, 'Where do I even find the tariff schedule?' That is not ignorance. That is infrastructure — digital, logistical, educational — still being built."

Inclusive growth

He said gradual pace is "the price of inclusive growth" and that the existence of RCEP reveals a "quiet resilience".

Flores said RCEP offers a separate track for cooperation even when political temperatures rise.

"Geopolitics is the occasional typhoon outside. RCEP is not the roof — it is the room where neighbors keep talking positively and trading while the storm passes," he said. "That is the accumulated wisdom of Asian diplomacy."

With RCEP's general review approaching in 2027, Flores called for a regional public education initiative over the next two years: multilingual media campaigns, university partnerships, youth exchanges, journalist fellowships and digital storytelling focused on practical success stories.

"Not theory. Not jargon. But examples," he said. "If the people themselves feel included in the journey of regional development, then the foundations of RCEP will become far stronger, more stable and more enduring for future generations."

Xing Haiming, former Chinese ambassador to South Korea, described RCEP as a flag — "a flag that everyone in our region can see and touch, a flag that brings tangible benefits to ordinary people, enterprises and countries".

The panel agreed that the pact's ultimate measure is not bureaucratic milestones but whether farmers, entrepreneurs and consumers see better lives. RCEP's benefits are already on store shelves and dinner tables — stories, speakers said, that deserve to be told.

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Hainan seen as gateway to regional markets

By MA SI and **CHEN BOWEN** in Haikou

The Hainan Free Trade Port is set to play an increasingly pivotal role in linking China with the vast markets of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, injecting fresh impetus into global economic growth amid rising trade headwinds, experts said.

Underscoring Hainan FTP's role as a key gateway advancing China's opening-up drive in the new era, they said the island's strategic geographic position at the center of the RCEP region and preferential trade policies will create new opportunities for cooperation in supply chains and services trade.

The remarks were made at a sub-forum of the 2026 RCEP Media & Think Tank Forum in Haikou, Hainan province.

Zhao Jinping, vice-president of the China Association of Trade in Services, said Hainan FTP will serve as a stress test field for China's high-level opening-up, against the backdrop of escalating global geopolitical uncertainties and rising trade protectionism.

"As its institutional and policy frameworks continue to improve, Hainan will evolve into a crucial hub enabling enterprises to tap into new investment and trade opportunities across the bloc of RCEP, the largest free trade agreement in the world," Zhao said.

Tu Xinquan, director of the China Institute for WTO Studies at the University of International Business and Economics, said the RCEP has become a vital force in sustaining global trade. For instance, direct China-US economic ties have weakened due to geopolitical factors, while the indirect trade links, especially through the RCEP, are on the rise, he said.

"As a frontier and test bed for China's reform and opening-up, Hainan can act as a core hub connecting the Chinese mainland with other RCEP members, much like Singapore and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region have facilitated exchanges between the Chinese mainland and Western countries," Tu said.

Bigger role

Guo Da, executive president of the Hainan Institute for Free Trade Port Studies, said high-level free trade ports such as Hainan can play a bigger role as the RCEP cooperation deepens. Currently, about 40 percent of Hainan's foreign trade flows to RCEP member economies, he noted.

Driven by unified RCEP rules and Hainan's free trade port policies, trade between Hainan and RCEP members has grown at an annual average rate of over 20 percent in recent years, he said.

Nicholas Kwan, deputy head of the chief executive's policy unit of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, said: "Hong Kong has long aspired to join the RCEP and looks forward to cooperating with Hainan to achieve a 'one plus one greater than two' effect.

"Hong Kong can be a great partner for Hainan. For instance, in the commercial space sector, Hong Kong's financial and service strengths can be effectively aligned with Hainan's Wenchang commercial space launch site to facilitate cooperation," Kwan said.

Kim Do-hoon, former president of the Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade, said that to give full play to Hainan's potential, more efforts are needed to cultivate local industries such as transport, and attract more big companies to invest in the island.

Zhu Jianmin, chairman of Oxiranchem Group, said: "The Hainan FTP's tax policies, unique geographic location and logistics advantages have enabled us to source raw materials globally and target ASEAN markets effectively."

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

WORLD

ASEAN vows to strengthen energy shield

Leaders seek quicker regional power links, renewable rollout amid oil shocks

By **PRIME SARMIENTO**
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Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have vowed to strengthen collaboration in energy security and renewable energy development amid the escalating Middle East crisis, with analysts calling for swift actions in that direction.

ASEAN leaders have agreed to expedite the ratification of the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Petroleum Security and promote energy transition and operationalize the ASEAN Power Grid.

The bloc's initiatives on energy security were among the highlights in the statement issued on Friday at the conclusion of the 48th ASEAN Summit in the central Philippine province of Cebu.

The summit was held as rising oil prices weigh on regional economies. The Asian Development Bank forecast inflation in developing Southeast Asia to rise from 2.3 percent in 2025 to 3.2 percent in 2026 on the back of upward pressures from higher energy and food production costs if the Middle East conflict is prolonged.

Analysts said that with most Southeast Asian countries dependent on energy imports, ASEAN must be able to expedite policies on regional energy cooperation as the war with Iran enters its 11th week.

"This turned out to be a very specifically themed summit, reflecting the acuteness of the repercussions of the Middle East crisis on ASEAN countries," said Oh Ei Sun, a senior fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs.

Lavanya Venkateswaran, a senior economist for ASEAN at Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation in Singapore, said the bloc's commitment on regional energy reflects a collective concern over the current situation in the Middle East.

However, these commitments "must also translate into swift actions considering the foreboding downside risks from geopolitics", she said.

ASEAN leaders committed to strengthening regional energy security and resilience through enhanced regional cooperation and coordination. They are looking to diversify the supply of energy through measures, such as developing renewable energy, strengthening intra-ASEAN energy trade, accelerating biodiesel and bioethanol blending, and promoting the adoption of electric vehicles.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, this year's rotating chair of ASEAN, said on Friday that the bloc's energy initiatives have to be enforced as soon as possible, but that the energy ministers are yet to meet and lay down a timetable.

Yeah Kim Leng, a professor of economics at Sunway University in Malaysia, told China Daily that the ASEAN leaders' responses to energy security and financial resilience are fitting but their effectiveness depends on timely and implementable regional cooperation and coordination frameworks.

The ratification of the petroleum security agreement is crucial but it may not be achieved in time to cope with the current crisis, Yeah said.

"This framework would have enabled member countries to supply 10 percent of their domestic petroleum needs to members facing supply crisis, a stark reality confronting several member countries during the current global energy crisis," he said.

Cooperation urged

Chan Wai-Shin, director of research at the Singapore-based Asia Research and Engagement, said ASEAN economies cannot optimize the energy transition in isolation, especially in light of the Middle East crisis.

Regional cooperation "makes much more sense economically", Chan said, adding that the abundance of solar and wind throughout the region is complementary.

Meanwhile, strengthening power trade, cross-border interconnections and financial investment across the region would reduce overall system costs, enhance regional self-sufficiency and accelerate renewable deployment, he said.

Jayant Menon, a visiting senior fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said the urgency of moving forward on renewable energy is the "only silver lining to come out of this whole crisis".

"Renewable energy is not shock-proof, but it creates some kind of national independence, because it can be nationally generated. This will be the positive legacy of this crisis," he said.



Russian servicemen march on Red Square during the Victory Day parade in Moscow on Saturday, amid a three-day ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, which runs through Monday. KREMLIN VIA NEWSCOM

Russia, Ukraine trade accusations of violating US-brokered ceasefire

KYIV — Russia and Ukraine on Saturday traded accusations of violating a three-day US-brokered ceasefire but no major strikes were reported by the warring sides so far.

United States President Donald Trump initially announced on Friday the surprise truce, which runs through Monday and coincides with Russia's World War II victory celebrations, along with an exchange of 1,000 prisoners from each side that is set to take place in the coming days.

"I'd like to see a big extension," Trump told reporters on Friday evening. "It could be."

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the ceasefire and planned exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and Russia, his spokesman said on Saturday.

"The secretary-general reiterates his call for an immediate, full, unconditional and lasting ceasefire, as a first step toward a just, sustainable and comprehensive peace, in line with the UN Charter, international law and relevant UN resolutions," Stephane Dujarric said.

However, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Sunday that Ukraine had violated the ceasefire by launching drones and artillery strikes against Russian troops, Interfax news agency reported.

Over the past 24 hours, Russia has shot down 57 Ukrainian drones, the ministry said, adding that Moscow was observing the ceasefire.

Also on Sunday, Ukrainian officials reported Russian drone strikes and nearly 150 battlefield clashes over the past 24 hours.

In the northeastern Kharkiv region, Governor Oleh Syniehubov said eight people, including two children, were wounded in drone attacks on the regional capital and nearby settlements.

In its morning report, Ukraine's General Staff said 147 clashes had taken place along the front line.

Casualties were still reported on both sides, as Moscow and Kyiv continued to exchange drone strikes.

Russian drones killed two people and wounded three in the Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk regions, local authorities said.

In Russia's western Belgorod region, three people were wounded by Ukrainian drone strikes, said Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Saturday that he thought the conflict was coming to an end.

"I think that the matter is coming to an end," Putin told reporters of the four-year conflict.

Putin was speaking in the Kremlin after setting out his view of the causes of the special military operation. He blamed "globalist" Western leaders, saying they promised NATO would not expand eastward after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, but then tried to draw Ukraine into the European Union's orbit.

His statement came just hours after the parade on the May 9 national holiday celebrating the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. The annual event pays homage to the 27 million Soviet citizens who perished in that war.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Briefly

HUNGARY

Magyar sworn in as prime minister

Peter Magyar was sworn in as Hungary's prime minister on Saturday after winning a parliamentary vote at the inaugural session of the new National Assembly, pledging to "change the system". A total of 195 of the 199 members of parliament cast votes, with 140 in favor, 54 against and 1 abstention. Magyar, leader of the Tisza Party, secured the required majority to be elected prime minister, marking the start of his four-year term.

PAKISTAN

First 'Panda bond' to be issued within week

Pakistan is expected to access Chinese capital markets for the first time through a renminbi-backed bond this week, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said on Saturday. "God willing, next week you will hear good news that for the first time, we will be accessing Chinese capital markets through Panda bond," he said at a news conference. The $250 million issue, the first of a planned $1 billion program, will be backed by the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

ISRAEL

Detained aid flotilla activists deported

Israel deported two activists, Saif Abu Keshek, a Spanish national, and Brazilian Thiago Avila, on Sunday after arresting them aboard a Gaza-bound flotilla in international waters, the foreign ministry said. The activists were part of a second Global Sumud Flotilla launched from Spain on April 12 to try to break Israel's blockade of Gaza by delivering aid to the enclave. They were detained by Israeli authorities on April 29 and brought to Israel.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Evacuation of hantavirus-hit cruise ship begins off Spain's Canary Islands coast

GRANADILLA DE ABONA, Spain — Occupants of a cruise ship struck by a deadly hantavirus outbreak that has sparked international alarm began leaving the vessel for their repatriation in Spain's Canary Islands on Sunday.

Three passengers from the MV *Hondius* — a Dutch husband and wife and a German woman — have died, while others have fallen sick with the rare disease, which usually spreads among rodents.

No vaccines or specific treatments exist for hantavirus, which is endemic in Argentina, where the ship departed in April.

However, health officials have emphasized that the risk for global public health is low and played down comparisons to a repeat of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The final flight to evacuate most of the ship's nearly 150 passengers and crew would leave for Australia on Monday, before the ship continues to the Netherlands, Spain's Health Minister Monica Garcia said.

Passengers wearing blue medical suits began disembarking the Dutch-flagged vessel onto smaller boats to reach the port of Granadilla on Tenerife, Agence France-Presse journalists saw.

The evacuees then boarded a bus for their transfer to Tenerife South Airport, where their repatriation flights were due to take off.

"The disembarkation of the passengers and the Spanish crew member has started," the Health Ministry confirmed on Telegram.

The evacuees changed into new protective equipment before boarding their repatriation flight, the first of which left carrying 14 Spaniards who will observe quarantine at a military hospital in Madrid.

"The operation is going very well," World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters at the port.

Separate flights for Canadian, Turkish, French, British, Irish and United States citizens were also planned for Sunday, Garcia said.

Regional authorities have warned that the operation must be completed by Monday, when adverse weather conditions will force the ship to leave.

The Canary Islands' regional authorities have consistently resisted taking in the ship, which was only authorized to anchor offshore instead of docking in the port.

However, all passengers are asymptomatic and underwent a medical assessment before their disembarkation, Garcia told reporters shortly before the operation began.

Spanish authorities have insisted there will be no contact with the local population in Tenerife.

AFP journalists at Granadilla saw white tents erected along the quay and that the police, some in protective medical suits, had sealed off part of the small industrial port.

Spain "is doing what it must do, with technical and scientific rigor and full transparency, with institutional loyalty and with international cooperation", Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Sunday.

The only hantavirus type that can transmit from person to person — the Andes virus — has been confirmed among those who have tested positive, fueling international concern.

The WHO said on Friday that it had confirmed six cases out of eight suspected ones. There are no suspected cases remaining on the ship.

The agency believes the first infection occurred before the start of the expedition, followed by transmission between humans onboard the vessel.

Health authorities in several countries have been tracking passengers who had already disembarked and anyone who may have come into contact with them.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

COMMENT

Editorials

Tokyo should heed the call of the times for peace and cooperation

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, Japan is charting a perilous course that threatens to destabilize the Asia-Pacific region. The nation's renewed push for constitutional revision, military expansion and strategic alliances under the guise of safeguarding a "free and open Indo-Pacific" is not only a departure from its post-World War II commitment to peace but also a dangerous revival of the country's militaristic tendencies.

Takaichi's advocacy for amending Japan's Constitution is a concerning development that signals a significant shift in the nation's defense posture. The country's pacifist Constitution stipulates that Japan should commit to peace and nonaggression. Takaichi's push for constitutional change is not merely a legal reform but a strategic maneuver to break free from the restrictions on Japan's military development. This move is deeply disturbing, as it indicates a willingness to abandon the principles of peace that have guided Japan since the end of World War II.

This concern is compounded by her government hyping up a "free and open Indo-Pacific" as a means for bloc confrontation.

During her recent visits to Australia and Vietnam, Takaichi promoted an updated version of the "free and open Indo-Pacific" vision, which serves as a pretext for building "small circles" that undermine the strategic security and interests of other nations. By framing this vision as a response to perceived "threats", Japan is effectively creating an environment of tension and confrontation, rather than fostering cooperation and dialogue.

Tokyo's "free and open Indo-Pacific" narrative is particularly problematic, as it is being used to justify military collusion and the formation of alliances that exclude and target specific nations, as Jiang Bin, a spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense, said at a news briefing on Saturday. He pointed out that Tokyo is undermining the strategic security and interests of other countries, by creating excuses for Japan to break free from the restrictions on its military development.

"The call of our times is for peace and cooperation rather than war and confrontation," he said, urging Japan and the countries it has been stepping up military collusion with "to do more things that are truly conducive to regional peace and stability", which is in line with the common aspiration of their peoples.

The joint statement issued by Japanese and Philippine defense officials, "opposing any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the East China Sea and the South China Sea", is a baseless accusation that serves to highlight Tokyo's attempts to create camp confrontation. The statement, while claiming to uphold regional security, is little more than a thinly veiled attempt to shift the blame onto China for the region's tensions.

The international community must view these developments with concern, as they signal a dangerous shift in Japan's military posture.

This is reinforced by Takaichi's actions, such as kneeling at the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier during her visit to Australia, which was a calculated bid to curry favor with Western allies. However, Japan's Asian neighbors, which suffered immensely under Japanese imperialism, have yet to receive a formal apology for Japan's historical aggression.

The lack of genuine atonement is a significant barrier to reconciliation and further isolates Japan within the region.

The militaristic resurgence of Japan, coupled with a disregard for historical accountability, is deeply disturbing in a region that suffered immensely from Japan's past aggression.

The consequences of Japan continuing on its militaristic path will be far-reaching. The international community must recognize the dangers of Japan's current trajectory and hold Tokyo accountable for its actions. Only through sincere reflection on its past aggression and a sincere commitment to peace can Japan hope to rebuild trust with its neighbors and contribute positively to regional stability.

Openness a viable path for shared prosperity

The resilience and vitality of the world's second-largest economy are once again drawing wide attention as fresh data show China's foreign trade maintained double-digit growth in the first four months of 2026.

According to data released by the General Administration of Customs, China's total goods trade reached 16.23 trillion yuan ($2.39 trillion) in the first four months of the year, up 14.9 percent year-on-year. Exports climbed 11.3 percent to 9.33 trillion yuan, while imports surged 20 percent to 6.9 trillion yuan year-on-year. In April alone, total trade expanded 14.2 percent year-on-year, underscoring the continued momentum of China's foreign trade.

Behind the impressive figures lies a more diversified and resilient trade structure. Trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the European Union grew by 15.7 percent and 13.2 percent respectively year-on-year, while trade with Belt and Road partner countries increased 13.5 percent. Trade with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership members rose 20 percent in the first four months year-on-year, showing that the trade agreement continues to inject new impetus into regional integration.

Such trends highlight that China's trade is becoming less dependent on any single market and increasingly embedded in broader regional and global networks. In an era marked by supply chain disruptions and geopolitical uncertainty, diversified partnerships are enhancing China's ability to withstand external risks while contributing stability to global industry and supply chains.

Equally noteworthy is the growing role of the services trade in China's trade structure. Data released by the Ministry of Commerce showed that China's total services trade reached 1.82 trillion yuan in the first quarter, with exports of services rising 11.2 percent year-on-year.

The effectiveness of China's high-level opening-up policies is highlighted by the robust growth of travel-related services. As China continues to expand its visa-free "circle of friends" and optimize departure tax refund policies, more foreign visitors are being drawn to the country for tourism, business and cultural exchanges. Travel service exports surged 32.3 percent in the first quarter year-on-year, the fastest among all service sectors.

What foreign visitors increasingly see is not merely a vast market, but an open, dynamic and confident China. From efficient digital payment systems and convenient transportation to thriving cultural consumption and modern urban landscapes, China's development is becoming ever more defined by innovation, green transformation and inclusiveness.

Meanwhile, the rise of new growth drivers in high-end manufacturing, artificial intelligence and new energy sectors is reshaping the global perception of China's economy. Exports of electric vehicles, lithium batteries and wind turbine units jumped by 68.1 percent, 43.2 percent and 40.7 percent respectively year-on-year in the first four months. China's robot industry also accelerated its overseas expansion, with exports reaching 11.32 billion yuan in the first quarter and products shipped to 148 countries and regions.

Reflecting both the booming global investment in AI and China's increasingly important role in global technology supply chains, exports of integrated circuits surged 78.3 percent year-on-year. As industry experts noted, China has become a key supplier of AI-related infrastructure, mature-process chips and supporting industrial components.

Some in the West have recently hyped up the notion of a so-called "China Shock 2.0", alleging that China's rapid advances in new energy and artificial intelligence rely excessively on overseas markets and create "overcapacity" that threatens developed economies. Yet such narratives ignore the reality of China's innovation-driven development and the benefits it brings to the world economy.

As Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian pointed out, China has genuine innovation capabilities that create tangible opportunities for global cooperation. The country has evolved from being "the world's factory" to being "a global market and innovation hub". China's exports, he stressed, have served to stabilize global supply chains, eased inflationary pressures, lowering living costs for consumers worldwide, and contributed to closing the world's green development supply gaps and accelerating the world's energy transition and low-carbon transformation.

More importantly, China's high-tech products are breaking technological monopolies and barriers, enabling more countries and people to access and afford emerging technologies.

Openness brings progress, and cooperation delivers mutual benefit, as Lin said. China's development is not a threat to any country, but an increment for common global development.

By steadfastly advancing high-level opening-up, promoting balanced trade development and fostering innovation-driven growth, China is providing the world economy with much-needed certainty and new momentum.

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Shi Yu



Opinion Line

Museums have evolved to be carriers of historical continuity

In contemporary cultural policy, museums are often described as repositories of artifacts, or guardians of the past. Yet this definition increasingly lags behind the times. In China, official discourse has moved toward a more expansive understanding of museums in which they are no longer static containers of history, but dynamic imparters of knowledge.

This shift is clearly articulated in statements by the central authorities that emphasize that every museum is a big school. A university does not merely display knowledge; it interprets, transmits and shapes understanding. To define a museum in these terms is to assign it a civic function: it becomes a place where individuals encounter a shared narrative.

This reconceptualization also explains a second, equally important point. The central authorities have cautioned that museum development should avoid uniformity: museum construction should not be one model for all, nor should it pursue superficial scale; exhibitions must highlight distinctive content. What matters is not how many museums exist, but whether they offer distinctive cultural experiences that invite engagement. Exhibitions that draw on local history, traditions and material culture are more likely to resonate with surrounding communities, while also offering visitors a clearer sense of China's regional diversity and the varied roles different areas played in shaping its development.

For example, by foregrounding classical painting, garden culture, literati traditions and refined crafts such as silk weaving and embroidery, the Suzhou Museum has placed Suzhou within the cultural world of Jiangnan — the prosperous region south of the Yangtze long associated with commerce and artistic life. Suzhou's local heritage thus becomes a lens through which China's long engagement with the wider world can be understood.

In 2023, the Cleveland Museum of Art presented a major exhibition, "China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangzi Delta", which examined the Lower Yangzi (Yangtze) region as both a cultural center and a conduit of exchange between China and the wider world. Drawing extensively on loans from Chinese museums, the exhibition traced how Jiangnan's economic vitality — rooted in silk production, commerce and urban culture — enabled sustained interaction with global trade networks and artistic currents. In doing so, it echoed the approach seen in Suzhou: local history was not treated as self-contained, but as part of a broader narrative of circulation and encounter. Presented on an international stage, such exhibitions demonstrate how regionally grounded cultural histories can illuminate China's long-standing engagement with the world.

Chinese museums can also draw lessons from international institutions, which often possess a sharper awareness of how to engage their audiences. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Metropolitan Museum of Art presented "Companions in Solitude: Reclusion and Communion in Chinese Art", an exhibition that explored the long-standing tension in Chinese thought between withdrawal from society and connection with others. Bringing together over a hundred works of painting, calligraphy and decorative arts, the exhibition framed Chinese aesthetics around a universal human dilemma — how to balance solitude and social life — in a moment of global isolation.

This curatorial approach continued in the museum's 2025 exhibition "Recasting the Past: The Art of Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900", which demonstrated how later Chinese artists reinterpreted antiquity, emphasizing that tradition in China is dynamic rather than fixed. Taken together, these exhibitions suggest a clear trajectory: moving beyond presenting China as an object of external curiosity toward articulating its internal artistic logic and historical continuity.

In describing cultural relics as those that "embody a rich civilizational legacy, transmit history and culture, and sustain the collective spirit", and in calling for them to "come alive", the central authorities capture a fundamental transformation in the role of museums. Objects are no longer treated as static artifacts, but as carriers of continuity — linking past and present, individual and collective identity. This shift is increasingly reflected in more open exhibitions, expanded digital access and interactive formats that extend cultural experience beyond the museum itself.

Emphasizing participation over instruction allows culture to be encountered rather than imposed. Ultimately, it reflects a broader rethinking of culture itself: not merely as heritage to be preserved, but as a shared resource to be experienced. In an age of increasing fragmentation, the capacity to bring people into common cultural spaces may be among the most effective ways to sustain social cohesion.

— ZHAO XU, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

AI in filmmaking cannot replace human emotions

Editor's note: *Artificial intelligence is reshaping a broad range of industries, including the film industry. During the 16th Beijing International Film Festival, various insiders of AI, the film industry and scholars shared their insights on AI's role in filmmaking and how professionals should respond to the trend of AI. Below are excerpts from their comments as reported by Xinhua News Agency. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*

AI can assist film producers in collecting and summarizing data and information. It can also help film directors visualize, while also assisting them in character design and casting.

Large AI models are able to create B-roll footage and scenes featuring animals. Footage that once took a week and cost hundreds of thousands of yuan to shoot can now be produced efficiently at low cost.

Currently, films that have powerful visual effects, such as *The Wandering Earth 3*, still rely on motion capture and modeling for previsualization of action and performance, as AI is as yet unable to achieve the same results. The smaller the screen, the wider the application of AI. The larger the screen, the more limited its application becomes.

AI technology is applied to only part of the production process of theatrical films, and has not yet been used to generate all the scenes in them. In AI-generated scenes, rendering human skin texture and subtle facial expressions remains a challenge.

The iteration of generative AI has drastically changed the underlying logic of audio-visual content creation. The production pattern of movies and television shows is shifting from one that features a clear division of labor and collaboration of multiple sectors to one that is highly creative, agile and involves human-machine cooperation.

AI technology is able to combine different kinds of media. Its "real-time generation" capability has greatly enhanced the interaction between products and their users, blurring the boundaries between animated films, live-action films and video games, and boosting the integration of films and video games. This will give rise to new patterns of consumption.

Films need a dose of human warmth to strike an emotional chord with the audience. For example, films such as *Dead to Rights* and *Her Story* have won praise mainly because they showcase genuine emotions, making audiences shed tears or smile.

The memorable parts of many classic film scenes are actors' impromptu performances inspired by directors. Algorithms cannot replicate this aspect of movies.

In an era when more and more people have gained access to tools for audio-visual creation, filmmakers need to make greater efforts in polishing their products, including the way a story is told, the aesthetic quality of the film and the audio-visual experience it provides, so as to make watching films in cinemas an irreplaceable choice for the audience.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

VIEWS

Roman Novozhilov and Yuan Zheng

Nature-based solutions to climate challenges

Climate change is no longer a distant warning. Melting glaciers, dying coral reefs and collapsing ecosystems are racing toward dangerous tipping points, posing significant risks to both people and nature.

Many countries, including China, are responding to the alarming signals. China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) focuses on developing river-basin economies, highlighting a powerful idea: nature is part of our infrastructure, and investing in it could strengthen resilience.

Nature-based solutions (NbS) could turn this idea into practice.

NbS involves actions that protect, restore and manage ecosystems so that they continue to provide essential services for people and businesses.

Forests regulate water and stabilize slopes, wetlands store floodwater and filter pollution and mangroves shield coasts from storms and erosion. Urban trees and parks cool streets and reduce heat stress.

In these ways, nature delivers essential ecosystem services — flood protection, water security, coastal defense and urban cooling — that make existing "grey" infrastructure more resilient.

By viewing nature as a form of infrastructure, we recognize that, unlike roads, dams or drainage systems, natural systems can renew themselves and deliver multiple benefits simultaneously.

Trees or mangroves, for example, could regulate water, store carbon, support livelihoods and enrich communities with cultural and recreational spaces.

Thus, nature is no longer external to socio-economic development, but a core asset that generates goods and services essential for sustaining other economic activities. Our long-term prosperity depends on protecting nature.

In a warming world with more frequent hazardous weather events, the capacity of ecosystems to absorb climate and disaster shocks is one of the most cost-effective ways to adapt.

Yet, investment in nature still falls short. Global estimates indicate an annual biodiversity finance gap of around $700 billion between now and 2030.

One major barrier is that many of nature's benefits — such as a stable climate, or cleaner air — are not properly valued and priced in project appraisals or national accounts.

Tools and outcome metrics to measure and quantify the socioeconomic gains from NbS are still developing, making these benefits easy to overlook.

Also, data on nature remain fragmented, standards on nature finance are still evolving, and many public NbS projects have to coordinate across multiple agencies and ministries.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

All this can make nature-positive investments look risky, hard to structure and difficult to implement, even when they make strong economic sense.

As climate impacts intensify, building resilience is no longer a choice but a necessity. Investing in nature can change how we design infrastructure, plan cities and shape our economies for the long term.

A holistic approach is needed to align policy, project preparation and finance, so that NbS are systematically built into decisions rather than added on later.

First, efforts could focus on bringing nature into the mainstream of project finance. This entails developing and using simple methods to identify nature-related risks and opportunities early in project preparation, so that suitable NbS measures can be built into the design from the very start.

This work can build on the environmental and social safeguard reviews that many financial institutions carry out for the projects they finance, making such standards easier to apply and institutionalize.

In parallel, a practical "menu" of NbS options can be compiled for key investment areas, offering project teams a set of tried-and-tested measures for climate-resilient infrastructure that can then be tailored to local conditions.

Second, financial markets need to deepen and continuously innovate to better support investment in nature, including NbS. For NbS that are integral to climate-resilient infrastructure, more adaptation finance could be directed to these activities as part of core project funding.

Some NbS can also generate high quality carbon credits, drawing on existing accounting methodologies used in some global and national voluntary markets.

Moreover, new types of labeled sustainable finance instruments can be piloted to channel capital into nature-positive projects.

Emerging nature-finance taxonomies from international institutions, such as the one recently launched by multilateral development banks, could offer a useful starting point for defining qualifications and guiding the design of such instruments.

Furthermore, a portfolio approach could bundle NbS projects that would otherwise be too small or fragmented, helping to overcome bankability challenges and attract larger-scale investment.

Third, to support the endeavors mentioned above, cross-sector policy making needs to be strengthened so that clear, consistent guidance comes from the top. A country's climate strategies — especially adaptation plans — should be aligned with planning for biodiversity conservation and natural resource management, and coordinated across ministries.

This is crucial when setting strategic targets and designing financial and economic incentives, so that NbS are encouraged and enabled in a coherent way across different sectors and levels of government.

Last but not least, capacity building also needs sustained attention across all key stakeholders, including financial institutions, governments, contractors and regulators, so they know why and how to integrate NbS into major decisions in the first place.

This will be a gradual process, and expand as more data, practical tools and financial instruments become available, tested and ready to scale up.

Across emerging markets and developing countries, strong examples of NbS are already emerging, including in China, where rivers, grasslands and coasts are often being used to support development and resilience.

Picture a solar farm spread across once-degraded land, with panels raised just high enough for sheep or goats to graze in their shade: the panels help slow down wind erosion, the ground cover restores biodiversity and stores carbon, and local herders earn steadier incomes while clean power feeds nearby towns.

Such vivid combinations of clean energy, healthier ecosystems and stronger rural livelihoods show how emerging markets and developing countries can pioneer NbS at scale and play a leading role in advancing climate-resilient, nature-positive growth.

As the world looks toward the 31st United Nations Climate Change Conference, the focus is shifting from high-level commitments to concrete implementation.

Now is the right moment to bring NbS out of the margins into the mainstream of climate and development plans.

Countries and other stakeholders can arrive at the upcoming conference with real projects underway — restoring rivers, forests, coasts and city landscapes that protect people and the planet.

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The views don't necessarily reflect those of the New Development Bank and China Daily.

Qu Yue

Enduring protection for workers in emerging fields

On April 26, the Chinese government issued a document offering guidelines on strengthening services and management for workers in new forms of employment — such as food delivery riders, couriers, ride-hailing drivers, and live-streamers who make a living through digital platforms.

It is China's first national-level policy document of its kind to focus specifically on the needs of this emerging workforce.

As China's social security and public service systems were developed alongside industrialization and are largely based on the work unit model, traditional workers are tied to a fixed employer, sign formal labor contracts, contribute to social insurance and receive corresponding benefits.

But workers engaged in new forms of employment have to face ambiguity.

Their flexible arrangements, often involving platforms, outsourcing firms and franchisees, create complex employment relationships.

As a result, these workers often lack clear legal protection and institutional support in areas such as pay, work injury insurance, rest rights and social security.

China's population service system requires that everyone, regardless of age, occupation, household registration status or employment type, be included.

Workers in new forms of employment, however, represent a large blind spot in this system. They often work away from their place of household registration, don't have stable employment and live in a dispersed manner.

The guidelines are meant to close that institutional gap by formally bringing this group into the national services and governance system, safeguarding their rights and providing tailored support.

The guidelines take into account the realities of the new forms of employment and clarify the responsibilities of all parties involved so that rights protection is based on clear and enforceable standards. This is essential to achieving high-quality and full employment.

Platform companies and courier firms are required to improve their management systems, use labor contracts or written agreements suited to the sector, and define rights and obligations in a lawful and reasonable way based on actual working arrangements.

The guidelines also urge platform companies to set remuneration in line with the workload, pay wages in full and on time and ensure workers' right to rest. They call for enhanced protection in special conditions such as extreme weather.

To ensure that the concerns of workers are heard, mechanisms will be established for consultation and dialogue on matters affecting their rights, with transparent outcomes.

Practices, such as unreasonable fees or commissions, unfair traffic allocation and abuse of market dominance, are expected to be investigated and punished. The protection of workers' rights may also be included in corporate social responsibility assessments.

To address a long-standing concern of workers, the guidelines have also tackled algorithm-related issues.

Platform companies must improve transparency and guarantee workers' rights to be informed about, participate in and make choices regarding algorithmic rules.

When adjusting algorithms, platforms should consult labor unions and worker representatives, and reasonably set rules on task allocation, pricing and time estimation, while strictly complying with filing requirements.

The guidelines call for measures to curb excessive competition, prevent harm to workers' rights, protect personal data and privacy, and crack down on fraud, predatory lending and other crimes targeting this segment of the workforce.

On the public services front, basic services need to be provided based on place of residence rather than household registration, a principle firmly upheld to allow services to follow the flow of workers.

Measures include improving social security systems suited to flexible employment, facilitating the transfer and continuation of social insurance, expanding pilot programs for occupational injury protection, enabling direct settlement of cross-regional medical expenses and exploring the inclusion of flexible workers in the housing provident fund.

The guidelines call for multi-party coordination mechanisms led by townships and communities to address practical issues such as access to residential compounds, parking areas, meals, rest areas and restroom facilities.

Community service centers and union stations are to be used to build service hubs such as "driver homes" and "rider stations", offering basic amenities including drinking water, charging facilities, hot meals and emergency supplies.

Outstanding workers are to be recognized and rewarded while regular skills competitions are to be organized to enhance professional pride.

Targeted support is also emphasized. Workers financially impoverished are to receive social assistance in accordance with regulations, while support is to be provided to the families of workers injured or killed on the job.

The guidelines highlight the importance of psychological services in easing work-related stress, expanded vocational training, improved systems for skill certification and professional evaluation, and clearer pathways for career advancement.

The guidelines come at a time when there are new changes in China's population structure and the platform economy is reshaping employment patterns.

The social security system is shifting from one centered on work units to one centered on society at large, extending protection from "employees of units" to "members of society."

By standardizing employment practices, safeguarding entitlements and opening pathways for career development, the guidelines lay a foundation for the long-term, healthy development of new forms of employment.

With the help of the guidelines, jobs that were once temporary stopgaps can be transformed into viable, stable careers, unlocking the potential of tens of millions of workers as a source of human capital.

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

Wu Ruijun

Investing in education brings talent dividend

In the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), China has emphasized the importance of investing in both physical assets and human capital, with education playing a vital role in enhancing the well-being of its people.

Education should be seen not just as an expense, but as a long-term investment that transforms human resources into core capital for future growth.

Human capital investment views the population as a dynamic and evolving resource. By improving the allocation of educational resources and strengthening policy design, it enhances people's knowledge, skills, health and innovative capacity.

Through upgrading the labor force's skill structure, strengthening intergenerational development capacity, and promoting population mobility and integration, education investment improves both the quality and structure of the population.

This facilitates a shift from reliance on a traditional demographic dividend toward a more sustainable talent dividend that supports long-term economic transformation.

Such investment should be precise and consider the entire life cycle to address major demographic changes such as declining birth rates, population aging and the demand for quality improvement. To counter falling fertility, it is essential to expand child care services and optimize basic education resources, thereby reducing the cost of raising children.

For an aging population, education for older adults and vocational training can unlock the potential of the elderly workforce and extend productive working lives.

We also need to forecast demographic trends, ensure a balanced regional distribution of educational resources, and coordinate education with fertility, employment and elderly care policies.

We have to shift from expanding scale to improving quality, building a resilient education system that can better deliver a talent dividend.

With increasing population mobility between urban and rural areas and across regions, migrant children often struggle with educational integration.

Technologies such as artificial intelligence can be used to recommend personalized learning pathways and improve accessibility.

Breaking institutional barriers, such as those related to the household registration system, is essential to ensure educational equity based on the principle of equal rights within the same city.

This involves easing or even abolishing school enrollment thresholds linked to social insurance contributions or residence permits, and removing household registration restrictions for senior high school admissions so that migrant children can compete fairly for quality educational opportunities.

On the fiscal side, funding mechanisms should be improved through transfer payments to support destination areas in providing public education.

Educational process equity has to be promoted through teacher rotation, mixed classes and integrated support systems that combine academic assistance, psychological counseling and social integration services.

Building a lifelong education system requires strong institutional safeguards, open resource sharing and technological empowerment.

Developing a national qualifications framework and a credit bank system can enable mutual recognition among academic education, vocational training and lifelong learning outcomes, lowering barriers to participation.

Universities, enterprises and social organizations can work together to build digital learning platforms offering blended online and offline courses for people of all ages, with particular emphasis on skills training for career transitions and community-based education for older adults.

Technologies such as artificial intelligence can be used to recommend personalized learning pathways and improve accessibility.

Closer integration between industry and education is also essential to deliver training aligned with industrial upgrading and ensure a continuous appreciation of human capital.

Nudging families toward a more rational approach to educational investment requires policy guidance and effective public communication. They need to shift from traditional attitudes that overemphasize academic credentials.

The role of skilled professionals in economic and social development needs greater recognition. A diversified talent evaluation system can be established by combining academic diplomas with vocational skill certificates and improving the national qualifications framework.

Also, the remuneration, social status and career prospects of skilled workers should be enhanced, helping families recognize vocational education as a viable pathway for upward mobility. Better alignment between skills training and the demand in the labor market, along with the promotion of successful role models, can help alleviate education-related anxiety.

Governments can strengthen career guidance services to help families make informed choices based on children's interests, abilities and market trends.

It is crucial that governments anchor education policy in the goal of high-quality population development, ensure balanced provision of inclusive educational resources, fulfill fiscal responsibilities and address gaps in underdeveloped regions and among vulnerable groups.

Sound regulatory mechanisms are also needed to standardize the education market and improve coordination among education, population and employment policies.

The market, in turn, is expected to respond to diversified educational demands by providing differentiated services, deepening cooperation between schools and enterprises and leveraging digital technologies to enhance quality and efficiency.

Families too should make rational choices that align with their children's strengths and social needs, prioritize moral education and holistic development and work in coordination with national population and education strategies.

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

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

GLOBAL VIEWS

EFEM N. UBI

Free trade milestone

China's zero-tariff treatment for the 53 African countries with which it has diplomatic ties is set to boost Africa's economic growth and modernization



The importance of Africa's trade with China is reflected in numerous bilateral, multilateral and regional agreements. This is also indicative of the new policy of the Chinese government that, starting May 1, China fully implemented zero tariffs on all products from 53 African countries with which it has diplomatic ties.

Historically, Africa has faced significant challenges in its trade relations with Western countries. Stringent duties and high tariffs imposed by Western countries have often hindered the export of African goods. For instance, the United States administration has reignited tensions in international trade. This approach has had a negative impact on many African nations, thus making it difficult for them to compete on the global stage.

In contrast, China has offered a solution by removing trade barriers. By taking these steps, China is offering new opportunities for economic growth and prosperity across the African continent, provided these advantages are effectively leveraged by African governments.

The trade relationship between China and Africa has been highly significant. In light of this situation, implementing a zero-tariff policy can help boost trade with China, reduce trade imbalances, support Africa's manufacturing growth, and encourage trade and development within Africa itself.

Data released by China's General Administration of Customs indicate that China has become Africa's largest trading partner, with trade totaling $348 billion in 2025. However, it is estimated that Africa's trade with China accounts for 4.5 to 5.5 percent of China's global trade. Thus, with a zero-tariff policy now in place, Africa will gain wider access to China's vast and promising market. This initiative also indicates that China is readily attuned to the concerns expressed about trade imbalances with Africa, extending beyond traditional diplomatic and soft-power considerations. This significant policy will gradually enable Africa to increase production and expand trade, thereby increasing revenue and competitiveness while also lowering production costs.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

One barrier to the effective participation of some African nations in international trade is the persistent lack of robust industrialization. Across the continent, numerous countries are struggling with insufficient infrastructure, outdated production techniques, and limited manufacturing capacity. According to the African Trade Report 2024 released by the African Export-Import Bank, the African continent accounts for about 2 percent of global trade. And some African nations rely heavily on exporting unprocessed raw materials such as crude oil, copper, cobalt, coffee, cocoa and lithium, while importing finished goods, machinery and technology.

This situation compromises their ability to compete globally, preventing them from fully exploiting the opportunities that international markets offer. The implementation of a zero-tariff policy could catalyze the growth of a more dynamic and resilient industrial sector in Africa. By eliminating tariffs, some African nations can reduce costs for manufacturers, encourage foreign investment and promote local production. This shift could lead to increased manufacturing output and innovation, which are crucial for fostering competitive industries. This comprehensive approach can pave the way for economic development that ultimately benefits not only the individual countries but the entire continent.

Some African countries can fully leverage this opportunity by combining their comparative advantages with efforts to improve logistics and standards systems. This will further boost export growth and diversification, which many African nations have been grappling with over the years.

The policy can also boost agriculture and food security. The zero-tariff policy is expected to enhance the agricultural sector across the African continent. Also, by promoting the processing and packaging of agricultural goods, some African nations can create a spectrum of jobs that range from farming and harvesting to manufacturing and distribution. These African nations can expect an increase in employment opportunities within local communities. This is particularly crucial, as the agricultural sector serves as one of the largest sources of employment in Africa, providing livelihoods for millions of people. In fact, China's zero-tariff policy for Africa has the potential to uplift rural economies and empower communities throughout the continent.

The landmark zero-tariff policy will also have positive effects on boosting intra-African trade and, importantly, the African Continental Free Trade Area. This policy will encourage intra-African trade by enabling some African nations to capitalize on their comparative advantages. As a result, countries will not only trade raw materials and commodities among themselves, but also exchange finished or value-added goods. Furthermore, it can incentivize the development of regional supply chains in Africa to meet China's growing demand.

In conclusion, China's zero-tariff policy for the 53 African nations with which it has diplomatic ties could not have come at a more opportune moment for Africa, as the world grapples with uncertainty, trade wars and conflicts that threaten the stability of developing countries. This effort offers opportunities for Africa's modernization through industrialization and manufacturing, aiming to realize a shared future for both parties.

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STEPHEN NDEGWA

Companions in modernization

China's tech push is also helping expand Africa's digital footprint with high-impact projects that are reshaping the continent's technological landscape



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



In global economic debates, innovation is often framed as a competitive race among major powers. Headlines tend to focus on who leads in artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing or green technology. The narrative is usually about who is ahead, who is falling behind, and who will dominate future industries.

But for much of the developing world, the real question is whether innovation expands opportunity beyond the traditional centers of power. For Africa, China's growing push for technological innovation is increasingly providing that opportunity. And as articulated during this year's two sessions — the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference — this partnership is entering a more mature, policy-driven phase focused on shared modernization.

For Global South nations, China's modernization drive is not an isolated project, but an open one. The two sessions were charged with a focus on new quality productive forces, driven by digitalization and AI. This is a signal of where China is investing in its immense research and development capacity and, crucially, what it is willing to share with partners such as Africa.

One of the most striking moments came during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's news conference on the sidelines of the NPC session. When a Nigerian journalist was given the opportunity to ask a question, the gesture stood as a small but powerful symbol of the importance China places on its African partnership. Wang's response was a reaffirmation that China's path to modernization is intrinsically linked to Africa's — a sentiment that resonates deeply from the Great Hall of the People in Beijing to the tech hubs of Nairobi and Lagos.

This commitment was given strategic depth by Wang during his visit to three African countries in January, during which he laid out a comprehensive vision for the future. His message moved beyond simple infrastructure development to a holistic partnership for the 21st century, built on several key pillars that will directly impact Africa's digital future.

The first is the principle of prioritizing development as companions in modernization. This is backed by the implementation of zero-tariff treatment for 100 percent of taxable imports from the 53 African countries that have diplomatic ties with China, starting May 1. This policy is a game-changer. It is designed to boost African exports, and crucially, it fosters the development of local industries and technological capacity, giving African innovators a direct pathway to the huge Chinese market.

Second, Wang emphasized promoting mutual learning in national governance. This means creating platforms such as the China-Africa knowledge network for development to share expertise. For Africa's digital transformation, this is vital. It is not just about receiving technology, but about understanding the policies, regulatory frameworks and innovation ecosystems that allow technology to thrive. It is a direct channel for African engineers, entrepreneurs and policymakers to learn from China's development.

Third, Wang called for upholding openness and inclusiveness as partners with a shared future. This stands in direct contrast to the trend of technological protectionism elsewhere. By strengthening coordination in international forums, China and Africa can jointly advocate a global governance system that gives developing nations a greater voice in making the rules for emerging technologies such as AI, ensuring these technologies serve the shared interests of all humanity.

This policy alignment is already translating into tangible, high-impact projects that are reshaping Africa's technological landscape. The focus is shifting from basic connectivity to intelligent infrastructure. A landmark example is the 2026 strategic memorandum of understanding between MTN Group and Huawei, signed to accelerate Africa's digital and intelligent transformation.

This partnership is a blueprint for the future. It leverages AI as the core driver to build "agentic networks", the next-generation infrastructure that evolves from automation to true autonomy. By targeting Level 4 autonomous networks, where AI handles most network management, this collaboration aims to dramatically improve efficiency and unlock new possibilities for service innovation. In addition to enabling faster internet traffic, it is about creating an AI-ready digital backbone that can support everything from smart agriculture and telemedicine to fintech and logistics, powered by innovation labs based in Africa.

This builds on a long history of cooperation where companies such as Huawei have been instrumental in building the continent's digital skeleton, contributing to constructing a large share of Africa's 4G networks and deploying hundreds of thousands of kilometers of fiber-optic cables. Now, with AI integration, we are moving from building the skeleton to wiring the nervous system of a digital economy.

For Africa, the convergence of its youthful population is obvious, with more than 60 percent of the total population in the sub-Saharan region being under the age of 25, and these technological investments create unprecedented potential. The continent is already the world's fastest-growing mobile internet market, gaining 1.5 new users every second. Young developers in Africa's Silicon Valley are building solutions on this foundation — mobile payments that expand financial inclusion, platforms connecting farmers to markets and digital health services reaching rural patients.

The pieces are coming together. China's renewable energy push, another pillar of its innovation drive, is also making solar power more affordable, helping power this digital ecosystem and address the electricity gap that affects 600 million Africans, according to the International Energy Agency.

As Chinese companies invest in solar farms, hydropower and minigrids across the continent, they are providing the clean and reliable electricity needed to keep data centers running, charge millions of new mobile devices coming online every day and power the small businesses that form the backbone of Africa's digital economy.

Ultimately, the narrative is no longer simply about China's tech push. It is about a strategic partnership that is actively co-creating Africa's digital future. Innovation delivers its greatest value when it spreads, and in this partnership, there is a clear path for the technological breakthroughs of the 21st century to truly transform economies far beyond the traditional centers of power.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

BUSINESS

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Research points to innovation depth

Foreign-funded R&D centers expand quantitatively and qualitatively

By ZHONG NAN
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Multinational companies once measured their presence in China by the number of factories they operated and the scale of their supply chains. Today, those metrics no longer fully capture their footprint.

The number of research and development centers has emerged as a more telling indicator of how deeply foreign businesses are embedded in the Chinese market and how committed they are to long-term innovation.

As of March this year, Beijing had 332 foreign-funded R&D centers, with 55 newly established this year, while Shanghai had 647 such centers, including 15 new additions this year, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

That shift is also becoming more evident in capital flows. The actual use of foreign direct investment in China's high-tech industries rose 30.7 percent year-on-year to 102.73 billion yuan ($15.05 billion) in the first quarter of 2026, accounting for 41.2 percent of the country's total FDI, according to the ministry data.

Of this, the actual use of FDI in R&D and design services rose by 127.8 percent on a yearly basis.

Zhao Yang, an official with the Ministry of Commerce's department of foreign investment administration, said China's industrial and innovation strengths are translating into tangible advantages.

Foreign-funded R&D centers are entering a phase of both quantitative expansion and qualitative upgrading, shifting from local adaptation hubs to integral nodes in multinational companies' global innovation networks, said Zhao.

Yin Zheng, executive vice-president of China and East Asia operations at Schneider Electric, said that running businesses, especially in the manufacturing sector, is no longer about simply taking orders and scaling up production in China.

"For many multinational corporations today, the country has evolved from a cost-efficient production base into a critical hub for innovation, market expansion and long-term strategic positioning," Yin said.

The French industrial group is currently building two new plants in Xiamen, Fujian province, and Wuxi, Jiangsu province, while upgrading its Beijing R&D center, focusing on energy management, optimization, efficiency and digitalization.

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said the trend reflects growing confidence among foreign investors in China's economic resilience and its capacity for sustained innovation.

As a result, investment decisions that were once seen as optional are increasingly being elevated to strategic imperatives, particularly in high-tech and consumer goods sectors, Bai said.

Sean Stein, president of the US-China Business Council, said the shift is evident.

"Twenty-five years ago, no one came to China to do R&D. Now, what I am seeing is that the best companies are doing some of their most important R&D in China," said Stein.

For example, US cosmetics group Estee Lauder is tailoring products for Chinese consumers, not only in packaging, but also in formulations and research and development. Tapestry Inc, the parent company of US fashion brands Coach and Kate Spade, has established an R&D center in Dongguan, Guangdong province, he added.

As part of its expansion in China, Estee Lauder launched two projects in Shanghai in late March — the China Fulfillment Center and the Group Open Innovation Center — to boost its research and development and intelligent supply chain operations.



Visitors experience cosmetics from Estee Lauder during the eighth China International Import Expo in Shanghai on Nov 9. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A visitor checks out products from Danfoss during a machinery exhibition in Shanghai on Nov 28, 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Visitors get to know information at Schneider's exhibition stand during the eighth CIIE in Shanghai on Nov 10. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "For many multinational corporations today, the country has evolved from a cost-efficient production base into a critical hub for innovation, market expansion and long-term strategic positioning."
>
> **Yin Zheng,** executive vice-president of China and East Asia operations at Schneider Electric

"China is more than one of the world's largest beauty markets. It is a global leader in shaping consumer trends, digital innovation and the future of our industry," said Stephane de La Faverie, the group's president and CEO.

Similar momentum is seen in other sectors. Louis Dreyfus Company, a Rotterdam-headquartered multinational trader and processor of agricultural commodities, has continued to expand its footprint in China, investing in four greenfield projects to strengthen processing capabilities.

James Zhou, LDC's chief commercial officer, said his group has already set up a global R&D center in Shanghai and launched two production lines for specialty feed ingredients in Tianjin, aiming to translate research into commercial applications.

"We are looking to expand our integrated specialty phospholipid production model — pioneered through innovation and advanced oilseed processing capabilities in China — to other LDC plants worldwide," said Zhou. "Meanwhile, we have launched various plant-based food and feed ingredients and solutions, tailored to evolving needs in China."

Pan Yuanyuan, deputy director of the international investment unit at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said foreign investment is becoming an increasingly important driver of employment and services sector development in China.

"In high-tech areas such as advanced manufacturing, green and low-carbon development, digital infrastructure and scientific research, multinational companies are increasingly leveraging China's industrial and supply chains to scale up innovation and accelerate its commercial application, integrating the country more deeply into their global production and innovation networks," she added.

Seeing great growth potential in the Chinese market, German anchoring system manufacturer Fischer expanded and upgraded its existing production base in Taicang, Jiangsu province in March.

Its new heavy-duty anchoring and structural reinforcement product lines have been put into operation, with products set to be supplied to the Chinese market from this month and expanded to cover the broader Asian market from November.

Alexander Bassler, CEO of Fischer, said that the Chinese market is one of the most dynamic and forward-looking globally for the group, with the speed at which innovations emerge and are implemented at scale standing out in particular. The company also sees new growth opportunities in areas such as digitalization, smart infrastructure, sustainable construction and high-tech industries, Bassler added.

"At the same time, demand is rising for high-quality, durable and technologically sophisticated solutions. This opens up excellent prospects for our company. Our fastening and system solutions are used in many modern-day industrial and construction projects and make a valuable contribution to efficient and sustainable solutions," he said.

Kim Fausing, president and CEO of Danfoss Group, said the Danish industrial conglomerate aims to deploy more resources in China's data center sector, drawing on its global expertise and technologies to support scalable, energy-efficient infrastructure for artificial intelligence-led digital expansion.

"China has become a key player in global digital and energy transitions, as data centers play a growing role in the energy system, driven by rising electricity demand from artificial intelligence and cloud computing," said Fausing.

As its sales in China more than doubled over the past decade to exceed 10 billion yuan, Danfoss, which operates 12 manufacturing bases and four innovation facilities across the country, posted a 13 percent sales growth year-on-year in 2025, driven by strong momentum in sectors such as data centers and marine industries, where demand for energy-efficient solutions is rising.

As China strives to drive high-quality economic development through higher-level opening-up, this year's Government Work Report called for steadily expanding institutional opening-up, promoting the reinvestment of foreign capital and the expansion of localized production, and improving services for foreign-funded enterprises.

More than 6,200 foreign-invested enterprises were registered with customs authorities in the first quarter, while the number of such companies with import and export activity rose by more than 1,000 from a year earlier to reach 69,000, statistics from the General Administration of Customs showed.

These companies recorded 3.47 trillion yuan in trade between January and March, up 16.1 percent year-on-year, marking the eighth consecutive quarter of growth.

"Multinational companies are playing a key role in driving new quality productive forces, and their trade outlook in China remains strong," said Wang Jun, GAC's vice-minister, adding that stable policy expectations and an open business environment are helping them select more trading partners and tap into more markets.

Wang said global businesses' integration with China's manufacturing sector is deepening.

In China, foreign-invested firms accounted for more than 30 percent of each sector's total trade in industries such as automobile manufacturing, instrumentation and pharmaceuticals during the January-March period, according to the GAC.

Meanwhile, these companies accounted for more than 30 percent and 60 percent of China's industrial robot and 3D printer exports, respectively, with growth in both categories outpacing the national average.

Trade ties depend on reliable partners

REPORTER'S LOG
By Zhong Nan

I have been covering the China Import and Export Fair (Canton Fair) for years, and every time I walk into its vast venue in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, my first instinct is to scan the crowd. It is a habit that comes naturally — reading the market through the density of people, especially foreigners, the pace of movement, and the hum of conversations across the halls.

That instinct still worked for me at the fair's 139th edition this year, but only up to a point. The crowds are there, the booths are busy and the noise level remains high. Yet, after a few hours on the floor, the feeling shifts. The signals are familiar, but the story behind them is not.

What has changed most is not the scale, but the substance of interaction. Buyers still stop, take photos and ask questions, but their questions have become more layered and more cautious. Conversations move quickly beyond product specifications and pricing, shifting toward delivery reliability, cost stability and the ability to manage unexpected disruptions.

In other words, customers today are not just buying products, but the ability to deliver with certainty.

Several exhibitors told me that decision-making cycles have lengthened compared with previous years. Buyers are taking more time to evaluate options, often revisiting the same supplier multiple times before moving forward. The process feels less transactional and more like risk assessment.

People can feel the contrast across the venue. The fair appears energetic and crowded, reinforcing the impression of strong demand. Yet the mood is more restrained, as both buyers and sellers deal with a more uncertain external environment shaped by cost pressures, supply chain disruptions and geopolitical considerations.

The mix of buyers is another sign of that shift. Visitors from emerging markets remain highly visible, but participation from Europe, the United States and South Korea has not faded. Instead, demand is spreading across regions rather than relocating, creating a more complex landscape for exporters trying to serve multiple markets at once.

That complexity is also reflected in what is being displayed. In newly expanded sections dedicated to drones, service robots and smart technologies, price is no longer the primary narrative. What stands out instead is application — how products are used, how systems are integrated, and how reliably they can be delivered at scale.

The fair itself is evolving alongside these changes. For many companies, it is no longer just about what happens on the exhibition floor, but part of a longer process. Leads are identified before arrival, conversations are structured during the event, and follow-ups begin almost immediately after. The physical interaction remains important, but it is no longer the starting point.

This shift is quietly redefining what success looks like. Counting visitors or collecting business cards is no longer a big deal. What matters more is how many of those contacts turn into real conversations, and how many of those conversations translate into actual orders over time.

All this points to a broader transformation in China's foreign trade model. Competitive advantage is moving away from simple cost competitiveness toward something more complex — the ability to deliver consistently, respond quickly and remain reliable when conditions become uncertain.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

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BUSINESSINSIGHT

How trade policy shapes consumer outcomes in US

EAGLE EYE
By John Quelch



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

In recent years, the United States has placed increasing emphasis on trade policies that prioritize national security, supply chain resilience and economic growth. In an era of global volatility and technological rivalry, these may be real and relevant policy objectives. However, it is equally, if not more, important to consider how such measures affect markets and, ultimately, the daily lives of US consumers.

Tariffs and import restrictions are two types of trade barriers that directly affect household well-being. First, such policies can reduce diversity in the domestic market by making it more difficult for consumers to access high-quality, lower-cost imports. A second effect concerns competition. When foreign firms face barriers to entry, domestic firms may encounter less competition, resulting in higher prices and reduced incentives to innovate over time. Together, these factors can make it more difficult for families to make ends meet, particularly for lower and middle-income households that are more sensitive to changes in the cost of goods.

The electric vehicle sector provides a useful example of how these dynamics play out. As part of its broader climate and industrial objectives, the US has set ambitious targets for deploying sustainable energy technologies, including EVs. At the same time, levies on imported EVs have increased significantly in recent years, in some cases by more than 100 percent. As a result, vehicles that are competitively priced at the point of production may end up costing significantly more by the time they reach US consumers, once taxes, tariffs and distribution costs are factored in.

In other major markets, including Europe and Canada, similar models — with a range of high-tech features such as advanced driver-assistance systems and integrated digital platforms — are often available at lower prices. Of course, cross-market comparisons are shaped by multiple factors, including government subsidies, regulatory frameworks and shipping costs. Nonetheless, the effect of current US trade policy is to make it more difficult for US consumers to access lower-cost alternatives at a time when affordability remains a pressing concern.

Survey data suggest that many US households are increasingly focused on value for money and would welcome a wider range of EV options. Expanding the variety of available vehicles could accelerate adoption, support environmental goals and ease financial pressures on households. However, current policies limit the availability of such options.

There is substantial empirical research on how tariffs affect consumers. Studies by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York indicate that US consumers and businesses, rather than foreign producers, have borne most of the costs of tariffs imposed since 2018. Similarly, the Kiel Institute for the World Economy found that tariffs function much like a consumption tax, with the burden falling largely on domestic consumers.

Industry projections provide further insight into how trade policies may affect consumers. According to the National Automobile Dealers Association, trade-related costs could raise vehicle prices by several thousand dollars. For many households, a car represents the second-largest expenditure after housing, meaning even modest price increases can significantly affect affordability and access.

As former White House economic adviser Gary Cohn has observed, tariffs can have regressive, tax-like effects, as lower-income households tend to spend a larger share of their income on goods.

At a macroeconomic level, tariffs can also contribute to higher prices. Several analyses suggest that recent trade restrictions have added upward pressure to the cost of various consumer goods, compared with historical trends. Tariffs are only one of several factors influencing inflation, including supply chain disruptions, energy prices and monetary policy, but they remain a policy tool with clear and measurable effects. Goldman Sachs, for example, has estimated that tariffs have had a modest but noticeable impact on inflation, with some effects likely to persist.

At the same time, tariffs have generated substantial government revenue, estimated to have exceeded $200 billion in 2025. This underscores the trade-offs involved in their use.

Trade barriers affect not only prices, but also the way firms compete. In more open markets, companies tend to improve efficiency, invest in innovation and adapt to evolving consumer preferences. When access to international competitors is constrained, these incentives may weaken. Over time, this can lead to higher prices, slower technological progress and fewer choices for consumers.

This raises important questions about how to balance short-term support for the domestic EV industry with long-term competitiveness. Policies that strengthen domestic production capacity can be valuable, particularly in emerging sectors. However, sustained success overseas often depends on the ability to compete on both quality and cost.

Trade policy discussions frequently emphasize the importance of safeguarding national interests, supporting job creation and strengthening industrial capacity. These are important objectives. It is equally important to consider the perspective of consumers, who bear much of the cost of these policies.

A well-designed trade strategy seeks to balance multiple objectives: safeguarding national security, supporting domestic industry and promoting consumer well-being. Achieving this balance is complex and requires ongoing adjustments as economic conditions evolve. Policies that preserve a degree of openness and competition — while advancing strategic priorities — are more likely to support innovation, efficiency and broad-based growth.

In this context, careful consideration of the long-term effects of trade policies can help inform better decisionmaking. By weighing impacts not only on industry, but also on prices, consumer choice and household purchasing power, policymakers can better align trade strategies with the broader goal of sustainable and inclusive economic development.

Ultimately, trade policy should be evaluated not only by how effectively it advances national objectives, but also by how it shapes everyday economic experiences of consumers. Ensuring that markets remain dynamic, competitive and responsive to consumer needs is an essential part of that broader goal.

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Demographics, urbanization changing housing market

MAIN STREET
By Sheng Songcheng

China's real estate sector is undergoing a historic transition. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), the industry entered a phase of deep adjustment after more than two decades of rapid expansion. The development model that once powered growth — characterized by high leverage, rapid turnover and heavy borrowing — has over time become difficult to sustain.

The structural conditions underpinning the market have also changed. China's demographic profile is shifting, urbanization is slowing as it approaches maturity and the marginal contribution of property investment to economic growth has diminished.

Recognizing these shifts, policymakers have begun outlining a new direction for the sector. Since mid-2023, policy discussions have repeatedly emphasized a consistent approach: strictly control new supply, optimize the existing housing stock and improve the quality of housing. Most notably, central authorities have explicitly prioritized the goal to halt the decline and move toward stabilization in the property market, elevating its stabilization to a strategic level vital for the broader macroeconomy.

As China enters the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-30), the policy framework has become increasingly clear. The half-decade has a distinctly layered objective. First, it seeks to address risks that accumulated during earlier phases of rapid growth, including risks related to real estate, local government debt and smaller financial institutions. At the same time, it aims to establish a new institutional foundation for the housing sector — reforming systems governing property development, financing and sales, while expanding the supply of affordable housing.

Guided by this shift in thinking, China's real estate industry may undergo a fundamental transformation, gradually returning to its core purpose: providing housing rather than serving primarily as a vehicle for financial expansion.

The most urgent task in this transition is risk management and reduction. Since China launched its market-oriented housing reforms in 1998, real estate has played an essential role in improving living conditions and driving economic growth. Yet the current challenges facing the sector are not simply cyclical fluctuations. Rather, they reflect deeper balance-sheet pressures emerging across the economy.

Over the past two decades, China's property sector developed a distinctive high debt-high growth model. Developers expanded aggressively using leverage; households increased borrowing through mortgage lending; and local governments relied heavily on land-transfer revenues to support fiscal spending. Together, these dynamics pushed up property prices while accumulating financial vulnerabilities.

Today, the situation has reversed. As housing and land prices enter a downward cycle, the liabilities associated with those assets — bank loans, bonds issued by developers and other forms of debt — remain rigid. This mismatch between declining asset values and fixed debt obligations has weakened balance sheets across the sector. Faced with such pressure, economic actors tend to shift their priorities from maximizing profits to minimizing risks. Income that might otherwise be used for investment is instead directed toward debt repayment. At the same time, falling property values reduce household wealth, which in turn dampens consumption and weakens domestic demand.

Managing this process requires caution. During periods of market stress, developers may attempt to sell assets quickly or slash prices in order to generate liquidity and repay debts. While such decisions may be rational for individual firms, if many companies simultaneously act in the same way, the collective effect can be destabilizing. Prices may fall sharply, liquidity may dry up and the industry may enter a negative cycle, in which declining asset values intensify debt pressures.

The appropriate strategy is therefore not a sudden correction, but a gradual adjustment — what Chinese policymakers often describe as "exchanging time for space". Real estate's share of China's GDP increased from 4.5 percent in 1998 to about 6.2 percent in 2025. The sector will continue to play an important role in the economy, but its functions can be recalibrated. By guiding key indicators such as the price-to-income ratio, rental yields and vacancy rates back toward sustainable levels, the industry can gradually shed the excessive financial and speculative functions that accumulated during the boom years.

Building a new development model requires strengthening the institutional framework governing property development, financing and sales. One important reform is the strengthening of the project-company system, ensuring that each real estate project operates as an independent legal entity and that funds raised for a project are used exclusively for its construction and delivery. Another reform involves establishing a "lead bank" system for project financing, under which a designated bank — or banking consortium — oversees financing and manages project cash flows. This mechanism builds on China's housing-project "white-list" program introduced in 2024, which has already supported financing for millions of homes.

Another significant change concerns the way homes are sold. For many years, China relied heavily on the presale of unfinished apartments. Increasingly, however, policymakers are encouraging the expansion of completed-home sales so that buyers purchase homes that are ready to occupy. This approach reduces delivery risks and helps restore confidence in the market.

At the same time, many developers are exploring asset-light business models, in which they provide development management services rather than funding projects directly. As the industry undergoes adjustment, this shift toward professionalized services may become an important path for sustainable development.

Another critical task is strengthening the affordable housing system. Housing possesses both a market dimension and a social-welfare function. International experience demonstrates the value of a dual-track system. Singapore's public housing program, administered by the Housing and Development Board, houses more than 80 percent of the city state's residents, while Germany's cooperative housing sector helps stabilize rental markets.

China faces its own structural challenges. The country's urbanization rate has surpassed 66 percent, and housing difficulties for new urban residents and young people coexist with underused housing stock. Expanding the supply of affordable housing and improving related institutional arrangements will therefore be essential to creating a tiered housing system that combines social protection with market efficiency.

Housing remains, above all, a place to live. Ensuring adequate housing for vulnerable urban households through public housing programs is therefore a core social objective. For lower-income families, shared-ownership housing and other mechanisms can help lower the threshold for homeownership. For households seeking improved living conditions, market-based housing can meet demand under appropriate policy guidance.

Better housing quality also contributes to human capital. The concept of building "good homes" — safe, comfortable, green and technologically advanced — reflects a growing recognition that housing quality matters as much as housing quantity. Large-scale urban renewal and the renovation of aging residential communities will not only improve living conditions, but also generate new investment opportunities.

Finally, housing also affects consumption through its influence on household wealth. Because more than 90 percent of Chinese households own homes, declining property prices can reduce perceived wealth and dampen spending. Policymakers are therefore exploring ways to enhance the efficiency of housing-related financial tools such as China's housing provident fund system, whose accumulated balances remain substantial but underutilized.

For all these reasons, stabilizing the housing market remains essential. Sales and investment have continued to decline in recent years, and restoring stability will be crucial for both the sector itself and the broader economy. Major metropolitan areas — where economic activity is concentrated and population inflows remain strong — will play a key role in anchoring the market. At the same time, improving housing quality, expanding affordable housing, and strengthening fiscal and financial support will help rebuild confidence.

China's real estate sector is now standing at a critical juncture between old and new development models. The path forward is increasingly clear: address accumulated risks, stabilize the market, and establish a new framework centered on quality, sustainability and housing as a basic social good. Achieving this transformation will not only determine the future of the industry itself, but also shape the stability and long-term development of China's economy.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

CHINA

BLUEPRINT INTO ACTION

New project aids Xinjiang's energy goals

Region to leverage resources to support transition plans and boost green power

By **FANG AIQING** and **MAO WEIHUA** in Urumqi

The Dashixia Water Control Project in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region has recently completed the installation of major components for all three power-generating units and the construction of its power transmission system.

Located on the Kumarak River in Aksu prefecture, the project features the world's tallest concrete-faced sand-gravel dam, rising 247 meters high, equivalent to an 80-story building.

According to the construction team, the 750,000-kilowatt project is scheduled to reach full impoundment by the end of May, with its first unit set to be commissioned in late June. All three units are expected to become operational in August, generating nearly 1.9 billion kilowatt-hours annually — enough to power 650,000 households.

Chen Wendeng, a project leader at China Gezhouba Group No 3 Engineering Co, which is in charge of construction, said that in addition to its water conservancy and ecological benefits, Dashixia's power generation will save about 764,000 metric tons of standard coal and cut carbon dioxide emissions by 2.45 million tons annually. It will also ease demand pressure in southern Xinjiang during summer and autumn and help smooth fluctuations from wind and solar power.

The Dashixia project epitomizes Xinjiang's energy transition and sets a promising tone for the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-30).

At a news conference in Urumqi on Saturday, regional leaders outlined Xinjiang's goal of leveraging its rich energy resources to support national energy security while boosting new energy and green power over the next five years.

Erkin Tuniyaz, chairman of the region, said Xinjiang will tap the potential of oil, gas, minerals, coal and new energy resources to foster large-scale industrial clusters, while using green electricity to accelerate industrial upgrading, develop emerging sectors such as computing power, and promote the integration of artificial intelligence with various industries.

Zhang Yingchun, the region's executive vice-chairwoman, said that during the 15th Five-Year Plan period, Xinjiang will accelerate construction of a new energy-based power system, promote local consumption of green electricity and speed up the building of outbound power transmission channels.

Official data shows that Xinjiang's installed new energy capacity surpassed 170 million kW in February, accounting for more than 60 percent of the region's total installed capacity. One-third of Xinjiang's outbound electricity, transmitted to 22 provincial-level regions, is green power.

Zhang said greater emphasis will be placed on advanced equipment manufacturing — including power transmission and transformation equipment and energy storage equipment — as well as green hydrogen.

Regarding green hydrogen, Xinjiang will pursue breakthroughs in production, storage, transportation and application technologies, build a full hydrogen energy industrial ecosystem and promote integrated development of green hydrogen, ammonia and methanol, she said.

A green hydrogen project in Yiwu county, Hami, has recently been added to Xinjiang's approved list of local new energy consumption projects. The project plans to install 690,000 kW of new energy capacity along with supporting energy storage facilities.

Using a wind-solar hybrid off-grid model, the project will rely entirely on self-generated green electricity for hydrogen production without connecting to the public power grid. It marks Xinjiang's first off-grid project directly linking green power generation with end users. Once completed, the project is expected to produce about 30,000 tons of green hydrogen annually while consuming approximately 1.65 billion kWh of green electricity each year.

A Xinjiang Daily report quoted the regional development and reform commission as saying that the project will effectively address difficulties involving grid connection and renewable energy consumption in remote areas.

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Stitches of friendship

An international visitor shops for traditional Miao embroidery products during a cultural exchange event at the Jianwai Diplomatic Residence in Beijing's Chaoyang district on Sunday. Featuring intangible cultural heritage displays, family activities and live performances, the event brings together embassy representatives, residents and inheritors of intangible cultural heritage from China and abroad.

FU TIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

SPC urges personal data infringement crackdown

By **CAO YIN**
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China's top court has emphasized the need to safeguard data security and protect individual rights in the digital age, releasing a landmark case in which two individuals were sentenced to prison for acquiring and disclosing more than 900 million pieces of personal information online.

As technology rapidly advances, criminal methods have become increasingly sophisticated and concealed. "This has resulted in the theft, leakage and sale of sensitive personal data, often due to inadequate data management by certain governments, enterprises and online platforms," the Supreme People's Court said on Friday.

It noted that some criminals exploit acquired personal data to engage in activities such as fraud, extortion and "box-opening", which severely harm individuals' personal and financial safety and pose substantial threats to public security and social order.

In the highlighted case, two defendants surnamed Lin and Wang illegally obtained personal information through encrypted communication tools and other internet channels between 2023 and 2025. Lin acquired more than 600 million pieces of personal data, while Wang obtained over 300 million pieces.

They subsequently sold the information for profit through methods including virtual currency payments. Lin also collaborated with another individual to set up an online group with more than 2,000 members, using the personal data to insult and abuse others.

After hearing the case, the Beijing Haidian District People's Court ruled that Lin and Wang were guilty of illegally obtaining and selling personal information, classifying their offense as "extremely serious".

Lin was sentenced to seven years in prison and fined 70,000 yuan ($10,287), while Wang received a prison term of five years and six months and was fined 50,000 yuan.

The Beijing court said such malicious acts of publicly disclosing others' personal information, including names, identity card numbers, phone numbers, home addresses, whereabouts and social media accounts, are known as box-opening, or doxing. The acts are often followed by inciting netizens to launch verbal attacks, harassment and cyberbullying.

"Doxing brings great physical and mental harm to victims and their families, as well as severely disrupts public order and social stability," the top court said. It underscored that the security of personal information concerns everyone, adding that cracking down on such acts is necessary to maintain order in cyberspace and foster a healthy online ecosystem.

On Friday, the top court also unveiled details of four other notable cases involving personal information infringement, calling on judges to continue intensifying the crackdown on the crime and related offenses such as extortion and fraud.

In one case, from February to July 2022, two defendants jointly funded the purchase of a Trojan program online and implanted it into an official booking website to illegally obtain more than 290,000 records of HPV vaccine appointment information stored on the site.

The pair then rented a virtual host server, uploaded the illegally obtained website source code to a domain service space and created a counterfeit phishing website. They organized a team with different assigned roles and used a platform to mass-send messages claiming successful vaccine appointments, luring recipients into clicking phishing links.

By impersonating doctors and customer service representatives, they used tactics such as price adjustments, priority appointments and reordering for discounts to defraud 51 victims of more than 580,000 yuan.

The two ultimately received prison terms of 12 years and 11 years and nine months, respectively, for personal information infringement and fraud, along with fines, according to a ruling by a court in Jiangsu province.

The top court said the criminals took advantage of women's health concerns by breaching a legitimate vaccine appointment website to illegally acquire personal information, which they then used for targeted fraud.

"Such actions warrant severe penalties due to their grave violation of personal data security and property rights," it added.

Nation to assess Beautiful China implementation

By **HOU LIQIANG**
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New measures to assess whether provincial-level governments are effectively implementing the Beautiful China initiative were unveiled recently to promote green and low-carbon development.

The Beautiful China initiative is a national development strategy aimed at fundamentally modernizing the country's ecological environment by 2035 through a comprehensive transition to green production, low-carbon lifestyles, and large-scale nature restoration.

Issued by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council on Thursday, the measures also aim to advance the initiative on all fronts and achieve a comprehensive improvement and fundamental transformation in the country's ecological environment quality.

The assessment will adopt a 100-point scoring system, with results classified into four grades: excellent, good, pass and fail, according to a document released by the central authorities.

The document said the office of the leading group for the Central Ecological and Environmental Protection Inspection and the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee, together with other relevant departments, will formulate detailed scoring rules for the assessment.

The evaluation will cover the implementation of responsibilities related to the initiative, progress in achieving annual major targets and fulfilling annual priority tasks, as well as fund utilization performance and public satisfaction levels.

The annual major targets include the condition of the atmospheric environment, water and marine ecological environments, soil ecological environment and overall ecological quality, along with the prevention and control of solid waste pollution.

In a media release, the office highlighted a goal-and-problem-oriented approach as one of the key principles guiding the assessment. It said key and directional indicators will be established to address major ecological and environmental concerns strongly voiced by the public and to steadily intensify the campaign against pollution.

The document also noted that provincial-level governments that fail the assessment must take corrective measures promptly and complete rectification within the required time frame.

In addition, principal heads of provincial-level Party committees and governments may be summoned by the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee and the office of the leading group for the Central Ecological and Environmental Protection Inspection if rectification is not completed within the prescribed period.

According to the statement, China's top anti-corruption authorities, together with the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee, will pursue accountability in accordance with regulations and laws where necessary.

The measures were made public as teams from the Central Ecological and Environmental Protection Inspection arrived in seven provincial-level regions, including Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces, for monthlong environmental inspections.

A key focus of the inspections will be whether these regions have properly implemented the Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, according to a media release from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, where the office of the leading group for the inspection is based. Inspection teams are typically led by ministerial-level officials.

The team assigned to Liaoning, for example, is headed by Cai Mingzhao, a member of the Standing Committee of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Central authorities unveiled guidelines in early 2024 to comprehensively promote the development of a Beautiful China.

By 2027, China is expected to see a continued decline in the total discharge of major pollutants and further improvement in ecological environment quality, according to the guidelines.

And by 2035, green production methods and lifestyles will be widely adopted, carbon emissions will have peaked and entered a steady decline, and the country's ecological environment will have fundamentally improved.

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No.1824

Visitors embrace Wuhan's tech-led factory tourism

By **ZOU SHUO** in Beijing and **LIU KUN** in Wuhan

Jia Meng's twin daughters thought they were visiting another museum during a recent outing. Instead, they walked into a room where a humanoid robot tried again and again to perfectly place a teapot in the center of a mat.

"It wasn't very good at pouring tea," said Jia, a 42-year-old freelancer from Wuhan, Hubei province. "But it's an emotionally stable perfectionist. It never got frustrated. My girls were glued to it for half an hour."

The robot in question, at the Hubei Humanoid Robot Innovation Center in Wuhan's Optics Valley, has hands that cost 50,000 yuan ($7,351) each.

It's still learning — human testers guide it, and the data is carefully selected for training. One day, the robot may teach itself, something Jia is looking forward to witnessing.

But the real jaw-dropper for Jia and her twins came later at the city's twin computing center — one of the few places in China that houses both a supercomputing center and an artificial intelligence computing center.

With 400 petaflops of computing power — one petaflop equals the combined might of 2 million laptops — the "smartest brains" of the digital age can find a specific star among 200,000 celestial bodies in just 100 seconds with 100 petaflops of power. Without that power, the same task would take over 100 days.

Jia's family was among the first wave of visitors to Optics Valley's new industrial tourism routes. Since March 12, the valley — known as one of China's tech heartlands — has launched nine themed tours, including "super factory", "AI" and "low-altitude economy".

The East Lake High-tech Development Zone, also known as the Optics Valley of China, has hosted more than 50 group tours in just a few weeks, according to the Wuhan bureau of culture, sports and tourism. "It's running smoothly, and the heat is only rising," an official with the bureau said.

The most popular stops are fully automated assembly lines, blacklight factories running without a single human worker and laser cutters that engrave metal in a flash, the official said. "Many parents and children told us it's the first time they turned textbook knowledge into real-life scenes," the official said.

Turning live production lines into tourist attractions is not easy. Factories have added glass-separated walkways, interactive screens and emergency exits. Each site pairs an engineer with a professional guide.

"Production first, safety above all," the official said. Visitors never enter the actual workshop, never touch equipment and never disturb a single bolt. "Staggered booking, capped group sizes and unified escorting — that's how we balance industry and tourism."

Asked whether visitors might one day assemble simple products or operate mini machines, the official said, "Definitely."

Plans include DIY laser bookmark-making, smart-device simulators and even a chance to try robot-like assembly tasks. "We want to move from watching to participating, from checking in to truly experiencing," the official said.

Finance professional Xiu Lei, 26, from Wuhan took his young daughter to Optics Valley expecting a quiet weekend. He left feeling like a child in a tech "wonderland". At Wuhan HGLaser Engineering Co, he saw a missile casing with a laser-welded seam — a sharp contrast to manual welding. "The guide pointed to it, and I felt a surge of pride," he said.

Then his daughter scribbled her name on a piece of paper. Seconds later, a laser engraved it onto a bookmark, and a machine automatically packed it into a gift box. "She was over the moon," Xiu said.

Next came Xiaomi's smart factory. Riding a sightseeing cart through spotless workshops, Xiu watched an air conditioner unit roll off the line every 6.5 seconds. The "lights-out factory" ran fully automated — products packed themselves, took an elevator and moved to a warehouse.

Wuhan is not alone. In Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, tourists make their own snail-rice noodles. In Jiaozuo, Henan province, visitors make DIY milk tea at the Mixue factory. In Renhuai, Guizhou province, home to Moutai, industrial A-level scenic spots hosted more than 10 million visitors in 2024, generating 12.86 billion yuan in tourism revenue.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

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.*

Shanghai's raccoon dogs find urban coexistence 'sweet spot'

City's residents learning to live with wild animals previously thought of as pests

By **ZHOU WENTING** in Shanghai
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Wang Fang, director of the Institute of Biodiversity Science at Fudan University, announces the research team's findings in the latest annual census on wild raccoon dogs in Shanghai on Nov 30. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Human-wildlife conflict in Shanghai has dropped significantly as the city's raccoon dog population stabilizes between 3,000 and 5,000 individuals, according to the most recent survey data.

While the protected species is expanding into new districts, localized densities in residential areas have fallen to record lows, driven by improved waste management and public education, a survey published on Nov 30 by the Shanghai Forestry Station, Fudan University, and the Shan Shui Conservation Center shows.

Despite their "bandit mask" markings, raccoon dogs are not actually raccoons. Instead, they are ancient members of the *Canidae* family, making them cousins to foxes and wolves. Native to East Asia, they are the only members of the dog family that hibernate during the winter.

Though their numbers have declined in Shanghai, they are still spreading and migrating in the coastal metropolis, with the city's Putuo district recording their presence for the first time last summer, and Chongming Island recording them for the first time a year ago.

"These changes can mainly be attributed to the improvement in the ecological management, including community waste disposal and stray cat feeding over the past three years, and the deepening of public education and outreach," said Wang Fang, director of the Institute of Biodiversity Science at Fudan University.

"Also, the sense of security provided by real survey data has been key in changing the perceptions and attitudes of many in the public. A rising number of residents are adopting the mindset of coexistence, as the population of the animal is under control and poses no direct threat to humans," he said.

Raccoon dogs are generally not aggressive toward humans and do not view people as prey. In an urban environment, they are shy, nocturnal and highly conflict-averse.

Since 2022, the Shanghai Forestry Station, the Fudan institute, and the Shan Shui Conservation Center, a Beijing-based non-profit environmental organization, have jointly conducted annual surveys on raccoon dogs throughout the city.

The results of the latest survey included public concerns such as whether raccoon dogs getting sick would have an impact on humans living in the same community.

Shanghai's urban environment has abundant habitats and food resources, and with less competitive pressure from other species, this attracts some wild animals into the city.

According to the results of the surveys, Shanghai's thousands of raccoon dogs are distributed in more than 300 areas across the city, primarily in residential compounds and urban green spaces.









Left: Researchers take blood samples from a raccoon dog on Aug 29, 2024. **Center, Right:** Raccoon dogs are found during the team's field investigations.

Based on results collected from online questionnaires and citizen hotline complaints last summer, 112 residential communities across the city reported raccoon dog activity between January 2024 and April 2025.

Over 500 citizen volunteers and professionals conducted multiple comprehensive surveys in those communities spanning nine districts. They collected transect survey data covering more than 560 kilometers and gathered 440 questionnaires regarding residents' attitudes toward raccoon dogs.

Their results showed that raccoon dogs were either sighted during field investigations or reported by residents in 102 of the communities surveyed, with the distribution density at an average of 0.41 raccoon dogs per hectare. This represented the lowest level recorded in the past four years, indicating that the issue of high raccoon dog densities in residential community environments from four to five years ago has improved.

In comparison, the density of wild raccoon dogs in areas like the Qinling Mountains in Shaanxi province, the Taihang Mountains in northern China, and Sichuan province in Southwest China is typically below 0.1 raccoon dogs per hectare. Their density in Shanghai is comparable to that in the wild.

Zhao Xi, a leading member of the research team, said residents are beginning to understand that raccoon dogs are nocturnal and have little overlap with human activity times. "They have very low proactive aggression toward people, therefore many residents have come to accept their presence in the city," Zhao said.

The latest survey indicates a shift toward positive sentiment, with residents' emotional inclination toward raccoon dogs rising to 3.06 on a 5-point scale (where 1 is least favorable and 5 is most favorable). This represents a 25 percent increase since 2022, a trend mirrored by the fact that nearly 80 percent of residents now find the animals tolerable — up from just 50 percent three years ago.

According to Li Zirong, deputy director of the Shanghai Forestry Station, such results reflected the high prevalence of raccoon dogs, involving residents and street managers. As a result, they gradually developed a feasible response plan for communities.

Efforts include distributing brochures in communities, explaining to residents which departments to contact when encountering a large number of wild animals, and what measures to take when encountering wild animals with skin diseases, said Wang.

Experts highlighted that improper kitchen waste management and cat food feeding have been identified as major factors increasing raccoon dog visibility.

The latest survey showed that in residential compounds where cat food is fed to stray cats, the number of raccoon dogs observed was 2.75 times higher than in those where stray cat feeding does not occur. In residential compounds where both issues were poorly managed, the number of raccoon dogs was 3.32 times higher than in those where both issues were well managed.

Data from all four residential compounds continuously surveyed over four years clearly reflected the importance of managing such human behaviors. In an apartment complex in Songjiang district, the raccoon dog density decreased from 5.8 raccoon dogs per hectare in 2022 to 2.22 per hectare last year.

Li Min, a resident at this apartment complex in the district's Sijing town, said she used to complain a lot about raccoon dogs rummaging through the trash around her home, but later she learned that it was because residents were feeding them cat food and were not disposing of garbage properly.

"As long as we don't feed them and keep our distance, they won't cause trouble. We can coexist peacefully," said Li.

This trend is not unique to Shanghai. Wild animals are increasingly moving into cities across China. Species such as wild boars, leopard cats, civets and otters are now frequently found in urban environments. Experts attribute this shift to the completion of major urban construction projects, which have allowed local ecosystems to recover and become more hospitable to wildlife.

As in Shanghai, there are teams in cities such as Beijing and Nanjing in Jiangsu province, among others, conducting research on the urbanization of wildlife.

"This requires both research and management, which is something that must be done for the civilized management of megacities, regardless of people's perceptions of a particular wild animal, its size, or its level of cuteness," Wang said.

Wang's team is leading a multi-year national initiative involving 10 research groups to study how wild animals like raccoon dogs, squirrels and hedgehogs adapt to city life. A critical component of the project is the development of oral vaccines to prevent the spread of animal-borne diseases. The team plans to launch a pilot program in Shanghai's Songjiang district, where they will distribute these vaccines in the environment for animals to find and consume.

"Through community co-management, government involvement and vaccine development, we aim to clarify the relationship between humans and wildlife. Shanghai's approach in this is scientific and civilized, and quite advanced on an international level," he said.

Metropolis aims to double its parks by 2036

By **ZHOU WENTING**

Following the milestone achievement of being China's first city with 1,000 parks, Shanghai authorities have announced an ambitious expansion plan to construct 100 new parks this year and 1,000 more over the next decade.

The initiative aims to bring the city's total to over 2,000 by 2036, ensuring that residents in this high-density metropolis of 25 million have greenery at their windows and parks at their doors.

Residents have praised this initiative as a reflection of the city's commitment to integrating ecological beauty and community comfort into urban planning.

Parks are an essential element in urban ecology, contributing to the city's resilience by cooling and humidifying the air, purifying pollutants, reducing noise and managing stormwater.

During the 2022 renovation of Peace Park in Hongkou district, an additional 8,700 cubic meters of temporary storage space were created to absorb and filter rainwater from the surrounding area of approximately 36 hectares, which exceeds the area's total drainage capacity.

Parks also serve as connectors for fragmented habitats. Chinese water deer have reappeared in parks in Pudong New Area and on Chongming Island in the past few years, demonstrating the ecological benefits of such green spaces.

The Shanghai Landscaping and City Appearance Administrative Bureau said that in Shanghai, where land resources are scarce, expanding urban areas to create more public spaces is not feasible. Under the dual pressures of space and cost, tapping into existing potential has become a core strategy for a new wave of park construction.

Over the past few years, the city has developed replicable strategies for expanding green spaces, with several high-quality parks serving as models for improving public well-being. As of last year, all 36 parks planned along the city's Outer Ring Road had been completed. In addition to another 14 that were previously put into operation, they form a continuous ecological corridor across the city.

A notable example among them is the Xuhui West Bank Nature Art Park, which opened in August as Shanghai's 1,000th park. It used to be a 100-meter-wide greenbelt along the Outer Ring Road, serving as a buffer between urban and suburban areas.

Today, spanning roughly 300,000 square meters, which is equivalent to the size of more than 40 standard soccer fields, the park features sunflower fields, native vegetation, playgrounds, amenities like vending machines and accessible restrooms. It continues to serve its ecological isolation function, but has also become a popular leisure and recreational destination for residents and families.

"It was once a dense forest here that we could only look at from a distance. Now, it's a place where we can stroll and enjoy flowers anytime. I can't help but marvel at the full sense of happiness in our current lives," said 65-year-old Zuo Shuhua, a retired teacher who has lived nearby for over two decades.

To maximize existing resources, Shanghai opened 187 plots of green spaces formerly belonging to government agencies and public service units to the public by last year. The Minhang district government office complex removed its walls and barriers, transforming around 2,900 sq m of auxiliary green space into a garden that is now open to the public around the clock.

In addition to tapping into existing resources, the construction of pocket parks has made green spaces easily accessible right at residents' doorsteps. Shanghai plans to build or renovate 40 pocket parks within this year.



A family paddles at Shanghai Century Park in Shanghai on March 22. CHEN HAOMING / XINHUA

One such pocket park built in recent years is located in Xuhui district near Shanghai Stadium. Transformed from a once-neglected area, it now provides a convenient passage from the residential area to the metro station, reducing a detour of over 10 minutes to just a two-minute walk through the park. It also features flower shops and leisure seating areas, making it a recreational haven for the elderly and children.

Residents have expressed their hopes that parks can have designated areas for pets, allowing pet owners to comfortably and happily visit the parks with their furry friends.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

LIFE

Dance brings ancient war alive

Revived production tours China, blending martial arts and opera to explore conflict and power through movement, **Zhang Kun** reports in Shanghai.

Blending modern dance with Peking Opera, martial arts and traditional Chinese music, the dance theater production *Under Siege: The Full Story of Farewell My Concubine* is on a four-month tour in 23 cities around China.

Choreographed and directed by Yang Liping, the production premiered in 2015 and draws on one of the most famous battles in Chinese history.

Designed with international audiences in mind, it has since been performed more than 300 times at home and abroad, earning a reputation as a landmark in China's contemporary dance theater scene.

The show has attracted critical praise overseas, described by The Guardian as rich in "hallucinatory images", while The Times noted its "urgency, vividness and wit".

A newly revived production was launched in April. Starting with three shows in Kunming, Yunnan province, it has traveled through Shanghai, Suzhou in Jiangsu province, and Wenzhou and Hangzhou in Zhejiang province.

Three shows were staged at the Poly Theatre in Beijing on Saturday and Sunday. The production will conclude its tour in August in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

Yang explains why she chose to revisit the work now. "I feel there is a hunger for artworks of power and strength."

Over the past decade, she says, many dance productions in the country, including her own *Peacock*, have focused on grace and feminine beauty. Audience tastes, however, are changing.

"I think they want to see works that reflect real Chinese power," she says.

The narrative centers on the struggle between Xiang Yu and Liu Bang following the fall of the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC). Their final confrontation in Gaixia ends in tragedy, as Xiang, defeated after a tactical ambush, chooses suicide over escape.

This historic rivalry between Xiang and Liu has long been retold in Chinese literature and performance, forming the basis of the Peking Opera classic *Farewell My Concubine*. The story reached global audiences through the 1993 film directed by Chen Kaige, which won major international awards.

Yang's version, however, shifts the focus. Rather than retelling the battle alone, she explores the emotional and psychological tensions experienced by individuals caught in cycles of power, desire and fear.

"People of all times and all over the world can relate to such situations," she says.

"Dance tells stories through the body, which is universal. You don't need language to understand it."

Xiang emerges as a tragic hero with serious personality flaws that make him a great theatrical character.



The dance theater production *Under Siege: The Full Story of Farewell My Concubine*, choreographed and directed by Yang Liping, is touring the country. By blending modern dance with Peking Opera, martial arts and traditional Chinese music, it presents a unique narrative of one of the most famous battles in Chinese history. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"He is stubborn and indecisive, yet also deeply loyal and righteous, willing to break rather than bend," Yang says. "It is this roughness and authenticity about him that endears the character to audiences."

The production's visual language reinforces that intensity.

Designed by Oscar-winning artist Tim Yip, the stage features installations by Liu Beili, including thousands of suspended pairs of scissors that shift above the performers, creating a constant sense of danger.

On one side of the stage, a paper-cutting artisan remains visible throughout the performance, crafting symbolic shapes tied to the unfolding narrative. The presence of this traditional craft adds a quiet counterpoint to the larger spectacle.

In keeping with Peking Opera conventions, Xiang's concubine is portrayed by a male dancer. As the story reaches its climax, the stage fills with vast cascades of red feathers — a striking visual metaphor for blood, sacrifice and loss.

From the Chinese folk art of paper-cutting to the costume design and choreography that borrow from traditional Peking Opera, Yang "adopted wide-ranging elements of Chinese culture ingeniously, and gave *Under Siege* a strong Eastern essence and contemporary avant-garde temperament", reads a review by Xuan Jing for the Shanghai-based Wenhui Daily.

Yang has explored digital innovation, including dance video projects using artificial intelligence, but she remains firm about the value of live performance.

"Technology can create impressive effects, but real experience cannot be replaced in a live dance show," she says.

For her, the physical immediacy of dance is essential. "People want to see real combat, where each strike of the fist hits hard on human flesh."

Also, the simple and strongly expressive stage design plays an important role during international tours, Yang says.

The production has performed in theaters old and new, on stages of various sizes. The full set of props can conveniently fit into three standard container trucks, which is cost-efficient for international transportation, according to Wang Yanwu, the producer of the show.

Yang, now 67, continues to shape China's dance landscape.

Born in Yunnan province, she rose to prominence with her 1986 work *Spirit of the Peacock*.

She later created *Dynamic Yunnan*, a large-scale production featuring local folk artists such as singers, dancers, and instrumentalists, which has been performed more than 7,000 times since 2003.

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Caffeine and creativity meet along the North Bund

By HE QI in Shanghai
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During the May Day holiday, the 2.3-kilometer riverfront at Shanghai's North Bund in Hongkou district was filled with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee as crowds flocked to the 2026 Shanghai International Coffee Culture Festival.

Nathan Manfredi, marketing director of Phil & Sebastian, a specialty coffee roaster in Canada, attended the festival for the first time, and was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm.

"We're sharing coffee stories and learning about local coffee culture, and we can see people in China are crazy about coffee," Manfredi says.

Running from April 30 to May 4, the festival's main venue hosted nearly 300 brand booths and over 20 international coffee brands. The event was divided into international, industry chain, cross-border integration, and interactive experience zones.

Standout draws included a slate of Shanghai-style signature coffee creations from Jin Jiang International Holdings' luxury hotel portfolio: the Hudec Orange Sparkling Iced Americano paired with Park Hotel Shanghai's iconic palmier and the nostalgic Lacovo (Le Kou Fu) Mocha from Golden Tulip Shanghai Rainbow, both emerging as the event's most popular photo spots.

A variety of latte art is showcased at the festival.

"Shanghai's coffee festival is more than a local celebration; it serves as a global bridge, connecting the world's top coffee players with China's booming market and reflecting the city's inclusive and open character," says Xu Jian, deputy dean of the China Institute for Urban Governance at Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

Xu unveiled the 2026 China Urban Coffee Development Report at the opening ceremony.

According to the report, China's coffee industry reached 354.9 billion yuan ($52 billion) in 2025, marking a 13.3 percent year-on-year increase. Shanghai alone now has 10,336 coffee outlets, surpassing the 10,000 mark.

"In 2017, Shanghai had 5,500 coffee shops, already the highest number in the world. By 2025, the figure had almost doubled in less than 10 years, and the city has consistently remained at the top globally," Xu says.

"Coffee shops have become part of daily life in Shanghai, as common as convenience stores."

The festival has also become a core gateway for global specialty coffee brands to enter the Chinese market, attracting coffee professionals from around the world.

Oskar Garberg, co-founder and CEO of Standout Coffee and a Swedish barista champion, was among the festival's notable guests.

"I've been to numerous coffee shops, and the standards are extremely high here. People in Shanghai have grown up with a deep knowledge of tea from childhood, and they have embraced coffee remarkably well," Garberg says.

The niche Stockholm-based roaster has built a loyal following in Shanghai. "We are a small Swedish brand from the other side of the world, but people recognize us here, and I even sign autographs," he says, making no secret of his expectations for the Chinese market.

"I would love to open a shop here. We will soon have two locations in Stockholm, and Shanghai could definitely be our third."

Park Hyeri, co-founder of Aery, an 18-month-old specialty coffee brand from Busan, South Korea, made her festival debut.

"Shanghai's coffee culture is unique because every shop has its own signature pairing or combination," Park notes.

"That isn't very common in South Korea, so we introduced combo sets here to show Shanghai customers our personality, even though we don't offer them in our Korean stores."



The 2026 Shanghai International Coffee Culture Festival draws a big crowd during the May Day holiday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Beyond industry insiders and hardcore enthusiasts, the festival drew a steady stream of casual visitors and expats.

Edvard Tadevosyan, a Swedish finance major at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, said he was surprised by the city's vibrant coffee scene. "I never imagined Chinese people would love coffee this much. The coffee shops here are amazing."

The festival's influence continues beyond the main event, with Shanghai rolling out a "one district, one feature" coffee culture map across all 16 districts and the Lin-gang Special Area in Pudong.

Nearly 50 flagship events and over 40 international professional competitions are planned in the coming months, alongside citywide promotions at more than 6,000 merchants.

Bookstores, cinemas, museums and commercial districts are also joining the festivities with themed activities and consumer incentives.

Li Junfeng contributed to this story.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

LIFE



Taki Li presents a selection of limited-edition cocktails created for the Symposia cocktail series at Bvlgari Hotel Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Mixology at the world's best bar

Taki Li's approach to creating cocktails and customer service has shaped her drinking spot into a top nighttime destination, **Li Yingxue** reports.

On a busy night, Taki Li barely looks up. Her hands move instinctively — measuring, stirring, adjusting — each action precise and economical. There is no excess, no wasted gesture. Even at full capacity, with orders stacking and voices rising, she remains composed. It is this restraint, more than flair, that defines her.

It also explains why, at a moment when Bar Leone HK sits at the top of The World's 50 Best Bars 2025 by the namesake academy since 2009, Li has become one of the most closely watched bartenders in the industry.

Recently, that attention has extended beyond Hong Kong. As part of the Symposia cocktail series at Bvlgari Hotel Beijing, the 35-year-old bar manager brought her approach to a different audience — less as a showcase, more as an exchange. The format was collaborative, built around shared ideas rather than individual signatures.

For Nicola Turturro, director of the bar and restaurant at the hotel, what stood out was not just technical ability, but presence. "Very natural hospitality. She is super engaging and always smiling. Even though the bar was packed with people waiting outside, she was very calm and elegant in her movements."

That balance — between intensity and ease — is central to Li's practice. "It's a huge pleasure and honor to have her with us," Turturro adds. "She brings something, and we bring something. The two menus join together to create the drinks."

A meeting of philosophies

For Li, collaboration begins with alignment rather than contrast. "This time we used Amaro, which has floral notes, as one of the main ingredients. It fits very well with our identity as an Italian bar."

The four drinks she presented follow a clear logic: classical foundations, restrained execution, and subtle contextual references. One, Amber Night, draws directly from its surroundings. As Turturro explains: "It is inspired by the pine trees we have outside. We use a liquor made with pine needles and rum to remind guests of the warmth of our hospitality."

The emphasis is not on novelty, but coherence.

This focus on understanding how elements come together was not something she developed overnight. In fact, Li's path into bartending began with uncertainty rather than intention. "My first shift behind the bar was as a part-time server in a tiny spot," she recalls. "A guest ordered an amaretto and I hadn't expected the almond hit to be so strong and, unsurprisingly, he complained."

The moment could have passed as a routine mistake, but it became a turning point. "The bartender pulled out all the bottles and showed me how it was done," she says. "He explained the flavors, how everything comes together. I was hooked."

At the time, Li was still a student, working without any clear sense that it might become a career. The experience triggered a deeper curiosity — one that stayed. After graduating, she stepped behind the bar full time, beginning what would become a long-term commitment to the craft.

"I hadn't expected it to become something so serious," she reflects. "But once I started learning, I realized how much there is behind every drink."

With a background in design, she brings a strong sense of structure and detail to her work. "My design background taught me creativity and an eye for beauty. The number one rule is to be mindful of details."



Taki Li, bar manager of Bar Leone in Hong Kong, which is currently ranked No 1 on The World's 50 Best Bars 2025 list.

Her early career was shaped in leading hotel bars in Hong Kong, but after years within that system, she sought a different environment.

"I'd only worked in hotels, and I wanted the experience of a stand-alone bar, to work more closely with a team, which felt almost like family."

That transition came in 2023, when she joined Bar Leone's opening team in Hong Kong under Lorenzo Antinori, a signature mixologist from Rome.

Bar Leone's concept is built on cocktail popolari — a return to accessible, classical drinking. The bar avoids complex machinery and modernist techniques, focusing instead on fundamentals.

For Li, this framework sharpens rather than limits creativity.

"I prefer classic styles, focusing on reducing elements to their essence. With limited elements and steps, creation becomes a different kind of challenge."

Her process begins with structure. "I usually start with a classic I want to nod to, then build around it with flavors, ingredients, or a concept I want to explore."

Balance remains central. "The right garnish not only makes the drink look good but also lifts the whole experience," she says.

A place with strict standards

At the bar, volume and precision operate simultaneously. The bar fills quickly — often within the first hour — and maintains a steady flow until closing.

"It's a high-volume state," Li says. "We have strict standards — drinks must be delivered within 8 to 10 minutes."

Maintaining consistency under pressure requires coordination. "Teamwork is very important, guests don't interact with just one person." As bar manager, Li's role is to align the team's rhythm as much as its output.

For Li, technical skill is secondary to interpersonal ability. "Personality is more important than technique," she says. "Technique can be trained. Personality is core."

She distinguishes between competitive bartending and daily service. "Competition is a one-way presentation, daily operation is two-way communication."

There, the experience is structured around this interaction. "Guests step into the bar and the drink is the last thing they experience." What precedes it — conversation, guidance, atmosphere — is equally critical.

"We want guests to feel like they have been invited into our Italian home."

The spot's rapid rise has amplified expectations. Asia's No 1 in 2024, followed by World's No 1 in 2025, has placed the bar and its team under sustained global attention.

"When we got Asia's No 1, I was more nervous. When we got World's No 1, I kept telling my colleagues: 'Hold me, don't let me cry!'"

The recognition carries wider industry weight. As Turturro notes: "It doesn't happen every day that a bartender from the number one bar in Asia creates a cocktail with you."

Yet Li remains focused on the original intent. "We want to be a neighborhood bar, not just a place people wait in line for."

Her priorities are shifting toward leadership and development. "In the past 10 years, I focused on bartending. In recent years, I moved into management. I enjoy it."

Collaborations like the Beijing guest shift suggest a broader trajectory.

As Turturro observes: "Guests now look for the story behind the drink, they want to understand why."

Li's answer remains consistent: strip away the unnecessary, focus on balance, and build connections. "If my bartender is happy, the drinks will be good," she says.

It is a simple principle — one that, in her hands, is executed with exacting precision.

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Archives reveal centuries-old ties with Naples

NAPLES — From local college names to street names, archives reveal close links between the southern Italian port of Naples and China over the centuries, serving as witnesses to the development of cultural exchanges between the two nations.

Luigi Carbone, Naples' city councilor and president of the City Council's commission for culture, tourism and productive activities, says that the ties between Naples and China are deeply rooted in history.

It has "become part of our DNA", says Carbone.

With a winding lane named "Salita dei Cinesi" (Chinese Slope), Naples became home to the Collegio dei Cinesi (Chinese College) almost 300 years ago, when it was founded by Italian missionary Matteo Ripa.

Serving as a painter and translator for the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) royal court, Ripa returned to Italy in 1723 and established the college with a clear mission: to overcome language and cultural barriers by nurturing truly inclusive, cross-cultural talent.

The college later turned into one of the earliest institutions in Europe to systematically teach Chinese language and culture.

After several name changes, the college evolved into the University of Naples L'Orientale, remaining a leading center for Sinology studies in Italy.

According to Antonella Vurchio, a librarian at L'Orientale, the library's earliest core collection came from the Collegio dei Cinesi.

Roberto Tottoli, rector of the university, says the "illuminating legacy" of Collegio dei Cinesi went directly to L'Orientale. In his view, Chinese language and culture studies have been the university's mission from the beginning.

Tottoli says the university's cooperation with Chinese institutions has expanded from language teaching and history to international relations and archaeology. It has signed multiple memorandums of understanding with Chinese partners and entered into cooperation with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

In addition, the Confucius Institute at L'Orientale has promoted cultural exchanges, people-to-people understanding, and friendship between China and Italy.

Valeria Varriano, director of the Confucius Institute at L'Orientale, says many Italians are first drawn to traditional Chinese culture, and are then surprised by China's vitality.

The institute has become a hub in Naples that connects schools with the university and promotes exchanges between Chinese students in Italy and Italian students, adds Varriano.

Wu Junru, the Chinese director of the Confucius Institute of Naples, says the institute serves not only as a language-teaching body but also as a platform for cultural exchanges.



People watch a lion dance during a Chinese New Year celebration in Naples in 2022. XINHUA

Italian student Davide Saracino says figures such as Matteo Ripa and Marco Polo helped build bridges across civilizations in their era, and it is up to younger generations to continue their work.

XINHUA

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

LIFE






From left: Students at Dahejia Primary School post sticky-note messages to welcome pianist Lang Lang. The school is nestled against the mountains near the Yellow River. Students listen attentively during Lang's music class. Students use drawings to express their understanding of music. PHOTOS BY BAI SHUHAO / CHINA DAILY

Healing in a major key

Pianist Lang Lang brings artistic inspiration and emotional comfort to children recovering from earthquake trauma, **Bai Shuhao** reports in Linxia, Gansu.

In mid-April, pianist Lang Lang sat at an electronic keyboard inside a classroom at Dahejia Primary School, a small rural school tucked beneath the snowcapped ridges of the Qilian Mountains.

Outside, the Yellow River flowed quietly across the Loess Plateau. Harsh sunlight streamed through the classroom windows. Inside, Lang's fingers drifted over the keys, the notes flowing through the room like water finding its course.

The children listening might not fully realize that the man before them was one of China's most internationally celebrated musicians. Many had never attended a live piano performance. They just knew that the music sounded beautiful, and that the keyboard in their classroom could produce sounds they had never imagined.

"When class ended, they didn't want to leave," says Zhang Zhengyun, the school's music teacher, who taught the lesson alongside Lang. He is one of the few full-time music instructors in the entire county.

Dahejia Primary School is located in Jishishan county, Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture in western Gansu province — an autonomous county where ethnic groups account for roughly two-thirds of the population. Long affected by poverty, the county was removed from China's national poverty list in 2020.

But three years later, disaster struck. On a winter night in December 2023, a magnitude-6.2 earthquake shook the region, followed by more than 400 aftershocks. Many homes built of adobe or brick collapsed; in some villages, as much as 70 percent of the residences were damaged. Dahejia Town, where the school stands, was among the hardest-hit areas.

After the earthquake, the school building remained standing but was deemed unsafe. For months, students attended classes in temporary prefabricated shelters. A new campus was later constructed, tripling the school's size and upgrading its facilities. Today, it serves 510 students across 12 classes.

When Lang arrived this spring, children were running on a newly laid rubber track during their physical education class. Word of his visit spread quickly. Within minutes, students gathered around him, curious and excited.

They know his name well and affectionately call him "Uncle Lang". On the third floor is a music classroom he donated.

The Lang Lang Arts Foundation first donated a piano classroom to a school in Jishishan in 2021. In 2025, the initiative expanded through a partnership with the Ant Foundation and One Foundation and educators from Beijing Normal University, introducing music courses designed specifically for rural schools. Altogether, 22 schools and 35 teachers in the county received music training, while the number of equipped music classrooms grew to eight.

Inside Dahejia's music room stand five electronic keyboards, along with tambourines, triangles and hand drums. Before every class, students rush in, tapping the black-and-white keys.

"Most of them can't perform yet," Zhang says. "But the instruments spark their curiosity."

That curiosity is precisely the goal. In Jishishan, where villages are widely scattered across mountainous terrain, some remote teaching sites serve only three to five students. Teachers are often responsible for multiple subjects and music education, when it exists at all, may amount to little more than playing popular songs through classroom speakers.

"The biggest challenge is the shortage of trained music teachers," says Bu Xiaomei, an associate professor at Beijing Normal University who helped design the online curriculum after conducting field research in the region.

Providing a dedicated music teacher for every teaching site, she explains, is unrealistic. Instead, the program trains existing teachers to deliver structured, high-quality lessons supported by prepared materials and recorded instruction.



Above: Lang Lang poses for a group photo with students at Dahejia Primary School. BAI SHUHAO / CHINA DAILY **Below:** At the end of the class, Lang performs Mozart's *Turkish March*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The curriculum introduces basic music theory, singing, and simple piano accompaniment, with deliberately modest expectations intended to ensure that every child has access to an instrument.

"The goal is to teach them to use the piano to play simple harmonies and accompany their own singing, so that every child gets a chance," Bu says.

During the class, Zhang divided students into groups and asked them to draw musical notes on paper as a challenge for Lang, who then improvised based on their creations.

Earlier that day, Lang had noticed vendors selling roasted sweet potatoes on the street. He turned the image into a playful improvisation, composing a rustic melody inspired by local life — prompting laughter and instant recognition from the children.

He also invited volunteers to play alongside him. Nearly every hand shot up.

One girl carefully played a melody, note by note, while Lang listened attentively. A boy with no musical training joined next. Starting with the familiar tune *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, Lang guided him through simple harmonies.

"See?" he told the class. "Playing the piano isn't so hard."

The lesson ended with Lang performing Mozart's *Turkish March*, while students clapped to the rhythm in unison. He left them with a challenge: to learn the piece before his next visit.

"It feels a little like a spring outing," Lang says, looking toward the surrounding mountains.

Music, he says, has shaped his own life. "It made me a better person.

"No matter how well they play, something more important is letting them find the joy of music."

For many children here, music serves another purpose. Most of the current students experienced the earthquake firsthand. Some still jump at sudden noises. Many families relocated after losing their homes, forcing children to adapt to unfamiliar surroundings.

Schools provide psychological counseling, but teachers say music classes also help students process their emotions.

"Music gives children a way to express their feelings," Bu says.

Zhang agrees. After completing the required lessons, he often allows students to choose activities freely. "The most important thing is that they feel happy."

The enthusiasm is unmistakable. Students wait outside the classroom before the teacher arrives, constantly asking when the next music class will begin. Many eagerly volunteer to sing or perform, disappointed when they are not chosen.

Zhang himself pursued music despite family opposition when he was young. He still draws inspiration from the works of Franz Liszt, whose music, he says, gave him strength during difficult times. He hopes to pass that same energy on to his students.

After the lesson, students from eight local schools gathered for a small concert with Lang. Children from Dahejia sang in clear, bright voices. Before performing, they explained the meaning of their county's name: Jishishan — "stones accumulating into a mountain". They said they are just like those small stones.

The impact of such a project is difficult to measure. Few students here are likely to become professional musicians. But Lang says he understands that.

"Of course I would be happy if some became pianists, but what is more important is that music grows with them, helping them become better versions of themselves."

Before his arrival, students had covered a whiteboard with handwritten messages for him:

"Thank you for coming. We are very happy."

"I want to become a musician."

"I want to be successful like you — even though I play basketball better than the piano."

As he said goodbye, Lang left them with a phrase he often shares with students, one that reflects his own journey:

"May your dreams come true."

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Online
Scan the code to watch the video.

Heartthrob to hard hat, star becomes a green storyteller

By **XING WEN**
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Seven years ago, Zhang Jiawei was just another electrical engineering student at Nanjing Normal University until a talent scout spotted his towering 6-foot-3 frame and camera-ready face.

Today, that same young man, now known by his stage name Zhang Linghe, commands nearly 19 million followers on the Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo and 5 million on Instagram, where each of his posts easily garners a million likes.

The would-be electrical engineer now lives under spotlights, walks red carpets, and spends his days on drama sets.

Recently, however, he appeared in the documentary *The Answer Is Earth*, produced by Warner Bros. Discovery and the international environmental organization WildAid.

The film explores how China's green shift is quietly reshaping people's daily lives against the backdrop of the country's latest nationally determined contributions, announced on Sept 24, 2025.

The targets to be met by 2035 include reducing economywide net greenhouse gas emissions by 7-10 percent below peak levels, raising the share of nonfossil energy to over 30 percent, and expanding wind and solar power capacity to more than six times that of 2020, aiming for 3,600 gigawatts.

In the documentary, Zhang puts on a helmet and arc-flash protective clothing to work alongside real electrical engineers on an offshore booster station, finally getting the chance to experience the career path he could have taken.

"Today, some of the most important stories in the world are about climate change, energy, sustainability, and our changing relationship with nature," says Vikram Channa, vice-president of Warner Bros. Discovery.

"These are defining issues of our time. And yet, these stories are often told through facts and figures — not always in ways that people can truly connect with. That is where storytelling has the power to make a difference.

"Our goal was to make these stories feel accessible, intimate and real, especially for younger audiences, while staying grounded in scientific truth."

Channa believes Zhang is the right person to guide the journey because of his engineering mindset, which allows him to reconnect with the logic and natural curiosity behind these subjects.

"Through that journey, science becomes personal. Engineering becomes relatable. And the future becomes something audiences can feel part of," Channa says.

The documentary brought Zhang to his home province of Jiangsu, where he visited an offshore wind power cluster, a pumped-storage hydroelectric plant, and an ecological dredging platform on Taihu Lake



Actor Zhang Linghe experiences jobs including equipment maintenance at an offshore booster station (left) and visits a wind turbine manufacturing plant (right) in a recently released documentary focusing on the country's low-carbon transition. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



to get hands-on experience in different jobs, including as a wind farm operation and maintenance engineer, dredging boat captain, fisherman, waste collector, and eco-agricultural technician.

He used language familiar to young audiences to explain electricity-related terms.

For instance, he described a pumped-storage hydroelectric plant — which uses surplus electricity to pump water to an upper reservoir and then releases it to generate power during peak demand — as a "giant power bank".

Zhang believes being a "translator" in the documentary can help more people understand what energy transition and low-carbon living really mean.

In the first episode, he lived and ate alongside electrical engineers at the offshore booster station, helping them carry out routine inspections and maintenance work on the station's power equipment.

Zhang observed that when the cameras were rolling, the engineers tended to speak in formal, academic terms. But once the crew paused, they would open up like family. And it was in those off-camera moments that he truly felt their passion for the job.

"I could feel how proud they are of what they do," Zhang says.

"They also want more young people to join them, but too many are chasing trendy majors and jobs instead. This documentary should show that this career has a real future and that it's truly making a difference for the environment."

Already known for a number of highly popular drama series, Zhang has been widely discussed for his good looks as a rising heartthrob in the entertainment industry.

"Because many people got to know me through my characters, and then started following me as a person, I want to make good use of that attention and influence to bring more positive things to everyone," he says.

"I hope that while following me, audiences can also see the country's energy transition, make small changes to their own lifestyles, and contribute to the progress of our energy transformation."

He also hopes more people can see his truest version. He describes this documentary as bringing him back to the world of Zhang Jiawei.

"In the past few years of becoming Zhang Linghe, I gradually drifted away from Zhang Jiawei, the young man surrounded by kind people, who was always willing to express his innermost, truest feelings."

He says that after becoming a star, he insulated himself from his old life, but this documentary journey brought him back to his hometown, doing work he was once familiar with, and most importantly, being surrounded by a group of very real people.

"The journey made me more willing to open up."

He once chose to become an actor partly out of a desire for freshness as he didn't want a conventional nine-to-five job. Acting allows him to live as a new character every few months, collaborating with different actors and directors.

However, by seeing and experiencing the daily lives of people doing different jobs throughout the journey, he has developed a completely different perspective.

"What they're doing is truly changing people's lives, changing the future of our country, and changing their own futures," he says.

"Sometimes, whether something feels fresh or not really depends on whether you can find something challenging in the repetitive work."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:47 PM

SPORTS

BASKETBALL



Los Angeles Lakers' LeBron James takes a pass as Oklahoma City Thunder's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander defends during Game 3 of a second-round NBA playoffs series on Saturday in Los Angeles. With a 131-108 victory, the Thunder's unbeaten playoffs run puts it on the brink of another Western Conference finals. AP

Thunder over LA looks ominous

Lakers on the brink of elimination, as Cavs claw one back against the Pistons

LOS ANGELES — The Oklahoma City Thunder used another explosive second half to beat LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers 131-108 on Saturday, pushing the Lakers to the brink of elimination in the NBA playoffs.

Ajay Mitchell scored 24 points and handed out 10 assists without a turnover to help the Thunder take a 3-0 stranglehold on the best-of-seven Western Conference semifinal series.

The Lakers will host Game 4 on Monday, when they'll try to become the first NBA team to rally from 3-0 down to win a playoff series.

"I'm not giving up on this series," defiant Lakers coach JJ Redick said. "We're going to try to win on Monday. We're going to try to extend the series and we're going to try to take this thing back to OKC."

The Cleveland Cavaliers, fueled by 35 points from Donovan Mitchell and clutch shooting from James Harden, avoided falling into a similar hole, grabbing a crucial 116-109 Game 3 victory over the Detroit Pistons to cut their series deficit to 2-1.

The Cavs, who dropped the first two games in Detroit, remained unbeaten at home in these playoffs.

But the Lakers, still without injured scoring champion Luka Doncic, couldn't conjure a crucial win as their series shifted to Los Angeles.

Rui Hachimura led the Lakers with 21 points and James added 19 points, six rebounds and eight assists.

But, the Thunder's depth was just too much for the depleted Lakers.

"That's the strength of their team," Redick said.

With reigning Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander connecting on just seven of 20 shots from the floor, second-year guard Ajay Mitchell — starting in place of the injured Jalen Williams — stepped up.

"He's a gamer," said Gilgeous-Alexander, who finished with 23 points.

"It might be a shock to the world, but this is no shock to us."

Just like in game two, the Lakers took a two-point lead into halftime, this one largely on the strength of 11 first-half three-pointers.

But, again, the Thunder exploded in the third period, opening the second half on a 21-6 scoring run.

After that, it was all but over. The Lakers connected on just eight of 22 shots from the field in the third period, including just one from three-point range.

The turnovers began to mount for the Lakers, and the Thunder pushed its lead to as many as 27 in the fourth quarter.

Gilgeous-Alexander said the Thunder, which swept the Phoenix Suns in the first round, will "absolutely" be aiming to finish off the Lakers on Monday.

"We would never want to waste an opportunity to win a basketball game," he said. "We've got to do the same thing we did in the first three games — be the aggressor, play the right way together."



Cleveland Cavaliers' James Harden (right) shoots against Detroit Pistons' Tobias Harris in Saturday's game. AP

Harden on target

In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell added 10 rebounds and four assists. Harden, a three-time NBA scoring champion, scored nine of his 19 points in a tight fourth quarter, drilling a trio of baskets that included a dagger trey that pushed Cleveland's lead to four with 25.9 seconds left.

"I love it," Harden said. "When your number's called, just getting to my spots. And it's something that I work on literally every day.

"Don(ovan) Mitchell had been working so extremely hard throughout the course of the game, (I was) just trying to find opportunities to help him. So that last minute-and-a-half, two minutes, however long it was, it presented itself. And for me, (it's about) just going out there and taking my shots."

Harden, who drew plenty of criticism for turnovers in the clutch in the first two games, kept the Cavaliers in front with big shots. The 17-year veteran hit a 16-foot step-back jumper to extend the lead to 108-104. After a driving dunk by Cade Cunningham, Harden made a floating seven-footer to put the lead back up to four.

"Chatter is going to be chatter, regardless," he said. "Whether you do something good, whether you do something bad, you give me opportunities in this fourth quarter, and I take advantage of them."

"It's the James Harden I've seen for however many years he's been in the NBA. That's the James we needed tonight," Cavaliers coach Kenny Atkinson said. "We were searching, and we got some good screenings into the matchups we wanted and he went to work."

Cunningham responded with a 3-pointer before Harden provided the decisive blow with 25 seconds remaining on a step-back 3-pointer while being guarded by Harris to make it 113-109. Robinson was short on a 3-pointer after a timeout and Mitchell made three free throws down the stretch.

The Cavs withstood a 27-point triple-double from Cunningham, who added 10 rebounds and 10 assists.

Cleveland led 64-48 at halftime and pushed the lead to 17 early in the third, before the Pistons clawed back.

Detroit managed to edge ahead with less than four minutes to play before Cleveland responded again.

The Cavs will try to level the series when they host Game 4 on Monday.

AGENCIES

Kerr offered 2-year deal to battle on with the Warriors



Steve Kerr

SAN FRANCISCO — Steve Kerr is giving it another go with Golden State.

Kerr has reached an agreement, in principle, on a two-year contract to continue coaching the Warriors, according to a person with knowledge of the negotiations. Kerr is still yet to sign the new deal, the person told reporters on Saturday night, speaking on condition of anonymity because the contract is yet to be finalized.

The Warriors missed the playoffs for the second time in three years, earning the 10th seed in the Western Conference and eventually losing to Phoenix in the play-in tournament.

Kerr's 12-year coaching run with the franchise has featured four championships and six NBA Finals appearances, including five straight from 2015-19. Kerr shared an embrace with Stephen Curry and Draymond Green near the end of the loss in Phoenix, saying afterward he knew it could be their final time together.

He has a career record of 604-353 and a 104-48 playoffs mark, with Golden State winning its last championship in 2022.

The Warriors were 37-45 this season while dealing with numerous injuries, including losing Jimmy Butler to a season-ending right knee injury in January and Curry's 27-game absence with a right knee injury of his own.

ESPN was first to report Kerr's new contract.

Kerr, 60, got his first coaching job in 2014-15 and immediately guided Golden State to the franchise's first title in 40 years. The Warriors would then begin the next season with a record 24-0 start under the guidance of assistant Luke Walton, as Kerr missed the initial 43 games as his team went on to a record 73 victories. Kerr took a leave of absence to recover from debilitating complications following two back surgeries, then missed time again in 2017, with Mike Brown filling in as Kerr underwent a procedure to deal with a spinal fluid leak.

Green had predicted on his podcast once the season ended that Kerr wouldn't return.

Throughout his coaching career, Kerr has used his platform to speak out against gun violence and social injustice, among other prominent issues. His father, Malcolm, president of the American University of Beirut, was murdered in Lebanon when Kerr, 18 at the time, was a freshman at the University of Arizona.

In March 2018, Kerr took part in the Oakland March for Our Lives. Earlier that same month, he joined Democratic Congressmen Ro Khanna and Mike Thompson — then-chair of the House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force — and students from across the South Bay during a town hall at Newark Memorial High School to discuss gun violence in schools, and cheered the efforts of youth nationwide.

Kerr has said it isn't hard to do double duty as a basketball coach and use his voice as a public figure for those who don't have one.

"I think, in some ways, the balance is presented to us, given what's happening around the country," Kerr said. "I know that when I played, players and coaches were never — maybe not never, but rarely — asked about politics and voting."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

ATHLETICS

Nketia races into Australia's sprinting spotlight

MELBOURNE — From dreams of rugby glory for New Zealand to a Hail Mary shot at the NFL, sprinter Eddie Nketia is now on track to win medals for Australia and take a share of the limelight trained on teen talent Gout Gout.

Nketia clocked Australia's fastest 100m in 9.84 seconds at a US college meet last month, albeit with a tailwind that ruled it out of the record books.

Australians latching onto the enormous potential of 18-year-old Gout and 22-year-old Lachlan Kennedy may now have another star in the sprinting firmament.

For 24-year-old Nketia, who runs for University of Southern California (USC), the buzz back in Australia since his 9.84 at the Mt SAC Relays has been almost as overwhelming as the run itself.

"Honestly, it was genuinely a surprise, because I never expected I could run 9.84 in my life," he told reporters in a video interview from his California base.

"And it's like, 'look at where we're at now'. My name is everywhere back in Australia. And it's a lot to take in. It's insane."

Prior to his run, Nketia had been virtually unknown in Australia, despite the nation's rekindled interest in athletics thanks to the performances of Gout.

Auckland-born Nketia only switched allegiance from New Zealand in December after a mandatory stand-down period from major global events.

He spent much of his childhood in Canberra, but returned to New Zealand to finish high school.

His Ghanaian father, Gus Nketia, was also a sprinter and held New Zealand's fastest 100m (10.11) for 28 years until the younger Nketia eclipsed it with a 10.08 at the 2022 world championships — with the help of his father's coaching, of course.

It was a poignant moment hailed by New Zealand media, but Nketia's relationship with the nation's athletics federation was already strained.

New Zealand has strict criteria for Olympic selection, only picking athletes with a demonstrated ability to finish in the top 16 of their events.



Eddie Nketia (right), representing the USC Trojans, races in a 200m prelim during a Division I Track and Field Championship in Eugene, Oregon, last June. NCAA PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

In the weaker Commonwealth Games field, only potential top-six finishers are considered.

That policy has rankled more than a few Kiwi athletes over the years, and Nketia publicly criticized Olympic selectors after missing out on Tokyo 2020.

After also missing the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, Nketia's mind was made up.

"Circumstances just kept ruining my chances of becoming a better athlete," he said.

Turning his back on his birth nation was a tough decision for Nketia, who remains proud of his Kiwi heritage and was a promising junior rugby player with a dream of playing for the All Blacks.

He ditched the track altogether to join the University of Hawaii's American football program, saying he needed a fresh start.

"It wasn't essentially that I was tired of track. I was just tired of missing tournaments," he said.

At 1.90 meters and about 97 kilograms, the powerfully built Nketia played as a wide receiver before returning to the track with USC.

His USC coach Brenton Emanuel calls him "Incredible Hulk" — gentle off the track, but a beast on it. He believes Nketia could ultimately be ranked among the greats of sprinting.

"He puts his superpower on and he just goes," he told reporters, sitting next to Nketia in the video call.

Nketia wants championship medals and has circled this summer's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland, which run from July 23 to Aug 2, on his calendar.

First, though, he wants to smash the 100m 10-second barrier legally during the NCAA season.

Only two Australians, Patrick Johnson (9.93) and Kennedy (9.96), have broken it, while Gout's PB is 10 seconds flat.

Gout is skipping Glasgow, but Nketia envisages a showdown in Australia next year against the teenager and Kennedy.

The prospect of the trio combining on relay squads also has Nketia excited, saying they could make Australia a sprinting power to rival the United States and Jamaica.

"When it comes to world championships next year ... and Olympic Games as well, it's like we're going to go all the way, do what we can to get as many podiums as possible," he said.

REUTERS

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Prosecutors harness tech to safeguard oceans
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Ice breakthrough
Homegrown Chinese hockey squad earns historic worlds silver
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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2026

Emergency at sea



An ambulance boat carrying crew members wearing hazmat suits approaches the pilot door on the starboard side of the cruise ship MV *Hondius*, off the port of Praia, the capital of Cape Verde, on Tuesday. Three passengers have died and at least five people have been struck by hantavirus on board the Dutch-flagged cruise ship. AFP **See story, page 4**

RMB's role as intl option grows

Recent deals highlight currency's expanding use in commodity trade pricing, settlement

By **ZHOU LANXU** and **JIANG XUEQING**

The renminbi is starting to gain ground in the dollar-dominated global commodity trade, as recent deals highlighted the Chinese currency's expanding role in offering a diversified option for pricing and settlement, economists and executives said.

Breakthroughs in RMB-denominated commodity transactions, regarded as one of the most difficult frontiers for the RMB's global use, may signal a faster phase of the currency's internationalization, as demand rises for alternatives to the US dollar and China's role in global trade grows, they added.

The RMB ranked the fifth in global payments with a share of 3.1 percent in March, up from a sixth ranking in February, as calculated by global financial messaging services provider Swift.

The Cross-Border Interbank Payment System, or CIPS — the primary platform for cross-border yuan clearing and settlement — recently recorded a single-day transaction volume of 1.22 trillion yuan ($179 billion), a record high, according to Shanghai Securities News.

Meanwhile, Reuters reported last month that Indian refiners were settling payments for specific oil cargoes purchased under a US sanctions waiver using the Chinese yuan, while mining giant BHP Group has reportedly adopted a Chinese pricing benchmark in its iron ore trade with China, signaling a broader acceptance of RMB settlement and pricing in commodity markets.

Zhang Bin, a national political adviser and a nonresident senior research fellow at the China Finance 40 Forum, said these developments suggest that the RMB is increasingly providing global trading partners with a more diversified currency option for commodity trade.

"The dollar has long served as a dominant currency for pricing, settlement and investment. However, intensified geopolitical tensions and changes in global economic governance have led some countries to reconsider the assumption that the dollar is reliable," Zhang said. "As countries seek to add an extra layer of safeguard in investment and business operations, the yuan is a particularly promising option, given China's significant and expanding role in global trade and investment."

Huang Yiping, dean of Peking University's National School of Development, highlighted the potential of the RMB in playing a bigger role in commodity pricing, as China is one of the world's largest importers of commodities and a leading exporter of manufactured goods.

"Promoting the use of the RMB to price more of our economic activities is both possible and an indispensable step of RMB internationalization," Huang said.

China launched yuan-denominated crude oil futures trading in Shanghai in 2018, an early step toward expanding the RMB's role in global commodity pricing. In recent years, countries like Russia have increasingly used the Chinese currency in oil trade with China.

"The fundamental conditions for the formation of a 'petroyuan' cycle — in which oil is increasingly priced, settled and reinvested in RMB assets — are gradually taking shape after China has become the world's largest crude oil importer," said Zhang Ming, deputy director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

However, analysts cautioned that how far the Chinese currency's role in commodity trade can evolve may ultimately depend on the depth of China's financial reforms and opening-up, the country's long-term economic strength, and the resilience of the US dollar's dominance.

"Part of the recent increase in RMB usage in commodity trade has been driven by short-term geopolitical factors, and the longer-term trajectory still needs to be observed," said Shao Yu, chief economist at the innovation center of Fudan University's School of Management.

Wu Xiaoqiu, former vice-president of Renmin University of China, said the key still lies in deepening market-oriented reforms to enable freer trade of the currency if a petroyuan system is to be established.

Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said China has worked to enhance institutional arrangements and financial infrastructure to support broader cross-border RMB usage to offer more diversified currency choices for all entities.

The yuan's rising role in commodity trade is part of a broader expansion of the currency's international use, with a Deutsche Bank report saying that the process of RMB internationalization is likely to accelerate.

Renminbi assets are becoming increasingly attractive, underpinned by China's strong growth prospects and the rapid development of future-oriented industries, said Stefan Hoops, CEO of DWS — Deutsche Bank's asset management arm.

Hoops pointed to a structural shift in trade invoicing: Whereas the vast majority of Chinese exporter invoices were denominated in US dollars five years ago, a growing share are now denominated in RMB.

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China ready to help restore peace, stability in Mideast

By **ZHAO JIA**
zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Wednesday that China is ready to help create the conditions for starting peace talks and play a greater role in restoring peace and stability in the Middle East, as the region stands at a critical juncture between war and peace.

Wang made the remarks in Beijing during talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi, whose visit was his first trip to China since the United States and Israel launched attacks on Iran on Feb 28. Before traveling to China, as part of his intensive shuttle diplomacy, Araghchi had visited Pakistan, Oman and Russia in late April.

Since the start of the conflict, Wang and Araghchi have held three phone conversations, maintaining close communication as the situation evolved.

Wang noted that more than two months of fighting has "dealt a severe blow" to regional and global peace and stability.

"China deeply regrets this. A full end to the fighting cannot wait, any resumption of hostilities would be even more inadvisable, and staying committed to negotiations is particularly important," Wang told his Iranian counterpart.

Araghchi briefed Wang on the latest developments in Iran-US negotiations and Iran's considerations in terms of its next steps. He said that Iran will firmly safeguard its national sovereignty and dignity while continuing to build consensus through peaceful negotiations in pursuit of a comprehensive and permanent solution.

Araghchi added that the issue of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open should be properly resolved at an early date.

Iran appreciates China's tireless efforts, which were made in a constructive spirit, to prevent the situation from deteriorating and spilling over, he said, adding that Tehran trusts Beijing and looks forward to China's continued active role in promoting peace and ending hostilities.

Araghchi also voiced hope that China would support the establishment of a new postwar regional architecture capable of coordinating development and security.

Wang told Araghchi that China supports Iran in safeguarding its national sovereignty and security, and appreciates Iran's willingness to seek a political settlement through diplomatic channels.

On the Strait of Hormuz, Wang said that the international community shares a common concern on restoring normal and safe passage through the strait, and China hopes that the parties concerned will respond to global calls as soon as possible.

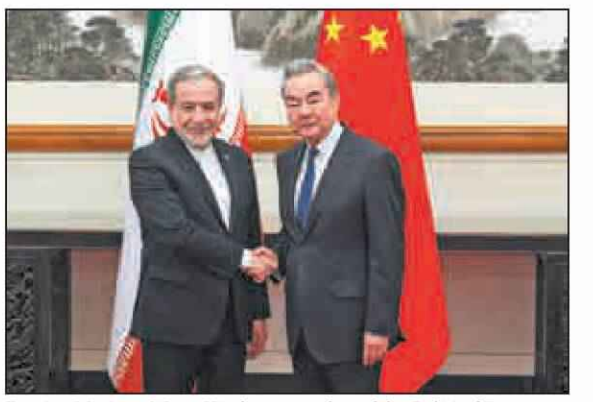
On the nuclear issue, Wang said that China appreciates Iran's commitment not to develop nuclear weapons, while maintaining that Iran has the legitimate right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

China believes that Gulf and Middle Eastern countries should keep their future in their own hands, Wang said. China encourages Iran and more Gulf countries to engage in dialogue and pursue good-neighborly relations, and supports regional countries in building a peace and security architecture based on common participation, shared interests and common development, he added.

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Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, meets with Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi in Beijing on Wednesday. CAI YANG / XINHUA

Poverty alleviation requires constant vigilance, support

WORLD WATCH
By Daryl Guppy

On their first visit to China, Western leaders invariably congratulate China on its successful elimination of absolute poverty. But they may not understand well that poverty alleviation is an ongoing process — for China and other countries as well — that requires constant vigilance and assessment.

China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) builds on the nation's achievements in poverty alleviation, with the strategy's focus shifting from campaigns of poverty reduction to long-term support and monitoring. The challenge is to ensure that low-income households do not relapse into poverty.

Rural development in agriculture remains a top priority, with the aim of improving farmers' incomes. Increased productivity and more efficient logistics mean farmers can access broader and more competitive markets that offer better prices. The progress from poverty to reasonable prosperity rests on enabling infrastructure and research.

Key focus areas include strengthening high-quality development and technological self-reliance. Continued enhancement of healthcare and social services and increased access to senior high school education all align with the 2035 target of achieving "basic socialist modernization" and the prosperity that goes with it.

Although Western leaders admire China's poverty reduction programs, they fail to emulate them. This failure can be traced to differences in the way that China and some in the West think about poverty and its causes.

Modern rich Western nations prefer to describe poverty in terms of homelessness or disadvantage. This language hides and changes the way Western countries approach poverty alleviation.

*See **Disparity,** page 3*

IN CHONGQING, SPICE BRINGS VARIETY TO LIFE

Visitors keen to know what fuels the mountainous metropolis need look no further than its 40,000 hotpot restaurants

By **TAN YINGZI** and **DENG RUI** in Chongqing

China Vibes 中国风尚 — FOOD —

The first bite is a velvet fire: rich beef tallow, dried chili, then the numbing buzz of Sichuan peppercorns dancing across the tongue. On a lantern-lit hillside under loquat trees, a group of Vietnamese hairdressers have just discovered their new obsession.

"This is unbelievable," one whispered, chopsticks already reaching for another mouthful.

In mid-April, more than 20 visitors from Hanoi, Vietnam's capital, made a pilgrimage to Nanshan Mountain's Pipayuan Shiweixian Hotpot Restaurant in Chongqing — a 30,000-square-meter terraced citadel of the hotpot world, which holds a Guinness World Record with more than 800 tables and 5,851 seats.

As dusk fell, golden lights outlined the wooden pavilions, and the scent of the bubbling beef-tallow broth drifted from terraces climbing over 100 meters high.

The Vietnamese visitors gathered around four tables, dipping shrimp paste, beef, tofu skin and mushrooms into dual-flavor pots, with the spicy side delivering the full mala (spicy and numbing) experience.

"It's truly overwhelming," said Do Duc Anh, 39.

"You taste the food and see the whole landscape. It's like eating inside a dream."

But Pipayuan is just one stage in the city's "Hotpot Broadway", which has grown spectacularly against the backdrop of the Yangtze River and soaring green mountains.

*See **Chongqing,** page 3*

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

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

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INDEPTH





Left: Two women assemble a sofa for their rental apartment in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, to give the room a chic feel. **Middle:** Chen Xiaoli from Hangzhou measures the window space in a sunlit apartment as part of her daily work conducting pre-renovation assessments for low-budget makeovers tailored to young renters. **Right:** Xiao Cai relaxes in her renovated rental apartment in Zhangzhou, Fujian province, where low-cost upgrades have transformed the once bare space into a comfortable home that reflects her daily life. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Renters dig deep for home renovations

Long-term tenants carry costs of upgrades, focusing on quality, comfort, individual style



A woman puts up a shelf in her Hangzhou "pink princess" room in her rental apartment. MA CHONGYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Before-and-after photos show human resources professional Kai Li's redecorated living area in her apartment in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. Kai said the changes have made it a cozy and functional area that supports her lifestyle. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By YU RAN
For China Daily

Facing the prospect of long-term renting in a tough property market, a growing number of tenants are laying out money from their own pockets to upgrade apartments to their individual tastes, experts said.

Wu Tong, an associate professor at East China Normal University's School of Social Development, said the trend signals a deep generational shift.

"Compared with their parents' generation, who often spent decades saving to purchase a home as a symbol of stability and achievement, today's young people place greater emphasis on their immediate sense of well-being," said Wu.

"They care about whether they feel comfortable and happy now, rather than postponing satisfaction entirely to the future."

China's rental housing market is underpinned by 260 million renters, according to the 2024–25 Housing Rental Industry Development Report released by the PBC School of Finance at Tsinghua University in August. In 2024, the total number of rental housing units nationwide reached 91 million, with nearly 90 percent of listings coming from individual landlords.

Rising demand for higher-quality rental housing leaves more than 60 million existing units with potential for being upgraded and renovated, according to the 2025 China Urban Long-Term Rental Market Development Blue Book released in April.

Transforming existing stock into "better homes" has become central to optimizing rental supply, it said. Over 40 percent of renters are willing to increase their budget for higher-quality renovations.

New tenant Xiao Cai, 30, decided that renting would not prevent her from improving her space.

After five years of moving between small shared flats in Zhangzhou, Fujian province, Xiao, who works in the education industry, rented a 60-square-meter one-bedroom apartment for 1,000 yuan ($146.30) a month in 2025.

The budget-friendly unit came with plain white walls and shiny floor tiles, but it had good lighting and a functional layout. By signing a three-year lease, she secured a price well below the local market average.

Six months after moving in, water leakage caused sections of the walls to peel, so she decided to undertake a proper renovation. Her initial budget was 3,000 yuan, but the final cost exceeded 9,000 yuan, equivalent to her monthly salary.

Although she had planned to paint the walls and install stone plastic composite flooring herself, a lack of skills and time led her to hire professionals. To control costs, she purchased most large furniture items secondhand, significantly reducing expenses while maintaining quality.

"The most worthwhile investment was upgrading the walls and floors, because they directly determine the overall quality and comfort of the space. The biggest savings came from buying secondhand furniture and making some items myself," said Xiao.

The renovation made the apartment feel like it belonged to her, she said. "Now I genuinely look forward to returning. The house is rented, but the life inside it is mine. Renovating it wasn't about ownership, it was about creating a place where I can feel stable and at ease," said Xiao.

Comfortable spaces

In Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong province's Shenzhen and Guangzhou, the rental population is close to 40 million, accounting for nearly 50 percent of total residents, the blue book showed. More than half of renters said they are willing to accept renting for five years or longer, while nearly 20 percent are open to renting for more than 10 years.

For Kai Li, 28, an HR professional in the AI hardware industry, long-term renting is not a reluctant compromise, but a calculated choice in an environment where property ownership feels distant.

She has moved six times in six years from cramped urban village rooms to progressively larger rentals, with each move reshaping her expectations of a rental property.

Kai currently rents an 80-square-meter, three-bedroom apartment for 7,500 yuan per month in Shenzhen, the most spacious place she has lived in since leaving her hometown in Hunan province. "Over time, I realized I needed to look at whether a space had potential — good light and a workable layout, especially a balcony. I rent with the idea that I will shape it," said Kai.

For many young people who move to a new city, stability is less about property ownership and more about having a space that is a place to cook, host friends, play guitar or simply sit alone, she said.

Before renovating, she hesitated. She negotiated a lease of more than two years at a slightly reduced rent, using the money she saved for the upgrades.

Most of the renovation focused on soft furnishings and spatial zoning. She asked the landlord to repaint the walls, then divided the apartment into areas for dining, working and resting. The total cost exceeded 8,000 yuan, and most of the furnishings and decorations can move with her.

"I didn't want to overspend, but I also knew that if I was going to live here for years, the space had to support my daily life. Otherwise, coming home after work would feel like just another obligation," she said.

The balcony has become her anchor. Shelves assembled by hand hold rows of plants and small vegetable pots. One afternoon, sitting there alone, she felt a quiet sense of achievement.

"Everything here was arranged by myself. Even spending a short afternoon at home helps me recover my energy," said Kai.

Homeownership may feel distant, but comfort and self-definition need not be postponed, she said. "If we can't control the housing market, we can still choose how we live inside the space we have," said Kai.

Data from the 2025 Shanghai Youth Rental Housing Trends Report released by the Shanghai Youth Research Centre showed rental rates of 68 percent among those born after 2000, 64 percent among those born after 1995, and 53 percent among those born after 1990.

In Shanghai, the number of renters aged 20 to 30 reached 76,000 in 2024, marking a 68.89 percent increase compared with 2022.

When choosing rental housing, respondents placed greater emphasis on fundamental living conditions and transport accessibility. Survey data showed that indoor comfort (79 percent), convenient transportation (72 percent), and high housing quality (67 percent) rank as the top three considerations. To secure a better living experience, more than 40 percent said they were willing to pay more for better renovations.

Design innovations

The rising emphasis on comfort is influencing not only tenants but also landlords and designers.

After years of designing brand visuals for major corporations, Chen Xiaoli questioned the meaningfulness of her work.

"In large companies, my work often felt like a small interchangeable part in a vast system. It was hard to see its real impact or feel a clear sense of value," said Chen.

Now 35, and based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, Chen turned to low-budget soft furnishing renovations in late 2025.

Within three months, she had taken on seven to eight projects, a shift she describes as moving design "from screens into real life".

The transition began unintentionally. After a low-cost renovation of her own rental property to attract more suitable tenants, she shared the results online. The apartment quickly drew attention and inquiries.

"I realized that landlords and tenants choose each other. If a flat looks worn and neglected, tenants won't feel motivated to care for it. But when a space feels thoughtfully arranged, it attracts people who appreciate and protect it. That small investment can completely change the relationship between a person and a home," she said.

Unlike corporate branding work, she said, each renovation directly affects someone's daily routine. Some of her clients are landlords hoping to improve competitiveness in a buyer's market; others are young renters seeking a stronger sense of belonging.

"When a tenant tells me she feels happier opening the door after work, or when a landlord says a property that sat idle for months finally sold after renovation, I can clearly see the impact. My design is not just decoration, but improving someone's everyday life," said Chen.

About 80 to 90 percent of her clients are landlords, while renters — typically aged 25 to 35 — often seek lighter services such as design plans and shopping lists costing around 1,000 yuan. Larger projects range from 20,000 to 40,000 yuan, a scale of work many traditional renovation companies are reluctant to take on.

Her design principles are consistent: prioritize function and movement flow before aesthetics, ensure adequate storage, unify colors and style, and avoid unnecessary waste.

"You don't need expensive items to create beauty. What matters is coherence and practicality. Whenever possible, I encourage clients to reuse what they already have, rather than discard everything," she said.

For Chen, the growing willingness among young people to invest in rental spaces signals a broader shift in mindset.

"Many people used to think renting was temporary and something you just had to endure. But young people today don't see it that way. Regardless of tenure, people still want their living space to reflect dignity and care," said Chen.

Landlords take note

As of March 2026, the hashtag "rental home renovation" had garnered over 2.3 billion views on Douyin, while related posts on Xiaohongshu, or RedNote, exceeded 3.7 billion views.

For savvy landlords, the online enthusiasm is also a barometer of renters' needs.

Zhu Chengjie, 49, moved from Jiangsu province to Shanghai more than two decades ago to start his own business. He gradually settled down in the city and now owns three apartments in Shanghai that he has rented for nearly a decade. Most of his tenants are young office workers fresh out of university, drawn to the city by career opportunities.

Recently, Zhu decided to renovate one of his apartments in Jing'an district.

Instead of simply repainting the walls, he hired a designer to make modest but thoughtful adjustments to the layout and furnishings, partly to justify a slight increase in rent, but also because he had noticed young tenants were placing greater emphasis on the style and quality of their living environment.

"I've noticed that young people today have much higher expectations for their living environment. A clean and functional space is no longer enough. They want warmth, personality and comfort," said Zhu.

His other two tenants have also approached him with requests to make small changes, such as adding houseplants, rearranging furniture or introducing soft decorative elements. Zhu has agreed to most of the requests.

"As long as the structure isn't affected, I'm happy to agree. After all, everyone wants to feel comfortable in the place they live," said Zhu.

When he first arrived in Shanghai, housing conditions were not his priority. Seeing today's young tenants invest time and energy in rented homes, he views it as a sign of changing attitudes. "Many of them are working hard in this city, just like I once did. Wanting to live well while striving for the future is not indulgence, but a reflection of confidence and social progress," said Zhu.

Experts said the change is closely linked to evolving market conditions and generational attitudes toward risk and stability.

Wu, from East China Normal University, noted that this transformation has been shaped by economic changes in recent years. When housing prices were widely expected to rise continuously, homeownership carried strong investment and status implications.

"As the market stabilizes and long-term (property) appreciation becomes less certain, renting is increasingly viewed as a rational and flexible choice. In an environment marked by employment uncertainty and income pressure, maintaining liquidity and reducing long-term financial burdens can provide a stronger sense of security," he said.

Wu added that reducing financial risk does not necessarily mean lowering living standards. Instead of investing heavily in property, many young people choose affordable soft furnishings to improve their living spaces.

"This is a pragmatic way of balancing quality of life with risk management," he said.

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TOP NEWS

Chinese firms in US grow, show resilience

Outlook of companies for countries' economic relations has improved, notes survey report

By **YIFAN XU** in Washington
yifanxu@chinadailyusa.com

Chinese companies operating in the United States remained largely profitable last year despite geopolitical tensions, according to a recently released survey report, which also indicated improved expectations for China-US economic relations this year.

The 2026 Annual Business Survey Report on Chinese Enterprises in the United States was unveiled on Monday in Washington, DC, by the China General Chamber of Commerce-USA and the CGCC Foundation.

The event brought together business leaders, industry experts and others to discuss the survey findings, which revealed remarkable operational resilience among Chinese companies and a pivot toward cautious optimism for the coming year.

According to the report, 81 percent of surveyed Chinese companies in the US remained profitable in 2025, while the share of enterprises with pretax profit margins above 15 percent rose sharply from 7 percent to 21 percent over the past year.

The report noted that the outlook of surveyed companies for China-US relations in 2026 has improved. "In economic and trade relations, expectations of 'moderate deterioration' fell by 24 percentage points from the previous year, while expectations of 'modest improvement' rose sharply to 36 percent," it said.

The CGCC, which was founded in 2005, is the largest independent chamber representing Chinese business interests in the US.

Speaking at the event, Zhang Jianyu, chairwoman of the CGCC, said the chamber's member companies have cumulatively invested more than $140 billion in the US economy, directly creating over 230,000 jobs and contributing to more than 1 million positions nationwide.

Qiu Wenxing, minister and deputy chief of mission at the Chinese embassy in the US, who delivered a keynote address, underscored the need for deeper integration of the world's two largest economies.

Referring to the investment and employment statistics quoted by the CGCC chairwoman, Qiu said: "That is the contribution Chinese companies have already made. We can do more to help America achieve even better lives for its people."

He urged US business leaders to be "quick and agile to seize the opportunity presented by China's development", particularly through the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), which offers expanded market access for international investors.

Qiu called on both Chinese and US business communities to "do the right thing instead of the politically correct thing", advocating for deeper engagement and more objective dialogue.

The relationship between China and the US is inherently mutually beneficial, and that characteristic could form the foundation for shared prosperity, he said, emphasizing that the two countries must find a common path based on "mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation".

"The world depends on a stable, sound and sustainable relationship," Qiu said, adding that efforts made by the two governments to stabilize ties are injecting "positive momentum" and certainty into business operations.

Pin Ni, vice-chair of the CGCC and president of Wanxiang America Corporation, said that any "decoupling" between China and the US would be disastrous for the US due to its inflationary impact.

Amid the expectations of improved economic ties, the survey report highlighted some significant hurdles. Tariff policies remain the primary source of pressure, it said, negatively affecting 79 percent of respondents through rising costs and supply chain disruptions. Geopolitical tensions have also become a "structural ceiling" for brand building, it added.

Ni stressed that successful long-term growth in the US requires a deeper commitment to localization and human capital. "Localization is not just about investing in a company; it is about investing in the local people," he said.

The strategic goal of Chinese companies in the US is to become a permanent and contributing part of the local economy, he added.

Monday's event included a panel discussion on the global rise of Chinese brands. The speakers noted that while Chinese companies make high-quality products, they need to improve their "narrative capability" in order to extend their reach.

Crisis management and storytelling should be combined to successfully navigate local challenges, the speakers added.

Talks: Nation steps up effort to promote peace, encourage dialogue

From page 1

Since the fighting started, China has stepped up efforts to promote peace and encourage talks.

In April, President Xi Jinping put forward a four-point proposal on maintaining and promoting peace and stability in the Middle East, calling for peaceful coexistence, respect for national sovereignty, adherence to the international rule of law, and a balanced approach to development and security — a framework that has guided China's diplomatic engagement in the crisis.

Wang has held nearly 30 phone calls with senior officials from relevant parties, including Iran, Israel, Russia and Gulf countries. He spoke last week by phone with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and the two sides exchanged views on the Middle East situation.

Niu Xinchun, executive director of the China-Arab Research Institute at Ningxia University, said that the US-Iran ceasefire remains fragile, with the risk of renewed hostilities still present.

He noted that prolonged disruption to the Strait of Hormuz could affect global energy supplies and maritime trade, drive up shipping costs, and increase pressure on the global economy.

Li Zixin, an associate researcher at the China Institute of International Studies, said that Tehran may hope that Beijing can convey necessary messages to Washington through bilateral and multilateral channels and convince Washington to exercise restraint.

China's communication with all key parties gives it a constructive role in preventing the ceasefire from breaking down and steering the crisis back toward dialogue, Li said.



Visitors enjoy hotpot in a pool at a water park in Meixin Wine Town, Chongqing, on Aug 2, 2025.
HE PENGLEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Chongqing: Hotpot served in unlikely places

From page 1

Here, dining is steeped in the vibrant, down-to-earth bustle of everyday life.

Nearby, Xianlongjing Hotpot Park sets 600 tables among lotus ponds, bridges and pavilions. At night, the traditional folk spectacle of datiehua, or molten iron fireworks, showers the lake in dramatic performances. As the sparks fly , diners dip on-site harvested lotus roots into the bubbling broth.

For a cooler dining experience, the Underground City Hotpot Restaurant repurposes a wartime air-raid shelter with 4,500 sq m of tunnels, which can seat 1,300 people at a constant 25 C.

Elsewhere, Chongqing offers more unusual places to enjoy hotpot. Set on a rooftop, the Mujiuge Hotpot Restaurant serves its ninegrid pots near a secondhand bookstore. At the Meixin Wine Town in Fuling district, diners can soak in a swimming pool while dipping into bubbling cauldrons — the ultimate summer flex in a city famously known as one of the country's "four furnaces", where summer temperatures routinely soar above 40 C.

Back on the hillside in Pipayuan, eight tables were filled with a Surabaya-based delegation of more than 40 Indonesian entrepreneurs. After touring factories to explore China's development and latest technology, they had been drawn to the eatery by Douyin videos. "It looked like a fantasy," said Fabiola Yonita Santoso, head of the delegation.

At the foot of the hill, Dave O'Toole from Dublin, Ireland, and Eve Adams from Seattle in the United States — a long-distance couple finally reunited — photographed their hotpot moment.

"My hometown is the birthplace of the Guinness World Records," O'Toole said with a laugh. "This is amazing."

Pipayuan manager Gan Yuanchuang said the restaurant now hosts many foreign diners daily, mostly from Southeast Asia. During the loquat season, which runs from late April to early May, diners pick the cool fruit to soothe palates scorched by spicy broth.

The roots of hotpot stretch back to 19th-century river porters, who simmered offal with chili. By the 1930s, two local entrepreneurs, known as the Ma brothers, had opened Chongqing's first hotpot eatery, bringing hotpot from the dockside into a proper restaurant. Today, Chongqing has nearly 20,000 hotpot enterprises and around 40,000 restaurants, with 160,000 of China's 500,000 hotpot spots tracing their lineage back to the city.

The flavor of hotpot has reached over 50 countries and regions. Locals believe that the fiery nature dispels the damp mountain air, while the unhurried, hours-long meals embody the city's inclusive, communal spirit.

Whether on a lantern-lit hillside, floating among lotuses, deep inside a cave, or bobbing in a swimming pool, a trip to Chongqing without dipping into its bubbling, numbing cauldrons would be unthinkable.

Contact the writers at dengrui@chinadaily.com.cn

China to attract more global students

By **ZOU SHUO**
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The 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) prioritizes the expansion of high-level opening-up of education and strengthening of the "Study in China" brand, and education officials and university leaders are confident that China is on track to become one of the world's most attractive destinations for international students.

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See more, **page 11**

Wang Daquan, head of the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange under the Ministry of Education, said, "We have confidence in that goal, and we will continue to make efforts to achieve it."

Citing data collected by the center over the past three years, Wang pointed to the steady rise in the number of applicants, greater diversity in the countries of origin of students, a significant increase in the number of self-funded students, and a marked rise in the number of degree-seeking candidates at the undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels.

He attributed this upward trajectory to several distinct advantages, including the strong cost-effectiveness of China's higher education system, with tuition fees in the country being among the lowest globally.

He also highlighted China's stable policies, safe environment, and rapid development — all of which allow international students to share in the country's growth. The expanding global footprint of Chinese enterprises and the Belt and Road Initiative are creating new career opportunities for graduates in their home countries and elsewhere, he added.

According to the latest data from the Ministry of Education, 380,000 international students from 191 countries and regions were studying in China as of the 2024-25 academic year.

Asian students made up the largest share at 61.1 percent, followed by those from Africa at 16.2 percent and from Europe at 15.6 percent. The number of degree-seeking students stood at 205,000, with postgraduates representing 35 percent of that figure. Engineering ranked first among the chosen fields of study, with 27.8 percent of students opting for it.

The Beijing International Studies University exemplifies the shift from scale expansion to high-quality development at the institutional level.



International students experience traditional Chinese stone-rubbing art, an intangible cultural heritage, in Lingshui, Hainan province, on April 26. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

Zheng Chengjun, vice-president of the university, said that as of March 2026, the university's international student population stood at 1,024 — a remarkable 70.6 percent increase year-on-year.

There has been notable growth in the number of students coming from Belt and Road partner countries and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership member states. Leading the enrollment figures are students from Saudi Arabia (177), Morocco (100) and Russia (54), followed by South Korea, Kazakhstan and Vietnam.

Zheng said the university aims to attract more postgraduate students during the 15th Five-Year Plan period. "International students act as a crucial link for trade, tourism and diplomatic relations between China and the world," he said.

By organizing international cultural festivals and improving campus facilities, the university ensures that international students find a true sense of belonging, he said.

Zhao Zhongxiu, president of the University of International Business and Economics, said the university has 70 years of experience in international education and has trained tens of thousands of students from over 170 countries and regions.

He said that deepening educational cooperation is a vital response to global uncertainties. Education cooperation can build cultural identity and people-to-people bonds, helping to forge a community with a shared future for humanity, he said.

In the economic sphere, international students boost two-way trade promotion, play a role in China's outward direct investment and contribute to building home-country human capital. In the field of science and technology, international cooperation in education serves as a major vehicle for talent flow and innovation, enabling global knowledge sharing and collaborative research, he said.

Zhang Hao, a professor at the Beijing Language and Culture University, emphasized that international students are the most powerful medium for telling the story of the real China when they return home.

To attract more students, Zhang urged Chinese universities to strive to reach high global rankings and work for the development of benchmark programs such as high-speed rail, electric vehicles and new energy.

Angelina Sanzharovskaya from Kazakhstan, a master's student majoring in Russian Interpretation at BISU, who has been in China for over three years, said: "The best thing about being a student here is the opportunities the university provides. Through various events, I've visited different cities and learned about the immense diversity of Chinese culture."

El Batoul Nejjaoui from Morocco, a postgraduate student at the same university with nearly 10 years of experience in living and working in China, said that as China plays an increasingly important role globally, she wants an on-the-ground understanding of its economy and urban development.

Disparity: Lack of opportunity leads to poverty

From page 1

If you pretend not to see poverty because it is classed as something different, then you do not need to act with urgency. But the reality is undeniable.

Walk the streets of the central business districts of Sydney or Melbourne, Australia, and you have to step around homeless beggars sleeping on the streets. In the countryside, they huddle in rough camps on the edge of towns. There are around 3.7 million people, or 15 percent of Australia's population, counted as living in poverty, according to a report co-authored by the Australian Council of Social Service and the University of New South Wales Sydney.

In the advanced economy of the United States, the figure is around 37 million, or 11 percent of the population, who live in poverty, according to the US Census Bureau. The percentage is much larger in the UK, where 13.4 million, or 20 percent of the population, are counted as living in poverty, according to UK government figures.

Western countries believe that poverty is the result of personal deficiencies and is not caused by structural economic problems. These unspoken beliefs are often reflected in the abusive language used to describe the poor as lazy, unintelligent or useless deadbeats.

In England, the Victorian era promoted the idea that idleness was a sin and that the workhouse or poorhouse — a place maintained at public expense to house needy people — was the solution for the lazy poor. These are ideas common to Western thinking about the foundation and causes of poverty.

Disgusted by the forced labor of industrializing Britain, German economist and philosopher Karl Marx took a different approach with his insightful analysis of social conditions: The workhouse was not a triumph of morality. It was a feature of an exploitative economic system that required a reserve of poverty-stricken workers to ensure that wages were kept low.

China treats poverty as a function of the economic system, so it has structured the system toward common prosperity and social good.

These are not abstract philosophical differences for academic debate. They are today's drivers of Chinese policy as shown in the details of the 15th Five-Year Plan.

China attacks the structural economic issues that create poverty. Western countries seem comfortable in accepting the assertion that the poor will always be with us, and so they see this as a moral problem and not an economic one.

When poverty is the result of a lack of economic opportunity, then the solution to poverty alleviation is to create the conditions necessary for economic opportunity.

Solutions require equal access to physical infrastructure and to modern digital infrastructure. Digital banking services in China like WeChat Pay and Alipay help expand inclusive financial access, as they generate financial records that can be used for loan assessments. Access rests on the rollout of reliable digital infrastructure.

China's focus is on using new quality productive forces to enable people to stay out of poverty by enabling and supporting economic opportunities.

Past success in tackling poverty means there is a genuine belief that life will improve, and that poverty will become just a memory on the path to a moderately prosperous society. Continued success is an ongoing process.

The author is an international financial technical analyst and a former national board member at the Australia China Business Council. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

WORLD

US jet fires on Iranian tanker headed to port

Reports suggest Washington, Tehran moving toward a temporary framework agreement

By **LIA ZHU** in San Francisco
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The US military fired on an Iranian oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman on Wednesday as US President Donald Trump intensified pressure on Tehran to reach a deal ending the war.

An American fighter jet fired several rounds at an unladen Iranian-flagged tanker attempting to sail toward an Iranian port, US Central Command said in a post on X.

> "The Americans will not gain anything in a war they are losing that they have not gained in face-to-face negotiations."
>
> **Ebrahim Rezaei,** Iranian lawmaker

Since the two sides agreed to a ceasefire on April 8, their negotiations have yielded no concrete results, and tensions have recently risen again.

Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office on Wednesday, Trump said the US has had "very good talks" with Iran over the past 24 hours. He added there is "never a deadline" for when he expects Tehran to respond to a US proposal for ending the war.

Trump claimed Iran had accepted his demand that it not obtain a nuclear weapon, but there was no official confirmation from Tehran and Reuters reported that no agreement had been reached.

Iran said on Wednesday it was reviewing the new US proposal. Multiple media reports indicated Washington and Tehran were moving toward a one-page memorandum to end the war while deferring complex issues, such as Iran's nuclear program, to later negotiations.

US media outlet Axios first reported a proposed 14-point, one-page memorandum to end the war. CNN, citing an unnamed source familiar with the negotiations, confirmed the information.

The memorandum would declare an end to the war and trigger a 30-day negotiation period on resolving critical issues including nuclear matters, unfreezing Iranian assets and future security arrangements in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran is still reviewing a US proposal and will convey its response to Pakistan — which has served as the main intermediary between the two sides — after completing its assessment, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said on Wednesday, according to Iran's ISNA news agency.

Iranian lawmaker Ebrahim Rezaei, spokesman for Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, expressed skepticism. He described the text reported by Axios as "more of an American wish list than a reality".

"The Americans will not gain anything in a war they are losing that they have not gained in face-to-face negotiations," Rezaei wrote in a social media post on Wednesday.

The firing occurred after the US launched "Project Freedom", a military operation to guide commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway for oil, gas, fertilizer and other petroleum products.

The US started the mission on Monday but halted it on Tuesday, citing progress in peace talks. Trump called the operation a "humanitarian gesture", saying other countries had asked the US to "help free up their ships, which are locked up in the Strait of Hormuz".

Iran and some analysts have disputed the US claims. Baghaei, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said the waterway had been safe for international shipping before US-Israeli attacks began.

Following the halt of Project Freedom, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy said in a post on X on Wednesday that safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz is possible under "new procedures", though it did not specify what these procedures entail.

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.
Vol. 38 — No.1822



Protesters light flares in the colors of the Palestinian flag during a rally in Athens, Greece, on Tuesday, demanding the release of two activists detained by Israel. LOUISA GOULIAMAKI / REUTERS

UN demands Israel 'immediately' release activists

GENEVA — The United Nations on Wednesday urged Israel to immediately release two activists taken from a Gaza-bound flotilla, and demanded an investigation into "disturbing accounts" that they had been severely mistreated.

Spanish national Saif Abu Keshek and Brazilian Thiago Avila, who are held in a prison in Ashkelon, were among dozens of activists on a Gaza-bound flotilla intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters off the coast of Greece a week ago.

Israel must "immediately and unconditionally" release Keshek and Avila, "who were detained in international waters and brought to Israel, where they continue to be held without charge", UN Human Rights Office spokesman Thameen Al-Kheetan said.

"It is not a crime to show solidarity and attempt to bring humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population in Gaza, who are in dire need of it," he added.

The flotilla's vessels set sail from France, Spain and Italy with the aim of breaking Israel's blockade of Gaza and delivering humanitarian aid to the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

Keshek and Avila's detention had initially been extended until Tuesday, but the Ashkelon Magistrate's Court extended it further until May 10.

Representatives for Avila and Keshek have accused Israeli authorities of abusing the two men, who have been on hunger strike for the past week.

Spokesman Kheetan decried the "disturbing accounts of severe mistreatment", calling for an investigation and insisting "those responsible must be brought to justice".

"We call for an end to Israel's use of arbitrary detention and of broadly and vaguely defined terrorism legislation, inconsistent with international human rights law," he said.

"Israel must also end its blockade on Gaza, and allow and facilitate the entry of humanitarian assistance to the besieged Palestinian strip, in sufficient amounts," he added.

'No evidence'

On Tuesday, Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said there was "no evidence" to justify the "illegal" arrest of Keshek and Avila.

"This is a completely illegal detention; no Israeli agent has jurisdiction in international waters," he told public broadcaster RTVE.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva demanded on Tuesday that Israel release the two activists.

"Our government, together with that of Spain ... demands that they be fully guaranteed their safety and immediately released," he said in a post on X.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian government on Tuesday condemned Israel's approval of about $300 million for settlement roads in the occupied West Bank, calling it a "flagrant violation" of international law.

It said more than 1,600 settler and Israeli force attacks were recorded last month, including assaults, crop damage and home demolitions.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Small ball, wide door: Ping-Pong Diplomacy lives on

By **YANG HAN** in Hong Kong
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Fifty-five years after United States table tennis players made a historic visit to China, the spirit of Ping-Pong Diplomacy continues to live on as people-to-people exchanges remain a cornerstone in bilateral relations.

That is the view of Bill Einreinhofer, a three-time Emmy Award-winning US film producer and director of the public television documentary *Your Serve or Mine*.

An Asian premiere of the documentary was held at the Asia Society Hong Kong Center on Tuesday to coincide with the 55th anniversary of Ping-Pong Diplomacy this year.

"Contemporary observers typically refer to the 'bad' relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China. But in the early 1970s, there was no relationship," Einreinhofer told China Daily.

Yet, the leaders of both countries wanted to find a way to talk and they discovered it through a "remarkable accident" — when somebody got on the wrong bus and opened the door that most people did not even know existed, he said.

At the 1971 World Table Tennis Championships in Nagoya, Japan, US player Glenn Cowan accidentally boarded the Chinese team's bus. He was warmly greeted by China's Zhuang Zedong, who gave Cowan a Huangshan Mountain silk tapestry as a gift.

On April 10 that year, at China's invitation, nine players from the US table tennis team made their historic trip to China, becoming the first US nationals to visit the country in more than 20 years.

The trip was the beginning of "Ping-Pong Diplomacy", paving the way for high-level China-US diplomatic talks, with then-US president Richard Nixon visiting China in 1972 and the formal establishment of diplomatic ties in 1979.

Einreinhofer's documentary, shot on locations in China and the US, not only interviews athletes who took part in the 1971 exchange, but also explores people-to-people exchanges between China and the US in recent times, and how the spirit of Ping-Pong Diplomacy continues to live on.

"The visit of American table tennis players to China made communication possible. The same holds true today," Einreinhofer said. People-to-people exchange plays an important role away from the glare of the media spotlight as it gives both countries an opportunity to communicate candidly, he said.

As he talked to people of different generations for the documentary, Einreinhofer said he found that young people remained eager to explore their counterparts' culture and "daily routines", which could give them deep insights into similarities and differences.

Bridging cultures

"Years ago, I was a young scholar studying in the US ... that is why I feel so compelled to bring this film to Hong Kong and to audiences across the Chinese mainland," said Ziheng Wang, who coproduced the documentary.

The film was first shown on US public broadcaster PBS in April last year and has been broadcast on more than 250 local stations, Wang said. The team hopes to bring the documentary to other cities where it was filmed at, including Beijing and Shanghai, she said.

The team also developed free learning resources and lesson plans for US public high school students to learn about Ping-Pong Diplomacy, saying exchanges of ideas among the next generation are becoming an important link in people-to-people diplomacy in this era.

Chan Tin-yan, 20, an undergraduate student in Hong Kong who plans to study in the US in two years' time, said he was amazed to learn the history of Ping-Pong Diplomacy and how the city served as a bridge for US players to enter the Chinese mainland.

"My biggest takeaway is this kind of cultural connection between two different countries is really good," Chan said.

"It is so vital to see all the communications and exchange what we have in different cultures."

Reflecting on growing up in an era when China was often referred to as "Red China" and diplomatically unrecognized in the US, Einreinhofer said the conditions for bilateral exchanges at that time were far worse than the tensions today.

That is why he remains deeply optimistic, he added.

"It is because of the nature of the American people, the nature of the Chinese people. We are two very welcoming cultures," he said.

Spain to allow virus-hit ship to dock in Canary Islands

By **JONATHAN POWELL** in London
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Authorities in Spain have granted permission for a Netherlands-flagged luxury cruise ship hit by a deadly hantavirus outbreak and anchored off Cape Verde to sail to the Canary Islands.

In a statement late on Tuesday, Spain's Health Ministry said the World Health Organization had explained that Cape Verde, in West Africa, could not receive the 147 passengers and crew of the MV *Hondius*.

"The Canary Islands are the closest location with the necessary capabilities," the ministry said. "Spain has a moral and legal obligation to assist these people, among whom are also several Spanish citizens."

Arrival in the Canary Islands was expected in "three to four days", it said, without specifying the port.

"Once there, the crew and passengers will be duly examined, cared for, and transferred to their respective countries," it said.

Since departing Argentina about a month ago for an Atlantic Ocean crossing, three passengers have died.

The WHO is investigating how hantavirus appeared on the ship, noting that the first victim developed symptoms on April 6 and possibly contracted the virus before boarding.

The rare disease, typically transmitted from infected rodents via urine, droppings or saliva, was suspected in the deaths of the three passengers. The WHO has said it had been told that "there are no rats on board" the ship.

As additional cases emerged, passengers and crew were placed in isolation after Cape Verde authorities barred the ship from docking. The vessel is anchored just off Praia, the island nation's capital.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said three patients with suspected hantavirus infections have been evacuated from the ship and are on their way to the Netherlands.

After the evacuations, the ship would "continue its route", said Ann Lindstrand, the WHO representative in Cape Verde.

Oceanwide Expeditions, the operator, confirmed it plans to send the ship north to the Canary Islands, either Gran Canaria or Tenerife.

Passengers told The Associated Press that they were coping well with the isolation.

"Our days have been close to normal, just waiting for authorities to find a solution," said Qasem Elhato, 31. "But morale on the ship is high and we're keeping ourselves busy with reading, watching movies, having hot drinks and that kind of things."

Veteran of victory



World War II veteran Nikolai Golubtsov, 99, holds flowers as he is honored on Tuesday in Sevastopol, Crimea, Russia, ahead of Victory Day, which marks the defeat of Nazi Germany. ALEXEY PAVLISHAK / REUTERS

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

WORLD

Chinese display firms showcase innovation, resilience at exhibition

By **RENA LI** in Los Angeles
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Major Chinese display technology companies showcased a broad range of new products and next-generation applications at the 2026 Display Week hosted by the Society for Information Display in Los Angeles, highlighting continued investment in innovation, research and development, and global industrial cooperation amid evolving global trade conditions.

The event, taking place Sunday to Friday at the Los Angeles Convention Center, featured more than 200 exhibitors and a record-setting 675 technical papers and sessions, providing attendees with a chance to see the latest displays and measurement tools.

Chinese display manufacturer BOE made its 12th consecutive appearance at the event, presenting more than 30 new technologies and products, including several global and industry-first launches. According to the company, many of the exhibits were developed under its three core technology brands.

In an interview with China Daily, BOE's Chief Brand Officer Si Da said that research and development remains central to the company's long-term strategy and competitiveness.

"Geopolitical factors are something we must consider, but before considering geopolitics, we must first focus on our own technological capabilities and innovation capacity, because that is the core competitiveness behind BOE's success," Si said.

BOE invests approximately 7 percent of its annual revenue into research and development, with expected R&D spending reaching nearly 14 billion yuan ($2.06 billion) in 2025.

The company also emphasized an open innovation strategy involving collaboration with universities, research institutions, developers and industrial partners globally.

"We believe technological development requires coordinated collaboration across industry, academia, research institutions and application partners," Si said, adding that it also demonstrates the openness of Chinese technology companies.

Global partners also highlighted cooperation with the Chinese display maker. Yulia Kern of Dawar Technologies said the company values rapid communication and collaboration on customized applications.

"We like that if there's a unique application with some custom features that BOE always responds and says, here's what we could do," Kern said.

At the same exhibition, TCL CSOT, a subsidiary of TCL Technology, introduced its APEX Pixel framework, which the company said is designed to unify pixel-level innovation across LCD, OLED and other display technologies.

Industry representatives attending the exhibition pointed to growing applications for advanced display technologies across entertainment, transportation and agriculture.

Bram Desmet, chief executive officer of Flanders Scientific, which supplies professional displays for filmmaking and broadcasting applications, said customers in the industry require high-performance monitors with strong color accuracy.

"It's a very niche market, very small but very demanding customers. Customers expect almost perfect performance," Desmet said.

He said he was particularly interested in tandem OLED-related technologies presented at the exhibition.

"It's very promising," he said. "I'm particularly excited about the tandem of lead products displayed here. I think that that's a very interesting future technology."

Advanced display technologies are also expanding into agricultural equipment and industrial vehicles.

Fred Haddad, technical product manager at CNH Industrial, said the company is exploring the use of OLED heads-up displays in vehicle windshields for agricultural machinery.

"We are looking at applications for displaying vehicle information, oil pressure, speed, RPM, on the windshield of our vehicles," Haddad said.

According to him, technologies such as high-brightness displays and windshield-integrated systems could help improve efficiency in farming operations by assisting with seeding, watering, spraying and crop monitoring.

The exhibition also reflected ongoing concerns surrounding tariffs and supply chain adjustments.

Tianma, another Chinese display manufacturer, presented ruggedized displays designed for aviation and marine environments, including products capable of operating under direct sunlight and extreme temperatures.

Dale Maunu, director of marketing at Tianma, said tariffs continue to affect customers and supply chain decisions.

"The tariffs definitely affect customers," Maunu said. "For customers that we ship to directly from our warehouse in Southern California, every invoice just has one more line for tariffs. Customers always pay the tariffs. It dramatically affects the supply chain."

According to Maunu, some assembly operations have gradually shifted to countries such as Vietnam and Thailand as companies seek to manage tariff-related costs and maintain competitiveness in international markets.

Maunu also reflected on broader structural changes in global manufacturing over the past two decades. He said the movement of production capacity overseas was accompanied by a decline in specialized industrial skills within the United States.

Briefly

SOUTH KOREA

Judge in ex-first lady's case found dead

A South Korean judge who presided over the appeal trial of former first lady Kim Keon-hee's Deutsch Motors stock manipulation and other charges was found dead early on Wednesday, Yonhap News Agency reported. Shin Jong-oh, a judge at the Seoul High Court, was found in a flower bed near the court building in Seoul. A suicide note was found at the scene, and police are investigating the exact cause of death. A special counsel team on Monday appealed to South Korea's Supreme Court against an appellate court ruling that sentenced Kim, the wife of South Korea's former president Yoon Suk-yeol, to four years in prison over charges including stock manipulation and graft.

AFRICA

Ethiopia, Sudan accuse each other of attacks

Ethiopia and Sudan traded accusations on Tuesday, each claiming the other had violated its territory. The Ethiopian government on Tuesday rejected Sudan's recent accusation of drone strikes as "baseless". Sudan recalled its ambassador to Ethiopia after accusing Addis Ababa of a series of drone attacks that hit its international airport on Monday. Sudan's Foreign Minister Mohi El-Din Salem said in a statement on Tuesday that his country is "ready to enter into an open confrontation with Ethiopia". In a statement issued on Tuesday, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected Sudan's "baseless accusations".

UNITED STATES

2 killed and 3 injured in back-to-back shootings

A man shot five people, killing two, in back-to-back shootings on Tuesday at a shopping center and then an apartment building because he was angry over business dealings, police said. The first shooting happened just before 10 am at a shopping center in a neighborhood in a suburb north of Dallas, the police department said. When police arrived, they found four adults who had been shot. While they were investigating, another shooting was reported at an apartment complex roughly 6 kilometers away, and responding officers found a dead man inside one of the apartments.

XINHUA—AGENCIES



'May the 4th be with you'

A *Star Wars*-themed drone show held in the night sky celebrates *Star Wars* Day at a park along the Han River in Seoul, South Korea, on Tuesday. Fans around the world come together every year on May 4 to celebrate the day, which is a pun on the famous line, "May the force be with you". AHN YOUNG-JOON / AP

Japan's moves imperil peace

PM's visits may encourage groupings in region, undermine stability: Experts

By **LIU JIANQIAO**
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CROSS CURRENTS

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's recent visit to Australia, which has hyped up so-called supply chain resilience and critical minerals security, may encourage the formation of exclusive groupings in the Asia-Pacific and undermine regional peace and stability, experts said.

During her visit to Canberra, the two countries signed four separate agreements, including statements on defense, energy and critical minerals cooperation, as well as a joint declaration on "economic security cooperation".

The two sides have also signed a new agreement on critical minerals, saying they would elevate it to a "core pillar" of the economic relationship and identifying six rare earths "strategic projects" that they can support to diversify supply chains.

Last month, Japan and Australia signed contracts to deliver the first three of a $6.5 billion fleet of Japanese-designed Mogami-class frigates.

In her talks with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Takaichi expressed hope that Japan and Australia will take on a leading role in promoting regional stability under the updated "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision, noting that their growing cooperation is effectively evolving into what could be seen as a "quasi-alliance".

She said she discussed issues, including China, with Albanese. However, according to an official statement released on his official website, the Australian prime minister made no mention of the topic.

The Japanese prime minister arrived in Australia on Sunday following a three-day visit to Vietnam, where she held talks on energy and critical minerals.

Japan's efforts to deepen institutionalized energy security cooperation with Australia, effectively forming a "small-circle" framework, can be seen as a geopolitical maneuver under the banner of "economic security", said Liu Shuliang, an associate researcher at the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences.

"Japan's push to deepen cooperation with Australia appears focused on economic security, but also carries a clear geopolitical dimension aimed at China," he said.

Multiple elements of Japan-Australia collaboration suggest a clear alignment with the United States' "Indo-Pacific Strategy", particularly in the efforts to restructure critical mineral supply chains, consistent with the objectives of the US-led "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity", he added.

In their joint declaration on economic security cooperation, Japan and Australia emphasized concerns about "economic coercion" and committed to "building resilient supply chains".

"This reflects a broader push to align with US-led efforts to diversify and rebalance control over strategic resources," Liu said.

Framed as "economic security", the mechanism risks becoming an exclusive regional bloc that politicizes economic issues, potentially disrupting global supply chains and deepening regional divisions, he added.

Broader objective

Chen Hong, director of the Australian Studies Centre at East China Normal University in Shanghai, said Japan is using supply chain diversification as a rationale, but its broader objective appears to be to deepen ties with Australia and align more closely with US strategic efforts in the region.

He said Japan is seeking to leverage Australia's natural resources to address its own strategic constraints, while simultaneously advancing security and defense cooperation with Canberra.

"This approach risks blurring the line between economic and security domains, potentially fostering bloc dynamics that could undermine the foundations of long-term open and cooperative development in the Asia-Pacific," he said.

Chen said that from earlier warship contracts to deepening defense and security cooperation, these developments underscore Japan's ongoing push to stretch the constraints of its post-World War II pacifist constitution, expand arms exports, and redefine its role in overseas security, with a view to strengthening its military footprint.

"Under this backdrop, Takaichi's call for strengthening the quasi-alliance between Japan and Australia would send a dangerous signal and risk heightening security concerns across the Asia-Pacific region," he said.

Japan's move is likely to accelerate regional bloc formation, fuel an arms race, undermine peace and stability, and heighten the risk of division and confrontation in the region, Liu from Tianjin added.

Experts said that given the evolving international landscape, Australia must maintain strategic autonomy.

Australia-China relations are in a relatively positive phase, and Australia should take an objective view of China's growing role in promoting peace and development, while avoiding being drawn into geopolitical rivalry and ideological narratives, Liu said.

Australia should place greater emphasis on sustaining pragmatic economic and trade cooperation with China, rather than align with the decoupling attempts in supply chains that risk undermining its own interests, Chen said.

It should support multilateral cooperation and avoid alignment with confrontational frameworks, he added.

Agencies contributed to this story.

President flexes control in primary state elections

COLUMBUS, Indiana — Elections in the US states of Indiana, Michigan and Ohio on Tuesday made a picture increasingly clear — that President Donald Trump still dominates the Republican Party, and Democrats seem to have the momentum ahead of November's midterm elections.

The biggest test of the president's power came in Indiana, where he backed primary challenges against seven Republican state senators who rejected his redistricting plan in December. Five of the president's candidates won.

"Big night for MAGA in Indiana," US Senator Jim Banks wrote on social media, adding that he was "proud to have helped elect more conservative Republicans to the Indiana State Senate".

It's been a costly and unprecedented intraparty battle that has exacerbated tensions among Republicans ahead of the November midterm elections that will determine control of Congress.

State Senator Travis Holdman, one of the incumbents to lose his primary, said he was at peace with his defeat. He voted against redistricting and faced more than $1.3 million in attack advertising funded by organizations tied to Banks and Governor Mike Braun.



Donna Wooten (right) votes across from her husband, Jerry Wooten, at a vote center during a primary election on Tuesday, in West Lafayette, Indiana. CARA PENQUITE / AP

"I did what my constituents asked me to do and it cost me my job," he says. "But that's OK."

Holdman warned that a more aggressive style of campaigning was arriving in his state.

"Welcome to DC politics in Indiana because this means that's what's coming," he said.

The race that was too close to call was the most expensive of the seven primaries.

The fundraising groups led by Banks and Braun combined to spend more than $2.2 million on advertising attacking Senator Spencer Deery, according to the ad-tracking firm AdImpact.

Trump began leaning on Republican-led states last year to redraw their congressional maps to make it easier for his party to hold its thin majority in the US House. Although redistricting is normally done once a decade, after a new census, the president wanted to abandon tradition to gain a political edge.

Texas was the first to follow through, and the White House pressured Indiana to go along, too. Vice-President JD Vance met with state politicians in Washington and Indianapolis, and Trump weighed in by conference call.

Meanwhile, in Michigan, Democrat Chedrick Greene won a special election on Tuesday, securing the party's control of the state Senate through the remainder of Governor Gretchen Whitmer's term.

Over in Ohio, primaries locked in candidates for two major races with national implications.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

COMMENT

Editorials

Cessation of hostilities a prerequisite to address Strait of Hormuz deadlock

While Washington insists it is working to "secure" passage through the Strait of Hormuz for the world, recent reports describe mounting tensions. The framing is as revealing as the facts: the United States attempts to portray its actions as "a public good", even as the origins of the crisis lie on its doorstep.

Prior to the escalation started by the US-Israeli strikes on Iran the strait was not at the center of a crisis. This causal sequence should not be obscured by Washington's altruistic claim. If someone sets alight a house and then seeks credit for trying to extinguish the blaze, the applause is likely to be muted.

Washington argues that the US itself does not depend on the Strait of Hormuz. Yet inflation in the US remains stubborn, with energy costs a persistent driver. Declining approval ratings for the US administration and the looming pressure of midterm elections underscore the domestic stakes.

In this light, when Washington alleges that Iran is on the verge of collapse, Iran desperately wants a deal, or that Tehran has more to lose from a closure of the strait, it is not unreasonable to infer the opposite.

The diplomatic theater of Washington, which tries to exert pressure on China over the Middle East crisis, adds another layer of obfuscation to the proceedings. Some US officials, including the treasury secretary, have publicly urged China to "step up" its role in persuading Iran to keep the strait open. The treasury secretary told the media, "if they want to be good global citizens", Beijing could join hands with other countries at the United Nations, in reference to an April UN Security Council draft resolution allegedly aimed at "protecting" commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz that China and Russia vetoed for its lack of fairness and justice.

Yet this request distorts China's role. Beijing has, in fact, been engaged in responsible diplomatic efforts aimed at de-escalation. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's meeting with his Iranian counterpart in Beijing on Wednesday was the latest move in a broader push to encourage dialogue and restraint.

As Wang stressed in the meeting, China believes that a comprehensive cessation of hostilities is urgently needed, that a relapse into conflict is even more inadvisable, and that continued adherence to negotiation is of paramount importance.

On the issue of the Strait of Hormuz, the world shares a common concern over the restoration of safe and normal passage. As Wang said, Beijing hopes the parties involved will respond as promptly as possible to the strong calls of the international community.

China encourages Iran and other Gulf states to engage in dialogue aimed at fostering neighborly relations, and supports the establishment, by regional countries themselves, of a regional peace and security architecture based on shared participation, the safeguarding of regional interests, and the realization of common development.

The pro-peace endeavors of China are grounded in a framework articulated in a four-point proposal it put forward last month on peace and stability in the Middle East, which emphasizes peaceful coexistence, respect for sovereignty, adherence to international law and the coordination of development with security.

It is unrealistic for Washington to press Beijing to endorse the premise that military action lacking UN authorization and legitimacy can be retrospectively legitimized as a contribution to global common interests. Nor should Washington expect the world to accept the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz — under the US' military pressure — as an altruistic act by those who precipitated the crisis in the first place.

The US may declare to its domestic audience that its Epic Fury operation has concluded with desired effects. But the costs of disruption in the Strait of Hormuz are borne not just by the protagonists, but by the world as a whole.

If Washington genuinely seeks to uphold the world's common interests as it professes, it should begin by recognizing its role in shaping the current predicament. It should also accept that diplomatic efforts by others will not serve as a post hoc endorsement of the US-Israeli attacks on Iran. What the US administration seeks to do now is to pressure others to clear up a mess of its own making while taking the credit if any breakthrough is made.

Stability in critical global arteries cannot be secured through unilateral forces. It requires consistency, restraint and a willingness to place shared interests above immediate political gain. Until that lesson is absorbed, the Strait of Hormuz will remain not just a strategic choke point, but a mirror reflecting the misjudgment of some.

Service sector driving high-quality growth

The 2026 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition, the world's largest auto show, was a testament to the rapid internationalization and quality upgrade of China's service sector, and compelling evidence of how China pursues high-quality development through innovation and openness.

With automakers from 21 countries and regions displaying more than 1,400 vehicles, the industry showcase, held from April 24 to May 3, highlighted China's role as a competitive player in electric vehicles and the transition of some global brands from "in China, for China" to "in China, for the world" as they deepen cooperation with local partners and leverage China's supply chain to optimize global production and sales. The mutual learning and co-evolution of Chinese and foreign companies in the Chinese market demonstrate that openness is two-way empowerment.

The event also offered the world a window through which to observe the development of China's convention and exhibition economy, a vital and integral part of the broader service trade industry.

Take the capital city as an example. With the construction of high-capacity, smart and green venues, Beijing's exhibition industry has become a key driver of the local economy. From automotive shows to energy storage expos and medical health fairs, the theme of the city's exhibition calendar is becoming increasingly innovative, intelligent and sustainable, reflecting its efforts to build itself into a globally influential convention and exhibition hub.

Shortly after the annual gatherings of China's top legislature and political advisory body in March, the State Council, the country's Cabinet, has twice specifically emphasized the development of the service industry in its meetings, sending a clear signal that the service industry is an important part of the modern industrial system, relating to the overall high-quality development and modernization.

The policymakers have unambiguously stated the need to actively plan and promote the expansion and improvement of the service industry.

In April, China held its first national conference on the service sector, which called for fostering new growth points, enhancing the digital and intelligent transformation of the sector, strengthening producer and consumer services, and cultivating more "China Services" brands, while also promoting broader opening-up of the service industry.

These pragmatic policy signals underscore a recognition that as China's economy transitions from a phase of rapid growth to one of high-quality development, modern services should play a major role in driving innovation, employment and consumption.

The numbers speak for themselves. In 2025, the added value of China's service sector exceeded 80 trillion yuan ($11.65 trillion), accounting for 57.7 percent of GDP and contributing 61.4 percent to economic growth. The industry also provided around half of the country's jobs and accounted for 46.1 percent of per capita spending by urban and rural residents, making it a key engine for expanding domestic demand.

China's expansion of its service sector also provides numerous shared opportunities and benefits for the world at large. The country's industry, economy and market will continue to contribute to global growth and certainty in the process. Instead of clinging to the zero-sum game mentality peddled by some naysayers of the Chinese economy, a pragmatic choice for multinational corporations is to embrace the opportunities presented by the superlarge Chinese market and foster win-win cooperation.

The service industry is the cornerstone of a thriving economy, serving as a barometer of a nation's development stage and a driver of global competitiveness. And China's thriving exhibition industry is a prime example of how the service sector is driving the country's high-quality economic growth.

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Fan Jianping



Opinion Line

Politicized fragmentation is the wrong prescription

According to Reuters, G7 countries, led in part by France, have convened discussions aimed at curbing what they describe as China's "grip" on critical mineral supply chains, even considering the creation of a permanent coordinating mechanism. Parallel reports by Euronews highlight cooperation among the European Union, the United States and Japan to restructure supply chains for the crucial raw materials.

Yet this is putting prescription before diagnosis.

The modern global supply system is facing obstacles at a time when the world's largest economy has increasingly embraced tariffs, export controls and financial sanctions as instruments of statecraft. Trade has been weaponized; interdependence, once celebrated as a stabilizing force, is now treated as a vulnerability. Inevitably, such actions reverberate across supply chains that were built on assumptions of relative openness and predictability.

However, rather than acknowledging this underlying disease and strengthening their immunity, some developed economies are spreading the contagion. The implicit belief seems to be that disengaging from China will naturally deliver "security".

This belief is, at best, incomplete. Within the EU itself, there is growing recognition that excessive reliance on the US — be it in energy, defense, finance and now industrial policy — poses its own strategic vulnerabilities.

Moreover, the premise that interdependence is inherently dangerous misreads how global markets function. Within a rules-based system, mutual dependence is precisely what disciplines behavior. It creates incentives for stability, predictability and cooperation. The risks arise not from interdependence itself, but from its politicization.

Unlike many economies, China is simultaneously a major importer of raw materials, a processor and exporter of refined inputs and a crucial market for high-end manufacturing equipment and semiconductors. Being so deeply embedded across multiple nodes of global supply chains, it has no appetite for causing systemic disruption.

To suggest, therefore, that China is the principal source of "instability" in global supply chains is to overlook both data and logic. The fragmentation now underway risks harming all participants. Resource-exporting countries would face collapsing demand if markets were artificially segmented and manufacturing hubs would struggle to sustain output without access to large, integrated markets.

The more uncomfortable question for some policymakers in the G7 and beyond is whether the "partners" they are now prioritizing truly represent more reliable, rule-abiding alternatives. Trust in international economic relations cannot be declared; it should be demonstrated through consistent adherence to agreed norms, which, in recent years, have been eroded not by emerging economies, but by the very actor that once championed them.

Within Europe, a cohort of policymakers has adopted a de facto adversarial stance toward China. Yet this stance often coexists with a willingness to acquiesce to pressure from Europe's transatlantic ally. The result is a policy posture that is neither strategically autonomous nor analytically coherent.

A rational approach tells one that supply chain resilience cannot be achieved through bloc formation or ideological alignment. It requires restoring confidence in the openness and predictability of the global trading system. That, in turn, demands a recommitment to multilateralism.

This doesn't imply passivity. Economies are entitled to safeguard legitimate security interests. But the indiscriminate expansion of "security" to encompass broad swaths of economic activity risks becoming self-defeating. China, for its part, has signaled that it will continue to pursue mutually beneficial economic relations with partners that engage on the basis of equality and respect. At the same time, it has made clear that discriminatory measures will invite proportionate responses. Such reciprocity is not evidence of risk; it is a predictable feature of sovereign interaction and rules defense.

The choice facing some developed economies is therefore not between dependence and independence, but between managed interdependence and unmanaged fragmentation. The former requires discipline, humility and analytical clarity. The latter offers only the illusion of control, at the cost of stability.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Industry still the foundation for development

Editor's note: *China's economy is witnessing the emergence of new drivers. Zheng Yongnian, dean of the School of Public Policy at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, spoke to Economic Daily about why it shouldn't abandon low-end industries. Below are excerpts of the interview. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*

Currently, a new wave of technological revolution and industrial transformation is making breakthroughs at a greater speed. New growth drivers are emerging for the Chinese economy, which shows no sign of peaking.

China strives to harmonize economic and social progress and balance the roles of the government and the market. This approach highlights both efficiency and equity, and integrates vitality with order. The country continues to deepen reforms in key fields to improve the socialist market economy system, and adheres to the approach of combining an efficient market with a capable government.

On the one hand, China recognizes that the government cannot manage everything on its own, and acknowledges that further efforts are required to unleash economic vitality. On the other hand, it has drawn lessons from other economies to avoid disorderly capital expansion and the structural imbalances that may follow. These institutional arrangements are conducive to sustaining long-term growth.

A robust manufacturing industry is an important advantage for China's economic development. The country is not only upgrading its traditional industries, but also fostering emerging industries and industries of the future. It is accelerating efforts to build a modern, comprehensive, advanced and secure industrial system.

China enjoys a complete industry chain and a huge market thanks to its all-encompassing manufacturing industry. The country needs to continue developing the real economy and the manufacturing industry, and advancing the integration of scientific and technological innovation with industrial innovation.

Some traditional businesses, such as rebar and cement, remain vital for the manufacturing industry, and should not be abandoned simply because they are not "high-end".

High-value-added and high-technology sectors have only a limited share in the overall economy. Also, many high-technology sectors require collaboration and support from other industries. In some fields, the capacity of different sectors to coordinate with each other matters more than individual technological breakthroughs.

A modern industrial system includes traditional, emerging and future industries. The three do not replace one another, but support and reinforce each other. A truly strong economy needs not only high-end manufacturing, but also some low-end and mid-level sectors. Only in this way can the economy achieve greater resilience and competitiveness.

Under the new circumstances, China needs to boost not only its GDP but also the "Chinese people's economy", or gross national income. GNI, which includes the country's overseas earnings, embodies the open way in which China pursues development. For instance, as Chinese enterprises make investments abroad under the Belt and Road Initiative, China's production capacity, technologies and development experience are "going global".

The country doesn't seek a monopoly or intend to stop other countries from developing as some Western countries have done. Nor will it impose its own development pattern on other countries.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

VIEWS

Erik Solheim

Ecology and economics are allies, not rivals

For most of modern history, the world operated on the conviction that if you want to develop your economy, you will damage the environment. The two move in opposite directions, so you can choose one.

This was not the view of ignorant or careless people. It was the lived experience of industrialization.

Global Lens

The British knew that sending children into coal mines during the Industrial Revolution was harmful. But they did it anyway, because they saw no other path to prosperity.

That model spread from Britain to Germany, to the United States, to Japan, to the Republic of Korea, to China, and eventually to every corner of the world that wanted to grow. For nearly two centuries, the trade-off between development and nature was not a debate. It was a fact of life.

That fact has changed only in the past few years, and the agent of change was not idealism. It was price. Twenty years ago, the world took an entire year to add one gigawatt of solar capacity.

Today the same gigawatt is added in half a day. Solar energy costs have fallen by around 90 percent in a decade. Wind costs have followed a similar trajectory. Batteries are now doing the same. When clean energy becomes the cheapest option in most of the world, the old trade-off dissolves.

You no longer have to choose between growing your economy and protecting your environment, because the tools that grow your economy are increasingly the same tools that protect it. The debate that defined two centuries of development has not been won by one side or the other. It has simply been overtaken by technology and economics.

Any nation replacing a drop of oil from the Strait of Hormuz with solar energy saves money, and becomes more energy independent.

This shift changes everything about how we should read what is happening in China.

What looks from the outside like a collection of separate environmental policies is actually something more coherent: a systematic attempt to prove, at scale and over time, that the old trade-off was a historical condition rather than a permanent truth.

I have been watching this unfold for two decades. Earlier this year, I took a boat along the Lijiang River in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

That river was once heavily polluted, widely reported as one of China's most polluted rivers. But what I saw from the water settled something for me.

The water is so clean you can go for a swim, maybe even drink it. It shows that protection and prosperity can advance together, and that the decision to treat nature as an asset rather than a sacrifice is one that pays back. Beautiful nature invites tourists and brings prosperity.

The Yellow River, the Yangtze and the Lancang-Mekong rivers sustain hundreds of millions of people across Asia. China is now building a national park at their origin in the Qinghai plateau to protect these watersheds for the long term. On the Talatan grassland nearby, vast



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

solar installations cover what was once barren desert. The panels generate electricity for the national grid while their shade slows the wind, reduces evaporation, and allows grass to grow beneath them.

Herders now graze their sheep underneath what has become the largest solar installation on earth.

Energy production and ecological restoration are not competing here. They are the same project.

This is what makes the concept of ecological civilization genuinely significant. As articulated by Chinese President Xi Jinping, "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets." The argument is not that China will sacrifice economic growth to protect nature, but that protecting nature is itself a sound economic strategy. The Yangtze River basin is the proof. A decade ago, a landmark commitment was made in Chongqing to prioritize ecological protection along the river over large-scale development. In 10 years, around 96.5 percent of the river's water meets the high-quality standards.

Over the same period, the region's GDP has more than doubled.

The tiger population in the Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park has grown from 27 to around 70.

Nearly 50,000 people have got jobs connected to China's first five national parks.

Managed well, nature generates wealth rather than competes with it.

This March, China adopted the Ecological and Environmental Code, consolidating 30 separate environmental laws into a single statutory framework. It is the second formal code in Chinese law after the Civil Code. It shows that while some other countries are retreating from environmental commitments, China is embedding those commitments in legal foundations.

The message is that this direction will hold, regardless of short-term economic pressures. That kind of institutional continuity is precisely what makes ecological recovery possible. You cannot restore a river or a tiger population in one political cycle. You can only do it by committing over decades and meaning it.

This matters beyond China because the old trade-off weighed most heavily on the countries that could least afford it. The logic of pollute first and clean up later was, in practice, a sentence passed on poor nations, not a strategy chosen by them. Clean up later turned out to mean never, or not until enormous damage had already been done.

But developing countries no longer face that sentence. Clean energy is not a luxury technology available only to wealthy nations.

It is, increasingly, the cheapest technology available to anyone. In Rwanda, protecting mountain gorillas generates around $1,500 per hour-long visitor experience, making conservation one of the country's most important economic assets. The gorillas are worth more alive in their habitat than they could be in any other form.

India, the home of around 75 percent of the world's tigers, has doubled its tiger population, not only for animal welfare but as an economic strategy. That is the logic that China is applying to its rivers, its forests, and its wildlife at a scale the world has not seen before.

The debate whether a country must choose between development and nature shaped two centuries of industrial history. Many still have that old mindset. But the economics of clean energy and the practical experience of ecological restoration have now answered that debate. The choice was never as fixed as it seemed.

And for the nations still at the beginning of their development paths, it is no longer a choice at all.

The author is a diplomat and former minister of international development and minister of environment of Norway. He was also the under-secretary-general of the United Nations and executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

China and the World Roundtable | Global Collaboration on Maritime Governance

Editor's note: *The Shared Oceans Shanghai Forum 2026 was held at Shanghai Maritime University in April. Launched in 2025, the forum promotes joint efforts to build a maritime community with a shared future. Experts from various countries and international organizations discussed maritime security, connectivity and other issues at the forum. Below are excerpts from the comments of some of the participants.*

Building a maritime community with a shared future

Improved global maritime governance needed



Mao Ruipeng is the director of the Institute for Global Governance at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies.

The United Nations has a leading position in global maritime security governance, serving as the overarching framework for shaping and safeguarding the modern international maritime order.

Oceans play a fundamental role in global trade transport, data transmission, energy supply and food security.

In recent years, the strategic significance of oceans has heightened, causing maritime security to gradually shift from a marginal issue to a core topic of discussion within the UN.

Yet maritime security is confronted with increasingly diverse threats and challenges, ranging from traditional risks, such as piracy and illegal fishing, to emerging hazards, including plastic pollution, climate change, ecological crises and threats to submarine cables. These challenges require comprehensive solutions.

Although maritime security has become a key topic of discussion within the UN, the organization is facing several challenges in handling the various threats.

The first hurdle is the stance taken by major countries. The United States' maritime policies, which emphasize key waterways and seek to control them, are steering UN discussions on maritime security away from international cooperation.

The second issue is the deep-seated differences between countries regarding the scope of maritime security.

There are vastly different views on which specific maritime security issues should be deliberated at the UN Security Council. Indeed, maritime security has become a battleground for rivalry and contention among various parties.

The third challenge comes from the UN itself. While many international organizations are involved in maritime security affairs within the UN system, they should have had an effective leading and coordinating mechanism.

As a result, some countries and think tanks have called for the UN to set up a dedicated institution to address maritime issues in a coordinated manner. Despite these challenges, the UN is expected to make slow but steady progress in placing greater emphasis on maritime security.

Inclusivity critical for maritime public goods



Wang Bocheng is an associate professor at the School of Marxism in Shanghai Maritime University.

The world has a wide variety of maritime public goods, but there is a structural imbalance in the provision of these goods.

There is considerable international cooperation and public goods in fishery resources.

But in other fields, such as maritime security and polar governance, the interests of different countries collide, leading to a shortage of relevant public goods.

Another problem lies in the imbalance of participants. There is a divide between the Global North and the Global South. Developed countries tend to follow the approach of "small yards, high fences", which effectively denies most developing countries access to the maritime public goods they provide.

A public good is defined by non-excludability and non-rivalry in nature. But many maritime public goods around the world fall in the category of quasi-public goods or club goods — goods that only a limited number of countries can use.

A typical example is the provision of public goods by some Western countries. These goods are highly exclusive, and often marked by attempts to impose stringent standards and high thresholds to keep China out.

China launched the Belt and Road Initiative and proposed the building of a maritime community with a shared future. It has provided maritime public goods — such as institutional frameworks, technological support and deep-sea data — which are available to all countries.

Guided by the vision of a maritime community with a shared future, China contributes to ocean conservation, maritime resource utilization and maritime security by offering its own solutions.

But China is facing unprecedented challenges, especially the intensifying geopolitical competition. It is therefore essential for the country to strengthen cooperation with other BRICS countries and other countries of the Global South.

Through this cooperation, it can demonstrate the openness, stability and inclusiveness of its supply of global maritime public goods.

Global collaboration will ensure stability at sea



Thong Viro is the deputy director-general of administration management at Sihanoukville Autonomous Port in Cambodia.

More than 80 percent of global trade is carried by sea. A stable maritime order is, therefore, the cornerstone of the global economy. However, today's international landscape has become increasingly complex due to geopolitical shifts, regional conflicts and non-traditional security threats.

When the maritime order is disrupted, the impact on maritime transportation is immediate. Shipping costs rise, supply chains fracture, and ultimately the pace of global economic recovery slows.

As a port administrator in Sihanoukville, I witnessed how sensitive international trade is to the global security environment. Without security, there is no efficiency, and without stability, there is no prosperity.

In an era of economic globalization, a country's interests are no longer confined to its own borders, especially when it comes to maritime and shipping. No single country can protect these growing overseas interests alone. The following steps can help in this direction.

First, we must uphold international laws and respect the established maritime order. A fair and rules-based international framework provides fundamental legal protection for our overseas assets and personnel.

Second, we must strengthen collaborative security mechanisms. Protecting overseas interests means sharing information, conducting joint patrols along critical waterways, and providing mutual assistance in times of crisis. Through international cooperation, we can build a robust safety net for global shipping lanes.

Third, we must embrace the vision of a maritime community with a shared future, a vision that captures the reality of modern trade with great clarity. All stakeholders and partners in the maritime industry should collaborate closely and continue harnessing advanced technologies, intelligent port systems and green initiatives to make international shipping safer and more resilient.

Also, when we help secure a shipping lane, we are not merely protecting one country's overseas investments. We are protecting the entire global supply chain for the world economy.

Aligning growth with green responsibilities

Two years ago, the Red Sea was closed to commercial shipping. Major carriers rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope. Freight costs surged. Supply chains that had linked Asia, Africa and Europe through the Suez Canal for over a century were severed almost overnight.

For Egypt, the impact was immediate. The Suez Canal, a lifeline through which roughly 12 percent of global trade passed, saw its revenues drop by nearly half.

This episode revealed a critical truth. While more than 80 percent of global trade moves by sea, the governance structures that underpin maritime security remain fragmented. Shipping lanes are global, but the mechanisms to protect them are not. This gap poses a key challenge, and the stakes go far beyond shipping alone.



Kazem Agamy is the dean of the Arab Research Institute for Sustainable Blue Economy at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport.

The ocean economy, spanning fisheries, coastal tourism, offshore energy and marine biotechnology, is valued at roughly $2.5 trillion annually. Egypt, with coastlines on both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and more than 50 working ports, is deeply embedded in that economy. For its people, the sea means jobs, food, and opportunity. But they cannot capture those benefits if the ocean itself is degraded.

Illegal fishing depletes stocks. Plastic and industrial pollution erode coastal habitats. Submarine cables, which carry over 95 percent of the world's intercontinental data, remain inadequately protected. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provides the legal framework, but governance is only as strong as its implementation.

In this context, three priorities require urgent and sustained attention. First, there should be better maritime awareness. We need shared surveillance, stronger regional coordination and joint operations that are equal to the threats we face.

Second, blue economy strategies must align with environmental responsibilities. Economic growth that undermines the ecosystems upon which it depends is inherently unsustainable. Lasting development requires balance, responsible stewardship, and a long-term vision.

Third, we must invest in knowledge and human capital.

The path forward lies in partnership, grounded in international law, guided by science and measured by concrete results.

Greater connectivity crucial for regional growth



Azhar Jaimurzina Ducrest is the chief of the Transport Connectivity and Logistics Section of the Transport Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

This year, ESCAP member states are preparing their new regional action program for sustainable transport development which will cover the period from 2027 to 2031.

Similar to the previous regional action program, this will be a unique strategic framework designed to address the evolving challenges of our times in the field of transport.

In 2021, member countries recognized maritime connectivity as one of the seven thematic areas of utmost priority for the region. They also established a key mechanism for regular regional dialogue on sustainable maritime connectivity for Asia and the Pacific.

The new regional action program is expected to build on these achievements to set a clear road map for collective action. In this context, the pivotal role of the Asia-Pacific region as the engine of global trade and the efforts of ESCAP countries in advancing maritime connectivity must be recognized.

Numerous national and regional initiatives, of which China's Maritime Silk Road is a flagship example, helped us achieve significant progress in more efficient and resilient transport operations.

These efforts have done more than just build infrastructure; they have created vital arteries for economic flow and people-to-people exchanges. By enhancing port efficiency and fostering intermodal connectivity, these initiatives have significantly contributed to the development of maritime transport across Asia and the Pacific, leading to tangible results in shortened lead times, more integrated supply chains, and a stronger, more unified regional market.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHOU WEISHENG

Dynamic medium of interaction

The Chinese language is evolving from a communication tool into a key carrier of global public value

Promoting mutual understanding and people-to-people ties through language has become a pressing priority for the international community. China's Global Civilization Initiative aligns closely with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, offering new theoretical and practical pathways for the international dissemination of the Chinese language.



Conceptually, the Global Civilization Initiative, first proposed in March 2023, advocates respect for the diversity of civilizations, emphasizes the importance of the inheritance and innovation of civilizations, upholds the common values of humanity, and promotes international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation.

It echoes the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which states that cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity. Within this framework, language is not merely a tool for transmitting information but a core mechanism for generating cultural meaning and enabling civilizational interaction. As one of the world's most spoken languages, Chinese has become a vital medium for diverse civilizations to coexist and interact.

Traditionally, however, Western views on language dissemination have been confined to cultural export or even cultural competition. Such perspectives often emphasize one-way communication and the expansion of influence, which can easily lead to the polarization and the instrumentalization of cultural relations. In today's complex, volatile world, this paradigm no longer meets practical needs. It is therefore necessary to steer the international dissemination of Chinese culture toward "cultural symbiosis" and realize a more effective provision of public value. Cultural symbiosis means the interaction, integration and coevolution of different civilizations; while public value supply refers to providing the global community with institutional resources for understanding, trust and cooperation through language and cultural exchanges.

On the practical front, the global reach of the Chinese language has expanded dramatically in recent years. Statistics show that over 180 countries and regions offer Chinese language education. More than 80 countries have integrated Chinese language teaching into their basic national education systems. Digital platforms have also lowered barriers to language learning, driving sustained growth in the number of online Chinese language learners. These figures show that Chinese has evolved from a regional language into a globally influential one — what might be called international Chinese language.

In terms of cultural influence, the international dissemination of the Chinese language features a distinctive "embedded" trait. Unlike mere cultural product exports, language learning itself fosters cultural understanding. For example, when learners study Chinese concepts such as *he er bu tong* (harmony in diversity) and *tianxia datong* (universal harmony), they gain not just vocabulary but also the relational thinking and holistic perspectives rooted in traditional Chinese philosophy. This kind of culturally embedded learning through language helps reduce cognitive biases and deepens cross-cultural understanding.

Language plays a fundamental and structural role in promoting people-to-people bonds. International relations depend not only on institutional arrangements but also on societal cognitive and emotional foundations. As more people learn Chinese, non-Chinese speakers can access first-hand linguistic resources to better understand Chinese society. This "disintermediated" access to information helps reduce misunderstandings and biases.

As a key vehicle for the international dissemination of Chinese culture, the Confucius Institute offers a representative case. Since its founding in 2004, it has been going beyond language teaching to include cultural activities, teacher training and academic exchanges. Despite differing institutional environments and public opinions in various countries, it remains vital for promoting Chinese language education and cultural exchange. More importantly, these institutes have developed a practical collaborative dissemination model — partnering with local educational institutions to share resources and facilitate cultural interaction, which fully embodies the vision of cultural symbiosis.

Meanwhile, technological progress is reshaping the ways in which the Chinese language is disseminated globally. Artificial intelligence translation, online education platforms and social media are shifting language dissemination from institution-led to multi-actor participation. For example, Chinese-language content creators on short-video platforms are presenting culture in more everyday and diverse ways. This decentralized model of dissemination enhances the diversity and authenticity of cultural expression, increasing international audiences' acceptance.

Admittedly, the global dissemination of the Chinese language still faces challenges such as cultural context differences, discourse system transformation and the international public opinion environment. Thus, future efforts should focus on three key dimensions: first, strengthening localized expression by integrating Chinese language teaching with local cultures; second, promoting two-way exchanges to avoid cognitive biases that can arise from one-way communication; third, reinforcing language's role as a public good to deliver more shared value to the world.

Guided by the Global Civilization Initiative and the principle of cultural diversity, the global dissemination of the Chinese language is moving toward cultural symbiosis. By fostering civilizational mutual learning and people-to-people ties with language as a bridge, Chinese is evolving from a communication tool into a key carrier of global public value. Driven by continued institutional innovation and technological progress, the Chinese language is poised to play a more active and profound role in building an inclusive, diverse and sustainable global civilizational system.

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SHI YU / CHINA DAILY



YANG MEINI / FOR CHINA DAILY

ZHAI KUN AND LIN HANDONG

Certainty amid volatility

China and ASEAN should strengthen the resilience of their comprehensive strategic partnership to maintain regional stability

The year 2026 marks the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, at a time when the global order is undergoing the most intense fragmentation since the end of the Cold War. Amid this new period of turbulence and transformation, China-ASEAN relations have not only withstood the test but also demonstrated robust resilience, showing clearer planning, more pragmatic cooperation and enhanced mutual trust. The continued deepening of this partnership reflects both an outcome of upgraded bilateral cooperation and a shared regional choice favoring stability, development and strategic autonomy.



Zhai Kun



Lin Handong

Through institutional alignment and planning coordination, ASEAN and China have crafted a highly predictable blueprint for regional development. The Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2026-30) explicitly supports ASEAN community building and integration, including efforts toward the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and its strategic goals, and reaffirms China's support for ASEAN centrality in the regional architecture and ASEAN-led mechanisms. This demonstrates that advancing relations is not about creating parallel structures but about upgrading cooperation within ASEAN's established institutional context.

Furthermore, China has aligned its own development planning with regional cooperation. China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) clearly calls for expanding high-standard opening-up and promoting the implementation of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0. By institutionalizing and itemizing their cooperation agenda, both sides have preserved a rare and valuable mid-to-long-term certainty during an otherwise volatile period.

Practical cooperation is increasingly showcasing the deepening of China-ASEAN relations. Politically, China and ASEAN maintain high-level strategic communication through annual leaders' meetings, while foreign ministers' meetings, senior officials' consultations and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus form a multi-tiered cooperation mechanism. Economically, ASEAN has been China's largest export market for three consecutive years and its largest source of imports for seven consecutive years. The upgrading of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area to version 3.0 means bilateral cooperation is moving toward higher-level rules connectivity, and it now incorporates emerging fields such as the digital economy, the green economy and supply chain interconnectivity.

On the security front, as of April 18, China and ASEAN had held 54 meetings of the joint working group on the implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, advancing consultations on a Code of Conduct for the waters. In 2025, China mediated the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict, playing a key role through shuttle diplomacy that culminated in the Fuxian consensus. The China-Cambodia-Thailand Track II dialogue has also preserved vital communication channels for the rebuilding of mutual trust. Meanwhile, China and ASEAN countries have carried out efficient joint law enforcement in non-traditional security areas, jointly combating cross-border online gambling, telecom fraud and other crimes, effectively responding to the demand of people in the region for security.

Greater regional trust has become a force behind stronger China-ASEAN relations. According to the State of Southeast Asia: 2026 Survey Report released by Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, trust in China among ASEAN respondents in this survey had reached a historic inflection point since the annual report's release in 2019, with trust levels (39.8 percent) exceeding distrust for the first time. In hypothetical "taking sides" scenarios, those choosing China (52 percent) surpassed those choosing the United States (48 percent). Among ASEAN's dialogue partners, China, with an average score of 9.1, remains the most strategically important partner.

The results reflect ASEAN's recognition of China's economic performance and policy continuity. It is noteworthy that a clear majority, over half at 55.2 percent, identified "strengthening ASEAN's resilience and unity" as the primary approach to navigating the competition between the US and China, underscoring that strategic autonomy remains ASEAN's core principle. In this sense, the key to the continuous deepening of China-ASEAN relations lies in China's consistent respect for the autonomous demands of ASEAN and joint efforts to expand the region's stability, development space and institutional resilience.

Both sides face fresh historical opportunities and notable challenges. Over the next five years, China and ASEAN need to seek common ground while shelving and narrowing differences, and find targeted, practical solutions to the difficulties hindering deeper relations.

On the one hand, the State of Southeast Asia: 2026 Survey Report shows that ASEAN's political concern over the South China Sea situation, at 48.2 percent, has declined, but it remains the top geopolitical issue involving China. In 2026, as conditions for concluding the Code of Conduct become increasingly favorable, all parties must guard against disruptive external interference.

China can also address the South China Sea issue within the broader framework of strategic bilateral cooperation to prevent it from overshadowing overall relations. Functional security projects, such as joint search and rescue exercises and maritime law enforcement capacity building, could help stabilize expectations. In addition, by strengthening China-ASEAN cooperation in the blue economy, including marine fisheries, marine biological resource development and marine renewable energy, the two sides can provide support for the handling of sensitive issues.

On the other hand, the survey shows that 41.9 percent of respondents are confident or very confident in China as a Global South leader. As a natural member of the Global South, China's positioning consistently aligns with that of other developing countries. In practice, China should focus more on poverty alleviation, climate change and digital transformation through localized and perceptible grassroots actions. For instance, most ASEAN respondents (60 percent) view climate change and intensifying extreme weather events as the most pressing challenge, but their underlying logic differs fundamentally from that of the European Union. Climate change directly affects agricultural output, freshwater security, coastal livelihoods and vulnerable rural groups in ASEAN. Therefore, China should not stop at general discussions of climate issues, but respond to the survival pressures behind them. Only by doing so can China better support the collective empowerment and self-strengthening of the Global South.

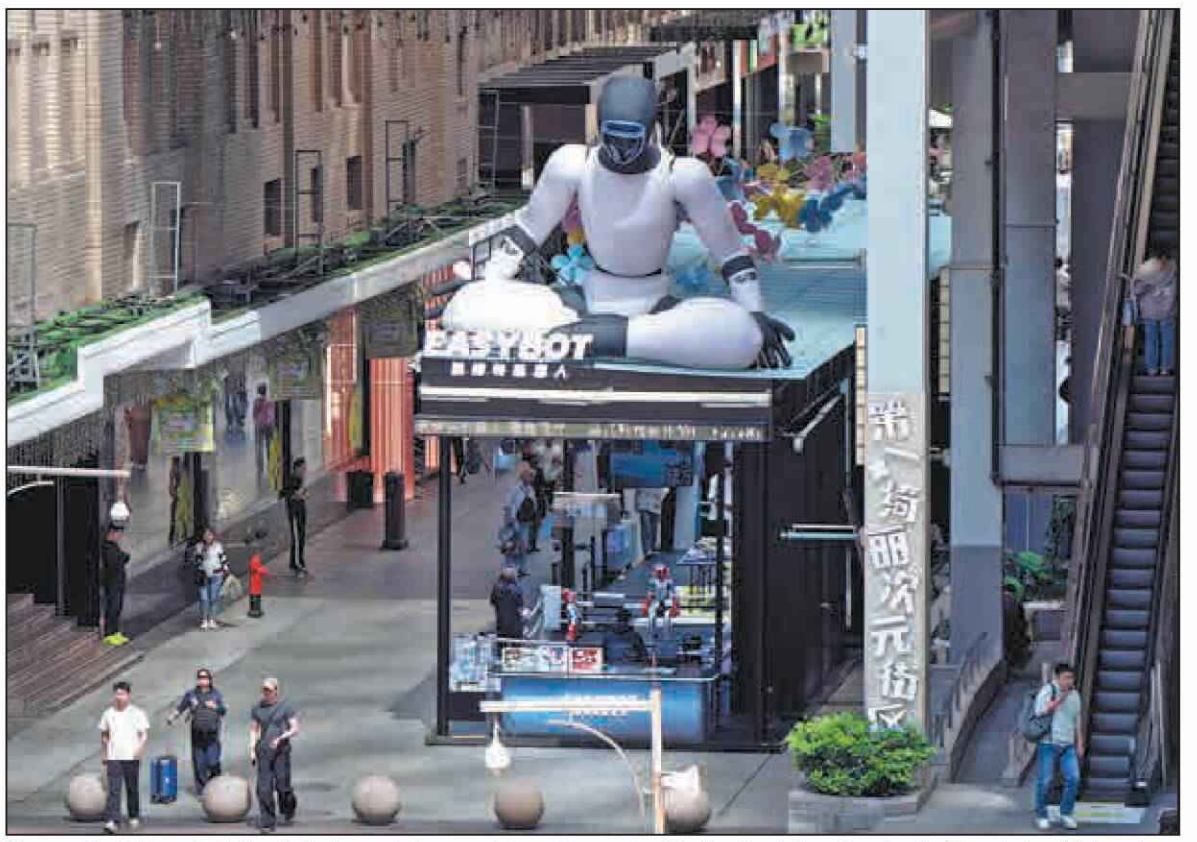
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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

BUSINESS

No coffee breaks



Humanoid robots work at a booth during a robot pop-up interactive event on Nanjing Road shopping street in Shanghai on Wednesday. The Digital China Summit said the country accounts for 84.7 percent of global humanoid robot shipments, with 14,400 domestic units shipped in 2025 out of the worldwide total of 18,000 units. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Debut of full-spectrum hyperspectral satellite to empower commercial aerospace innovation

By **REN QI**
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Kuaizhou-11 Y7 rocket launches at 12:12 pm on March 16 from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Gansu province, deploying eight domestic satellites into scheduled orbits in a flawless mission. CCTV+

A significant milestone in China's commercial aerospace sector, the recent successful launch and precise orbital insertion of the Xiguang-1 06 satellite reflect the development of China's industry, underscoring the robust support provided by the local government, experts said.

Developed by Xi'an Zhongke Xiguang Aerospace Technology Group Co Ltd, based in Xixian New Area of Shaanxi province, the satellite was launched aboard the Kuaizhou-11 Y7 carrier rocket from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Gansu province.

As China's first and currently the only in-orbit commercial hyperspectral remote sensing satellite with full-spectrum coverage of the 400–2500 nanometers band, the satellite ushers in a new industry era of "full-spectrum precise perception".

Covering the visible to shortwave infrared bands with 26 independent spectral bands, the satellite managed to transmit clear images within 24 hours of entering orbit.

"The satellite functions as if it is performing CT scans on the planet. It doesn't just look at surface morphology, but can analyze material composition, monitor crop health and predict ecological hidden dangers," said Kou Yimin, chief engineer at Zhongke Xiguang Aerospace.

Supported by the Xi'an Institute of Optics and Precision Mechanics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the development team achieved independent control over core technologies, adopting an integrated design to significantly reduce weight, lower costs and shorten the development cycle.

The satellite's applications have already been implemented broadly. In Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, it monitors the growth of characteristic cash crops like tea and traditional Chinese medicinal herbs. In northwestern China's mining areas, it provides early warnings for geological disasters such as landslides, ensuring safe production.

Behind this single satellite's success is the collaborative support of an entire industrial chain. With Zhongke Xiguang Aerospace as the leading enterprise, Xixian New Area has built a complete commercial aerospace ecosystem encompassing upstream new materials, midstream core component manufacturing and downstream data application services.

In the upstream, Shaanxi Pulimei Material Technology Co Ltd focuses on aerospace composite materials.

"We specialize in aerospace-grade heat-resistant and structural materials, with multiple product performances reaching leading domestic levels," said Zhang Xinhang, chairman of the company.

For midstream manufacturing, Shaanxi Weixing Zhihang Technology Co Ltd possesses the capacity to produce 50,000 aerospace boards annually in its 100,000-class clean room. General Manager Zeng Xuan noted their products meet stringent aerospace standards and have supported multiple satellite models with a 100 percent qualification rate.

Downstream, Shaanxi Baota Xingkong Aerospace Technology Co Ltd operates the "Yan'an Constellation" and a big data center, providing standardized products for over 30 industries nationwide and boosting data interpretation efficiency by over 60 percent.

Such an achievement is inseparable from strong policy guarantees. Xixian New Area has rolled out measures to strengthen policy supply and financial empowerment to back up such projects. Currently, the area hosts 34 enterprises in the aerospace industry chain, achieving an output value of 5.69 billion yuan ($835.29 million) in 2025.

"The success of this satellite sets another benchmark for the new area to cultivate a more modernized industrial system with new quality productive forces," a spokesperson for Xixian New Area told China Daily.

"We will use this to accelerate the linkage of commercial aerospace, high-end equipment and new materials, contributing the 'Xixian experience' to China's high-quality manufacturing development."

High-income status seen around corner

Official data put China's '25 per capita GNI above World Bank's '24 benchmark

By **ZHOU LANXU** and **OUYANG SHIJIA**

China is on track to reach high-income status within one to two years, as steady growth and structural upgrading place the country on the cusp of a key developmental milestone, even as external uncertainties add complexity to the outlook, economists said.

"Taking a relatively conservative view, China is likely to reach the threshold of a high-income economy within the next one to two years," said Sun Xuegong, director-general of the department of policy study and consultation at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research. The academy is affiliated with the National Development and Reform Commission.

> "Taking a relatively conservative view, China is likely to reach the threshold of a high-income economy within the next one to two years."
>
> **Sun Xuegong,** director-general of the department of policy study and consultation at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research

$19.2 trillion
gross national income of China in 2025, according to the National Bureau of Statistics

Sun said that crossing the threshold would mark "an important milestone" and signal a new phase of development characterized by upgrades to industrial structures and shifts in household consumption patterns, in line with the country's broader push for high-quality growth.

The outlook comes as China is now very close to this key milestone. In the World Bank's classification in July last year, China was ranked as an upper-middle income economy with 2024 per capita gross national income (GNI) at $13,660, versus the 2024 high-income benchmark of $13,935.

In 2025, the country's GNI reached 139.4 trillion yuan ($19.2 trillion), the National Bureau of Statistics said. Using NBS figures, China Daily estimates per capita GNI at 99,109 yuan for 2025, or about $14,503 at current exchange rates — exceeding the 2024 threshold of $13,935.

The final classification depends on the updated benchmarks for 2025 and exchange rate adjustments based on the World Bank's calculation method, allowing the next round of income group updates to be released in July to provide a key observation window for assessing whether China formally enters the high-income category.

International institutions share a cautiously optimistic view. Marshall Mills, senior resident representative of the International Monetary Fund in China, said he saw significant potential for further expansion of China's economy as reforms to improve resource allocation and boost consumption could lift annual GDP growth by nearly 0.5 percentage point.

This will help address the challenges of a shrinking labor force and slowing productivity growth and support the country's prospects of reaching high-income status within the next five years, he said.

Beyond headline income levels, economists and policy advisers stressed that sustaining growth after reaching high-income status will be critical. Some economies have struggled with slowing momentum after crossing the threshold.

Sun, from the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said the key lies in strengthening innovation capacity, which China has prioritized as a strategic priority. The country's steady rise in the Global Innovation Index rankings — where it ranked 10th in 2025 — reflects significant progress that could help it avoid the so-called middle-income trap.

Equally important is maintaining social stability and improving income distribution, Sun said, adding that advancing common prosperity will be crucial to ensuring long-term, sustainable development after achieving higher income levels.

The outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) has demonstrated China's determination of achieving steady mid-to-long-term growth, reiterating China's goal of achieving "mid-level developed country" status by 2035.

With first-quarter GDP growth resilient at 5 percent despite rising external headwinds, Mao Shengyong, deputy head of the NBS, said that growth driven by technological progress and industrial upgrading will be sustainable going forward.

Zhang Bin, deputy director at the Institute of World Economics and Politics under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that given China's current level of industrialization and production capacity, reaching the World Bank's high-income threshold would be a natural outcome.

Crossing the line does not mark the end of development, Zhang said, adding that China's per capita GNI remains far behind the more than $80,000 in leading advanced economies such as the United States.

"China still faces gaps in frontier technologies and advanced capabilities, requiring continued efforts to catch up with leading economies," he said.

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Tech firms spending big on strategic land buys

By **CHENG YU**
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China's internet giants are ramping up land purchases in major cities, committing more than 15 billion yuan ($2.2 billion) since late last year in a strategic shift from asset-light leasing to owning property tied to core operations.

Companies including ByteDance and JD have led a fresh wave of land purchases in hubs such as Beijing and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, signaling a deeper transformation in how China's tech sector manages capital and growth.

The new buying spree is not a traditional real estate play but reflects a broader move toward heavy-asset ownership. Firms are increasingly seeking to anchor research, data and headquarters functions in self-owned facilities, aligning with long-term industrial strategies rather than short-term property gains, industry experts said.

JD has been among the most active. Last month, a unit of JD spent 1.76 billion yuan to acquire two parcels of land in Beijing E-Town, adjacent to its existing headquarters. The purchase came just one day after its other subsidiary paid 663 million yuan for a commercial site in Hangzhou.

In late 2025, JD secured land in Nanjing and acquired office space in Hong Kong's Central District for HK$3.47 billion ($442.9 million), underscoring a multi-city footprint built in rapid succession.

Other tech majors are following suit. Alibaba Group acquired office space in Hong Kong's Causeway Bay in October 2025 for HK$7.2 billion, while ByteDance has spent roughly 6.1 billion yuan this year alone on two prime sites in Beijing's Haidian district, a core technology hub.

The pace of investment has accelerated markedly since 2025, with purchases becoming more concentrated and strategic. Unlike earlier, scattered acquisitions of office buildings, the latest deals feature high self-use ratios, strong links to industrial activity and long-term operational horizons.

Yan Yuejin, deputy head of the E-House China R&D Institute in Shanghai, said: "This is about optimizing balance sheets and hedging against uncertainty. Holding high-quality real estate in core locations can provide stable asset appreciation, especially as property prices have adjusted."

The shift also reflects a redefinition of land use by tech firms. Rather than speculative holdings, companies are developing integrated campuses for research and development, digital industry parks and artificial intelligence computing centers — infrastructure viewed as critical to future growth, Yan said.



A file photo shows a horse-themed setup by ByteDance's Douyin in Shanghai on Jan 27. CHEN YUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Demand from internet companies — often linked to what policymakers called new quality productive forces — is emerging as a rare source of certainty, particularly in the commercial and R&D segments of major cities still grappling with a property slowdown," he added.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

BUSINESS

Restaurant chains eye rapid growth

Country's catering industry experiencing acceleration in franchised development

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**
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People wait to dine at a Haidilao hotpot restaurant in Shanghai on May 2. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The country's catering sector is experiencing sustained acceleration in chain store development, driven by market consolidation and operational quality upgrades, according to the 2026 White Paper on the Development of Restaurant Chains in China released by the China Chain Store & Franchise Association and Meituan.

The report shows that the percentage of restaurants in the country that are part of a chain rose from 21 percent in 2023 to 25 percent in 2025, an average annual increase of 2 percent. This growth highlights the sector's resilience in adapting to evolving consumer preferences and operational challenges. Across segments — including beverages, fast foods, snacks and marinated flavors — leading chain enterprises with national influence have emerged in every category.

"This is exactly why we upgraded the 'Top 100 Catering Franchises' to the 'Top 300 Chain Restaurants' this year," said Peng Jianzhen, CCFA director. "With the chain rate rising, more brands are emerging, and as niche categories diversify, benchmark chains are appearing across every sector — Chinese, Western, casual dining, fast food, beverages and baking."

The white paper identified a clear divergence among brands of different sizes, according to the Meituan Research Institute. Top-tier brands with over 10,000 outlets continue to consolidate leadership through standardized operations and strong brand influence.

Chains with between 101 and 500 stores increased store count in 2025 by 28.3 percent year-on-year, while chains boasting between 501 and 1,000 outlets also expanded rapidly, increasing store numbers by 32.6 percent year-on-year. The smallest chains, typically with three to 10 outlets, shrank sharply, with an 18.5 percent year-on-year reduction, largely due to limited risk resilience and underdeveloped supply chains.

Xiaocaiyuan, a "Top 300" Chinese chain restaurant brand, stands as a prime example of high-quality growth. Founded in 2013, Xiaocaiyuan has expanded to over 800 directly operated stores. According to its first interim report following its public listing in August 2025, the company achieved revenue of 2.71 billion yuan ($397.5 million) during the reporting period, a year-on-year increase of 6.5 percent, with the growth driven by the steady expansion of its store network. Net profit reached 382 million yuan, representing a surge of 35.7 percent compared to the same period in 2024.

Overall, the total number of catering outlets in the country remained largely stable, with 7.47 million stores nationwide by the end of 2025 — a 0.1 percent decline from the previous year.

Category differentiation is a defining feature of the market.

Beverage chains, in particular, have become the primary growth engine, with a chain rate of 54 percent, far above the industry average. These brands benefited from high platform subsidies and booming takeaway demand, allowing rapid replication of standardized operations.

Top-tier brands, leveraging mature operating systems and strong management, are the backbone of China's chain development.

Luckin Coffee is an example of this trend. Its 2025 financial report shows a net addition of 8,708 stores, bringing the total to 31,048 — a 39 percent year-on-year increase. Self-operated stores alone exceeded 20,000. Luckin also prioritized product innovation, launching over 140 new items in 2025, driving a 39 percent increase in freshly prepared beverage sales to 4.1 billion cups.

Other segments, including Chinese and Western cuisine, face more complex operational challenges, said the report. High unit costs, intricate supply chains, and difficulties in standardization have prompted operators to focus on service quality and menu innovation rather than rapid expansion. Consumer demand for value and quality favors standardized, cost-effective categories.

The consumer market remains robust. Total retail sales of consumer goods reached 50.12 trillion yuan in 2025, up 3.7 percent year-on-year, while catering revenue totaled 5.79 trillion yuan, up 3.2 percent. Although slightly below overall retail growth, this demonstrates the sector's resilience amid intensified competition and evolving consumer expectations.



A humanoid robot interacts with people at Luckin Coffee's exhibition booth during the 2026 Shanghai International Coffee Culture Festival on April 30. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Macroeconomic indicators provide additional context: GDP growth reached 5 percent in 2025, disposable income rose by 5 percent, and the service industry producer index increased by 5.5 percent. Catering revenue could have grown around 5 percent without subsidy-driven "takeaway battles", indicating that competitive pricing pressures slightly suppressed revenue, though market fundamentals remain strong, said the report.

While competition has intensified, operational quality is improving. Meituan and Dianping data show a decline in low-rated outlets in 2025, while mid-tier scores rose, reflecting enhanced service stability and operational excellence. Market shakeouts have accelerated improvements in management standards, menu consistency and customer experience, laying the foundation for sustainable medium-term growth.

Technology adoption is also increasing. The 2026 white paper on the Development of China's Catering Ingredients, released by catering research unit NCBD and Expo Fine-food Shanghai, reported that the cooking robot market exceeded 3.5 billion yuan in 2025 and is projected to surpass 12 billion yuan by 2030. These robots are being deployed in group meals, fast food and regional cuisines, helping restaurants standardize operations and improve efficiency.

Chain penetration is higher in major cities. First-tier cities such as Beijing; Shanghai; Guangzhou and Shenzhen of Guangdong province, have a chain rate of 33.2 percent. Lower-tier cities are catching up, with fifth-tier cities reaching 21 percent, reflecting accelerated chain expansion into less developed markets, said the report. But a rising number of catering brands is shifting to lower-tier markets with localized strategies.

Taking Miss Xiaogu, a brand which focuses on three core categories — spicy hotpot, *malatang* (numbing, spicy and hot) and *malaxiangguo* (numbing, spicy and fragrant pot) — as a prime example, the brand has now surpassed 1,200 stores globally.

Targeting the lower-tier market, Miss Xiaogu has specifically engineered a profitable single-store model characterized by low costs and high repurchase rates, deeply aligning with community consumption needs. By leveraging the core advantage of low rental costs in these markets, the brand practices deep community-based operations. It has precisely anchored two core positioning strategies: as the "family backup kitchen" and as a "convenient canteen for young people". This approach has allowed it to rapidly gain a foothold in smaller cities, establishing itself as a benchmark case for the downward expansion of restaurant chains.

Peng of CCFA suggested key priorities for the industry should include trade-in subsidies for catering equipment. He said catering equipment should be included after automobiles and home appliances in trade-in policies.

Expanding subsidies would facilitate digital and intelligent transformation, improving equipment standards and productivity, he added.

Peng also suggested in the report ideas for opening domestic listing channels, allowing catering companies to access domestic capital markets. Additionally, he called for specific policies to support the international expansion of Chinese cuisine in order to enhance global influence and market share.

Online
Unlock China's Treasures: Shop, Explore, Enjoy.

Walmart's Chengdu store turns prototype for nationwide upgrades

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**

Walmart China's recently revamped Chengdu, Sichuan province, store marks the launch of its next-generation store model in the country, signaling a rising trend of proximity-focused formats in retail.

The 20-year-old location has been overhauled with a new merchandise layout, spatial design and enhanced omni-channel experience, reflecting the company's strategy to deliver fresh, high-value and convenient shopping for urban consumers.

The Chengdu store will serve as a prototype for a nationwide upgrade. Walmart plans to renovate more than 100 existing stores and open five to 10 new locations this year, signaling a renewed push for high-quality growth in the retail market in the country.

The new store format targets urban middle-income families and single shoppers. Walmart has optimized a compact footprint of roughly 3,000 square meters with around 10,000 stock keeping units, emphasizing fresh food and groceries.

Zhu Jun, senior vice-president of Walmart China, said: "The Chengdu reopening represents the company's response to changing consumer habits and will serve as a blueprint for similar renovations in other cities this year."

Fresh food is central to the new model. Walmart has intensified sourcing from local suppliers and enhanced production, display and shelf-life management standards. Short-shelf-life items, including fresh-cut beef, sashimi, chilled fish and fruit platters, have been expanded, while Chengdu-specific offerings such as a "Sichuan Hot Pot Fresh Ingredients Zone" cater to local tastes.

The stores also feature digital shelf-life monitoring systems, seasonal product corners, and flower and fruit zones, designed to maximize freshness and provide a dynamic shopping experience.

Walmart's refreshed "Marketside" private label has expanded its portfolio of bakery, beverages, snacks and fresh food. The label underscores Walmart's strategy to differentiate through simplicity, freshness and local sourcing.

The Chengdu reopening comes as the retailer continues to rebalance its portfolio. While Walmart China is consolidating to about 300 stores nationwide, its membership format Sam's Club has become the primary growth engine.


Customers shop on April 24 at Walmart's newly opened Chengdu store in Sichuan province, marking the launch of its next-generation store model in China. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Sam's Club has opened 10 new locations over the past year and plans at least 14 more in 2026. The recent opening of the Wuxi, Jiangsu province, store marked its 64th location in China, highlighting the company's focus on its membership warehouse format while quietly refining neighborhood Walmart stores.

This expansion mirrors a broader reshaping of the country's offline retail market, according to Worldpanel by Numerator's first quarter 2026 analysis. The data underscore a widening gap between traditional modern trade channels and community-focused, high-value formats.

Hypermarkets, supermarkets and convenience stores faced headwinds in the first quarter, according to Worldpanel. Factors include the post-holiday "reverse migration", stronger foodservice recovery, a rebound in travel spending and continued online penetration.

Modern trade sales fell 3.2 percent year-on-year, highlighting the challenges of large-format retail in an increasingly fragmented market, Worldpanel's analysis shows.

Smaller, proximity-focused formats bucked the trend, posting a 2.7 percent year-on-year increase, driven by higher purchase frequency and everyday convenience. These results underscore the resilience of urban and community-oriented retail, a space where Walmart's compact "new generation" store model seeks to gain traction.

Among China's top 10 retailers, Walmart China and Hema Fresh stood out for growth and market adaptation. Walmart China pursued a dual-line strategy, focusing on neighborhood markets and Sam's Club membership stores. Strengthened product capabilities and localized supply chains helped both Walmart and Sam's Club private labels achieve rapid growth, reflecting a strategy consistent with the Chengdu store prototype, Worldpanel stated.

Hema Fresh increased its market share by 1.2 percentage points, overtaking CR Vanguard Group. Its dual-format expansion strategy improved both efficiency and scale, with penetration rates approaching 8 percent in the first quarter. Hema's value-for-money private label leveraged supply chain advantages to increase penetration by 4.6 points in the eastern region and achieve breakthroughs in the southern region.

Yonghui Superstores saw a 1 percentage point decline in market share, but reported strong rebounds in sales and private label performance, aided by initiatives in product quality and scene-driven sales.

JD Seven Fresh expanded offline, leveraging logistics and supply chain advantages to attract in-store traffic. Its northern region penetration rate rose 1.2 points year-on-year in the first quarter.

Worldpanel highlighted an emerging trend of ecosystem integration between online and offline retail. High-efficiency formats, including small supermarkets and discount stores, continue to perform, while online channels grow through content commerce and instant retail.

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CHINA

Coming of age



Senior students cheer under an "Adulthood Arch" during their coming-of-age ceremony at a high school in Kuqa, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Wednesday. The event saw over 1,200 students honoring their transition to adulthood through a series of activities like Constitution oath-taking and exchanging letters with parents.
YUAN HUANHUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Prosecutors pledge to tighten marine protection oversight

Advanced tech, better governance to be used to safeguard ocean ecosystems

By YANG ZEKUN
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China's top procuratorate has pledged to strengthen legal oversight in marine environmental protection by leveraging advanced technologies and enhancing coordinated governance, as the country steps up efforts to safeguard ocean ecosystems and support sustainable development.

The Supreme People's Procuratorate said it will intensify case handling in key areas such as marine water quality, coastline changes and control of invasive species.

The move aligns with the country's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), which advocates for stronger prevention of marine environmental risks at the source and greater efforts in pollution control and ecological restoration in key coastal regions.

Xu Xiangchun, director of the SPP's public interest litigation department, said procuratorial organs in coastal regions have made notable progress in recent years by leveraging geographic advantages and actively performing their public interest litigation functions.

"Protecting marine ecological resources is also closely linked to safeguarding people's livelihoods," Xu said, noting that improving marine environmental quality directly supports coastal communities and industries.

> "Protecting marine ecological resources is also closely linked to safeguarding people's livelihoods."
>
> **Xu Xiangchun,** director of the SPP's public interest litigation department

Xu acknowledged that balancing ecological protection with economic development remains a challenge, particularly in cases involving historical issues and complex local conditions. "It is important to properly handle this relationship to address problems at their root," he said.

He added that many long-standing and complex issues in marine protection require coordinated efforts across different levels of procuratorial organs and government departments, rather than relying on a single authority.

One case released by the SPP illustrates this approach. In Xiangshui county, Jiangsu province, an agricultural company converted 300 hectares of saline land along the Yellow Sea into aquaculture ponds and leased them to 106 shrimp farmers. Untreated wastewater was discharged into the sea, affecting coastal water quality and harming public interests.

The local procuratorate identified the case during a campaign to protect the Yellow Sea and launched a public interest litigation investigation in April 2023. It then convened authorities overseeing water resources, agriculture and rural affairs, and the environment.

Although all parties agreed the discharge was illegal, enforcement proved difficult. Farmers had already invested heavily, an immediate shutdown risked social tensions, departmental responsibilities overlapped, and the large aquaculture area posed technical challenges.

The procuratorate issued recommendations urging coordinated enforcement, better management of discharge outlets and standardized wastewater treatment. Following joint enforcement efforts, more than 60 drainage outlets were removed and dynamic monitoring was introduced.

To balance environmental protection with economic stability, local authorities invested more than 10.7 million yuan ($1.5 million) in wastewater treatment facilities, ensuring compliant discharge while maintaining production. An ecological education base was also built.

The case later revealed broader problems. In 2024, prosecutors found similar issues across more than 9,300 hectares of coastal aquaculture areas and issued recommendations to promote unified treatment. A centralized tailwater treatment area covering more than 833 hectares was established, 40 monitoring points were added, and an ecological aquaculture community of more than 8,000 hectares was developed.

By April last year, more than 24,600 hectares of aquaculture areas in Yancheng, Jiangsu, had completed rectification and achieved compliant discharge. The Xiangshui experience has since been promoted across the province.

Xu said prosecutors will focus next on key areas of marine ecological protection and intensify case handling. Led by an ongoing public interest litigation campaign around the Bohai Sea, prosecutors will guide local authorities to strengthen oversight in major marine environmental and resource protection cases and develop region-specific models.

Technology will play a larger role, Xu said. Given the fluid and complex nature of marine ecosystems, traditional methods of identifying clues and collecting evidence are no longer sufficient. Prosecutors will make greater use of satellite remote sensing and big data models.

He added that prosecutors will deepen cooperation with departments overseeing ecology and environment, natural resources and maritime affairs, improve information-sharing and joint case-handling mechanisms, and issue guidance to address practical issues such as damage assessment and compensation management.

Supercomputer reconstructs evolution of the universe

By LI MENGHAN
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Chinese scientists and international collaborators have used one of the largest cosmological simulations ever created to "fast-forward" the universe from the "Big Bang" all the way to the present day inside a supercomputer.

The project, called HyperMillennium and led by the National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, simulates a cubic volume of space with a side size of 12 billion light years. That is roughly equivalent to lining up about 120,000 Milky Way galaxies end to end.

Inside this digital universe, 4.2 trillion virtual dark matter particles evolve under gravity, reproducing 13.8 billion years of cosmic history. Dark matter refers to an invisible form of matter that does not emit or absorb light but is believed to make up about 85 percent of all matter in the universe and to provide the gravitational "framework" on which galaxies form.

"Due to the vast scale of the universe and the long course of its evolution, the distant galaxies observed through telescopes are actually static snapshots dating billions or even tens of billions of years ago, making it impossible to track their evolution in real time," said Gao Liang, a professor at the CAS' National Astronomical Observatories who leads the project.

Gao said ordinary matter that emits light represents only the "visible surface" of the cosmos, while dark matter forms its "invisible skeleton". Because dark matter does not interact with electromagnetic radiation, it cannot be directly observed with telescopes.

"Cosmological simulations are the key to solving this puzzle. By calculating the gravitational interactions among vast numbers of virtual dark matter particles, they can reconstruct — with high precision — the evolution of the universe from its early days to the present, allowing us to directly 'see' how dark matter particles cluster, distribute, and form structures over time," he said. "By comparing simulated virtual universes with real telescope observations, scientists can test and refine theoretical models of dark matter and dark energy."

Wang Qiao, a researcher at the observatory, said next-generation sky surveys are increasing demand for such simulations. These include the European Space Agency's Euclid mission and the China Space Station Telescope.

He said simulations must balance two competing requirements: a large enough volume to match the scope of sky surveys and extremely fine resolution to capture the formation of small galaxies.

"The emergence of ultra-large-scale cosmological simulations like the HyperMillennium aims to bridge the gap driven by observational progress, providing a crucial link in humanity's quest to understand the universe's ultimate mysteries," Wang said.

Globally, he noted, there are now three major simulations tracking trillions of dark matter particles: Japan's Uchuu simulation, Europe's Flagship 2, and China's HyperMillennium. The Flagship 2 emphasizes large cosmic volume, while the Uchuu focuses on high resolution. According to Wang, the HyperMillennium combines both strengths.

Wang added that the HyperMillennium runs on China's ORISE supercomputer, using software optimized for that system.

The simulation of 4.2 trillion particles produced about 13 petabytes of data — roughly equivalent to 13 million high-definition movies. A petabyte is 1,000 trillion bytes of data. Processing this dataset required 16,000 accelerator computing cards working for 18 days, underscoring advances in high-performance computing.

The first academic paper from the project was recently published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society. It focused on Abell 2744, a giant galaxy cluster known for its complex structure and extreme gravitational interactions. The study found that the simulation closely matches real observations, supporting its accuracy in simulating rare and complex cosmic systems. The first batch of data will be made available worldwide later.

Mike Boylan-Kolchin, a professor at the University of Texas in the United States, described the simulation as "a computational marvel that will help unlock fundamental physics from observations of the cosmos".

"It has an unprecedented range of volume and mass resolution, enabling detailed predictions about how huge numbers of relatively common galaxies are distributed across the cosmic web and the properties of inherently rare and interesting objects that are inaccessible with smaller volumes. The HyperMillennium simulation will be a touchstone for the galaxy formation and cosmology communities for years to come," he said.

Volker Springel, director of the Max Planck Institute for Astrophysics in Germany, said he was struck by the simulation's scale and precision, adding that it "redefines what is nowadays possible in numerical cosmology".

BLCU aims for 16,000 intl students by 2030

By ZOU SHUO
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Beijing Language and Culture University plans to expand its international student population to 16,000 by the end of the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-30), with degree-seeking students expected to reach 8,000, according to university president Duan Peng.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, Duan said BLCU currently hosts 12,000 international students for the 2025 academic year — a 3.5-fold increase from 2023. Among them, 4,300 are undergraduate, master's or doctoral candidates, marking a fivefold rise in degree-seeking students over the same period. The university now ranks first in China for both total international enrollments and degree-pursuing international students.

"Our historical peak was in 2009, with about 8,000 to 9,000 international students. Today we have surpassed that," Duan said. "Back then, degree students numbered around 1,500; now we have over 4,300 — more than double."

Since its founding in 1962, BLCU has cultivated 300,000 international alumni, including 300 ambassadors. Among them are 11 current foreign ambassadors to China who are BLCU graduates.

"These alumni serve as enduring bridges of friendship and understanding," Duan said.

To achieve its 2030 target, BLCU is leveraging its global network of 29 Confucius Institutes and classrooms, four China institutes, Tokyo College of BLCU, Beijing Language and Culture University Bangkok College, BLCU Kazakhstan and the BLCU Saudi Arabia program.

The university has diversified its academic offerings beyond language education to include business, artificial intelligence, computer science and joint engineering programs.

Looking ahead, Duan said the university will broaden its outreach to attract outstanding students worldwide.

"The goal of making China a top study destination is one that all of us in higher education should strive for," he said.

Andriantina Princie Fandresena, a 21-year-old doctoral student from Madagascar, said she has been in China for nearly three years and considers BLCU her second home.



Duan Peng

"I share my daily life on social media — the campus, the scenery, even Chinese songs I've translated into Malagasy — to help more people understand China. I am also researching how to introduce Malagasy culture to Chinese friends," she said.

She added that she often posts practical tips for prospective students from Madagascar, helping them navigate the application process.

"I want more people from my country to experience studying in China," she said.

Another student, Zechariah Werner Levi from the United States, gave up a career in commercial real estate to study at BLCU.

"I wanted to improve my Chinese and understand the Chinese market," he said. "China is hyperfocused on the future — AI, electric cars, consumer services. I hope to work between the US and China someday."

He has since invited his father, mother, brother, sister and best friends to visit China.

"Showing the real China is the best way," he said.

He also posts on social media to give US citizens a more authentic picture of daily life in China.

"I haven't felt any discrimination — people are super nice and welcoming. And the digital ecosystem here — WeChat, delivery, even calling taxis — makes the US feel so slow when I go back," he added.

2 Guangdong museums win global design prize

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
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Two museums in southern China's Guangdong province have been recognized in the Prix Versailles, a global architecture award established by UNESCO and the International Union of Architects, highlighting the country's advances in contemporary design.

The two are the Shenzhen Science and Technology Museum in Shenzhen, a hub of China's reform and opening-up, and the Xuelei Fragrance Museum in Guangzhou, the provincial capital.

"The award showcases the systematic construction, contemporary expression and cultural confidence of China's fragrance culture to the world," said Weng Haocong, director of the Xuelei Fragrance Museum.

Widely regarded as a major prize in architecture and design, the 2026 list of the world's most beautiful museums — commonly known as the Prix Versailles — was announced in France on Monday.

The award recognizes outstanding contemporary architecture and spatial design projects worldwide, emphasizing how architecture responds to urban, cultural, ecological and public life challenges.

According to the organizers, the award values innovation, local cultural expression, ecological efficiency, social interaction and public engagement.

The Shenzhen museum, with a building area of about 128,300 square meters, features a 38-meter-high atrium and permanent exhibition halls covering 35,000 sq m.

Its exterior incorporates cutting-edge technology that creates visual illusions, changing appearance with different weather conditions and times of day. Because of its futuristic design, it has been dubbed "the big spaceship" by locals and visitors, and has become a new landmark for science and culture in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.





Top: Xuelei Fragrance Museum. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Above: Shenzhen Science and Technology Museum.
REN XIAOXIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

The Guangzhou-based fragrance museum received the honor after being certified by the Guinness World Records in November as the largest fragrance museum.

Located in Baiyun district, it has an immersive space of over 9,500 sq m, with 18 themed exhibition areas, more than 50 interactive installations and over 300 scent points.

The structure is composed of clusters of red-brick cylinders inspired by the distillers used in modern perfume-making, resembling a "fragrance castle" that appears to breathe.

Unlike traditional museums that focus primarily on visual experiences, it offers a sensory journey centered on smell, providing visitors with a distinctive immersive experience.

For Guangzhou, the recognition signals an expansion of the city's cultural and tourism offerings beyond sightseeing and cuisine to more nuanced sensory experiences, Weng said.

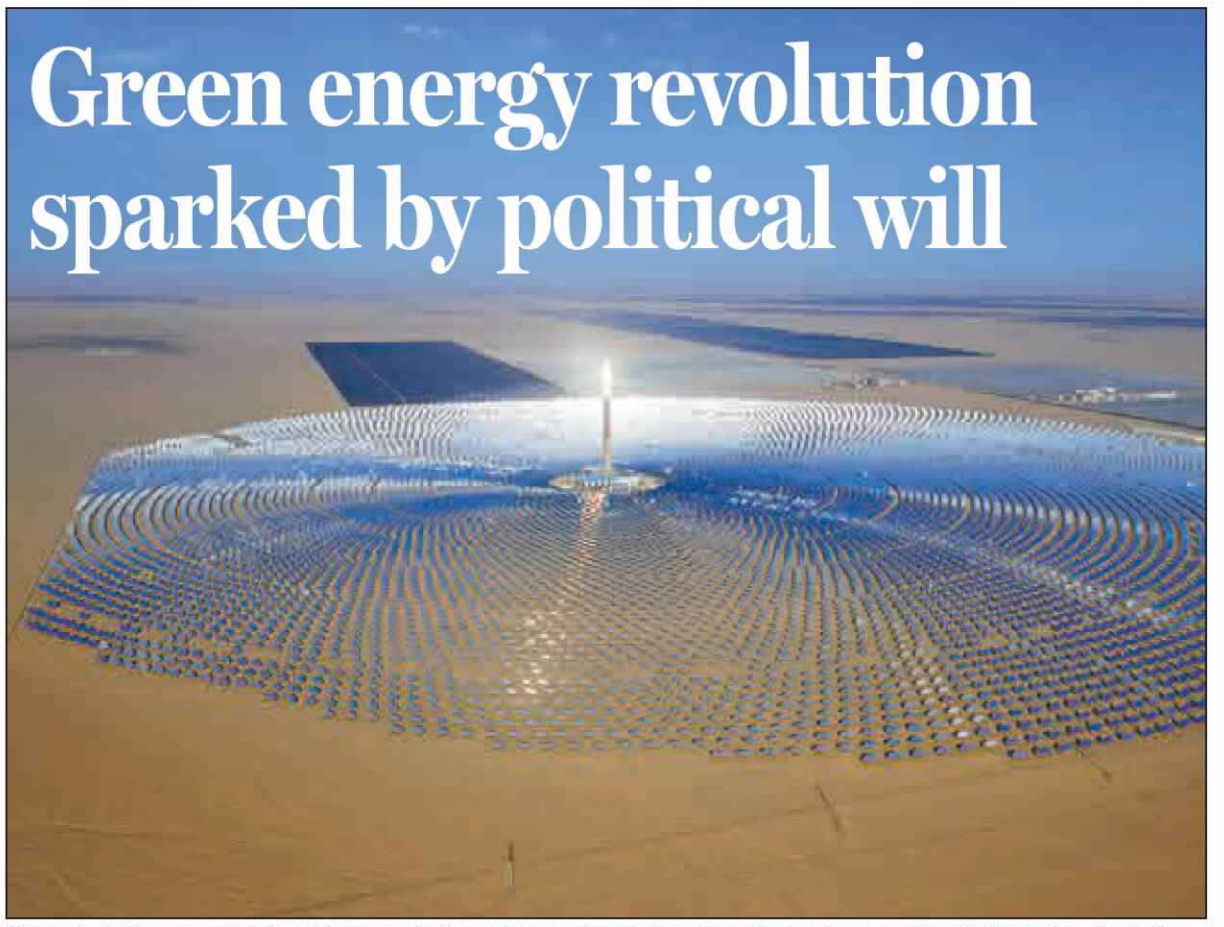
Chen Shaofeng, chairman of the Guangdong Provincial Museums Association and deputy director of the Guangdong Museum, said the fragrance museum, as a specialized institution, plays an important role in promoting fragrance culture.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

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.*

Green energy revolution sparked by political will



China's first 100-megawatt molten salt tower solar thermal power plant operates in Dunhuang, Gansu province, in September. The facility, completed in late 2018, is able to generate some 390 million kilowatt-hours of green electricity every year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Adaptive legal framework supercharged nation's renewable network rollout

By HOU LIQIANG
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When the Renewable Energy Law took effect in 2006, China's clean tech sector was a fraction of its current size, struggling to compete as the country wrestled with severe, localized power shortages.

Two decades later, the transformation is staggering. By 2025, renewable electricity generation in China reached approximately 4 trillion kilowatt-hours, exceeding the total consumption of the European Union's 27 member states. More than 60 percent of China's installed power generation capacity comes from renewable sources.

This meteoric rise from a marginal player to the global leader in renewables was not an accident of the market; it was engineered by forward-thinking legislation. According to energy experts, the 2006 law provided the vital regulatory foundation required to transform an energy crisis into an economic opportunity.

Zhou Dadi, executive vice-chairman of the China Energy Research Society, explained that the law was enacted against the backdrop of severe domestic electricity shortages and intensifying international climate negotiations.

Accelerated economic development following the country's reform and opening-up in 1978 further worsened the electricity supply, making rolling blackouts a frequent occurrence, he told China Energy News. On the international front, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, signed in 1992, established the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities".

Although developed countries accounted for 60 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions at that time, and China's emissions remained far lower than those of developed economies, the country's total energy consumption — given its vast population — could no longer be overlooked, Zhou said.

The enactment of the Renewable Energy Law proved to be the decisive answer. It established renewable energy as a priority category, granted it policy preferences, and provided the legal guarantees required to launch the industry.

In 2003, the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, listed renewable energy legislation on its priority agenda.

Wang Zhongying, a key participant in drafting the law, recalled 2004 as a critical turning point that sped up its passage. That year, China announced to the world that it would enact the law at the International Conference for Renewable Energies in Bonn, Germany.

Wang highlighted the important role of international cooperation in shaping the law.

"Through renewable energy research projects with the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as group study tours organized by different departments to Germany and Denmark, we deepened our understanding of renewable energy and accelerated the law's drafting," he said.

The efforts of Wang and his team saw the law, featuring classified pricing, guaranteed purchase and special funds, adopted in February 2005.

Qiao Liming, former head of Asia at the Global Wind Energy Council, said that while the law initially provided the framework and policy direction, it was the subsequent series of implementation rules that truly drove the market.



A spiral case stay ring is fixed at a pumped storage hydropower station in Hami, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, last month. CAI ZENGLE / FOR CHINA DAILY



A worker installs photovoltaic panels on a hillside in Anqing, Anhui province, last month. WU JUNQI / FOR CHINA DAILY

She pointed to the fixed feed-in tariff policy — borrowed from the German model — as the most critical element. "It allowed renewable power to be stably connected to the grid and sold, thus opening the door to the market," she said.

China's feed-in tariff mechanism — with classified price levels for different technologies and resource regions — requires grid operators to purchase renewable electricity at government-set prices, a guaranteed above-market rate funded through a small surcharge on electricity bills.

After six adjustments to subsidies for wind power and eight for solar, newly approved onshore wind and solar projects in China have achieved grid parity, with their on-grid tariffs set at the same level as local coal-fired power since 2021.

For the first decade after the law's enactment, China's wind power capacity grew 120-fold, from 1.26 million kilowatts to 150 million kW, while solar module prices fell to just one-tenth of their original cost.

However, as the industry expanded, challenges emerged. By the first half of 2016, the volume of curtailed wind and solar power had already surpassed the total for all of 2015. To address this, authorities replaced the full-guaranteed purchase mechanism with renewable portfolio standards in 2019, setting out binding targets for renewable consumption in each province.

In 2017, the Green Electricity Certificate was launched to provide a standardized way for businesses to track and verify that the power they consume comes from clean energy.

Dimitri de Boer, director for China at ClientEarth, an environmental law organization, noted that legislation must not remain static in order to be effective.

"Over time, the law, together with supporting policies, has gradually optimized the framework from administratively set prices, to competitive allocation, to full market integration and grid parity," he said.

De Boer said the second and current revision of the law provides an opportunity to further enhance its effectiveness in light of new and emerging trends.

He said further incentives for energy storage, demand-side response and flexible electricity pricing, for example, can help the energy system to adapt to the next stage of the energy transition, especially as China moves toward very high renewable penetration scenarios.

Equally, it's important to clarify the role of coal in the new system, repurposing it from base-load power to peaking power provision, he added.

De Boer suggested the circular economy and recycling in renewable energy industry chains, especially as the early installations begin to retire, become key focuses of the revision.

"At the same time, we need to ensure that renewable energy doesn't have an excessive impact on biodiversity," he said.

Beyond its domestic impact, China's rapid expansion of clean energy spurred by this legislation has had global significance. By driving down component costs and turning climate action into an economic opportunity, China has made the global energy transition faster, more efficient and far more accessible to developing nations.

De Boer said the share of oil and gas in China's primary energy needs is now only half that of the United States or the EU, meaning China is better insulated from global energy price shocks than many other major economies.

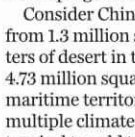
Reducing exposure to volatile fossil fuel markets, he suggested, offers a practical lesson for other nations.

The incredible progress in renewable energy sectors in China is one of the greatest contributions to climate action globally, as it provides the solutions needed by the entire world, De Boer said.

"China has helped to turn climate action from a burden into an economic opportunity," he said.

"Without China's clean energy achievements, the global energy transition would be more expensive, less efficient and take much longer."

Law just one part of key drivers of power transition



Hou Liqiang
Reporter's log

This year marks the 20th anniversary of China's Renewable Energy Law coming into force — a milestone many developing nations now turn to for reference as they scramble to accelerate their own energy transitions.

And rightly so. The law signaled strong political will and kicked off one of the fastest energy transitions in history — one that started almost from scratch. Today, renewable energy accounts for over 60 percent of China's total installed power generation capacity, with total installed renewable capacity surpassing 1,800 gigawatts in 2025.

China's experience in promoting energy transition holds significant potential for many developing nations, as it is not far from other developing states in terms of development stages. As Nigeria's Minister of Environment, Balarabe Abbas Lawal, once stressed in an interview with China Daily, China "understands what we are going through because they have just gone through it".

Yet, we must be careful not to over-romanticize China's experience in renewable energy development — particularly the law's role. Doing so risks missing some key drivers of China's success: its vast domestic market and complete industrial chain. These are precisely what many developing countries lack.

Consider China's geography — from 1.3 million square kilometers of desert in the northwest to 4.73 million square kilometers of maritime territory, spanning multiple climate zones from tropical to cold temperate. This diversity allowed China to test and scale a wide range of renewable technologies under different conditions. Its massive population and industrial base created unparalleled economies of scale, driving down the cost of solar panels and wind turbines to record lows.

But for many much smaller nations with limited land, fragmented infrastructure, or a small electricity market, copying the law without these structural advantages may lead to disappointment.

The hard truth? No amount of legislation can substitute for market scale or an integrated industrial ecosystem. Even China succeeded not by law alone — but through intense bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The country learned from Germany and Denmark through demonstration projects, welcomed international investment, and trained a generation of policymakers, entrepreneurs and skilled workers. That cooperation — not the law in isolation — built today's giants, such as wind turbine giant Goldwind and BYD, the latter selling 4.6 million new energy vehicles in 2025.

Therefore, developing countries cannot go it alone. They must deepen South-South cooperation — sharing regional markets, jointly building supply chains, and co-investing in manufacturing. Some capacity may be outdated for China but remains highly useful elsewhere, as it can help developing nations start to build their own industrial chains — the key to future takeoff.

Thus, developing nations should set ambitious goals, but begin with humility. The law offers a compass, but only cooperation can pave the road.

Contact the writer at houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

Report: China, Philippines cooperation on electricity a 'win-win'

By HOU LIQIANG

The Philippines and China could benefit from a wealth of untapped potential in renewable energy cooperation, capitalizing on the Philippines' natural resources and Chinese know-how, according to a recently released report.

By partnering with China on renewables, the Philippines could fast-track its shift to clean energy and unlock a strategic market for Chinese companies, creating a "win-win" scenario, the report said.

The Bridging Opportunities: A Roadmap for China–Philippines Renewable Energy Cooperation report was compiled and released in April by People of Asia for Climate Solutions, a Manila-based NGO, and global nonprofit New Energy Nexus.

The report comes as the Philippines strives to raise the share of renewables in its energy mix to 35 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2040, while fossil fuels continue to dominate at roughly 78 percent.

The country's energy transition has become more urgent amid the ongoing fossil fuel crisis, as it remains heavily reliant on crude oil imports, the study said.

The Philippines imports 98 percent of its crude oil from the Middle East, according to the country's Department of Energy.

Today's oil crisis is a reminder that the Philippines remains highly exposed to global fuel shocks. What this report shows is that the solution is already within reach, said Brenda Valerio, country director for the Philippines at New Energy Nexus.

"With the right partnerships, we can accelerate deployment while building domestic capability, jobs, and more affordable energy for households and businesses," she said.

While diplomatic ties between the Philippines and China span five decades, collaboration in renewable energy remains limited. The study found that the opportunity is not simply in increasing capital flows, but in structuring partnerships that drive shared growth, including joint ventures, local manufacturing partnerships, knowledge transfer and technical capacity development that anchor value within the Philippines.

Valerio said the Philippines has abundant renewable resources from solar and wind to geothermal. With clear policy direction for energy transition, the country's electricity demand continues to grow, creating a strong market for new capacity.

Despite this, however, she pointed out several important concerns that make international companies, especially those from China, hesitate to engage in the country's renewable energy development.

She noted policy inconsistency as the most frequently cited challenge. "Not necessarily the absence of policies, but gaps in implementation. So processes can be slow or unclear, which creates uncertainty for investors," she said.

She added that the complexity of permitting and regulatory requirements — which can lengthen project timelines and increase costs — along with infrastructure constraints, are also factors to blame.

Chinese renewable energy companies bring extensive experience in technology, manufacturing, and large-scale deployment. The study found that collaboration should expand to distributed and community-based solutions such as rooftop solar and microgrids, which can be deployed faster and help address grid constraints.

"This can be a perfect match. The Philippines has rich renewable resources and urgent needs, while China has strong capacity and readiness. Together, we can deliver clean, safe and affordable electricity for Filipino communities," said Wang Xiaojun, executive director at People of Asia for Climate Solutions.

"The longer we hesitate, the more we lose," he said.

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LIFE







From top: Dishes Sun Lixin has taught the public via video, including Huaishan Four Treasures Soup (made with Chinese yam, cauliflower mushroom, cordyceps flower and chicken), beef ribs with dipping sauce, and braised pork knuckle.



Sun Lixin, former executive chef of a century-old restaurant and a veteran of state banquets.

Banquet halls to home stoves

Once a master of state dinners, Sun Lixin now teaches cooking to millions online, proving that even the most refined dishes can live on in everyday, family kitchens, **Li Yingxue** reports.







From top: More of Sun's creations include blueberry Chinese yam, a chicken dish, and a fish dish. PHOTOS BY ZHANG WEI AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Deep in the maze of Beijing's *hutong* (alleyways), inside a lived-in *siheyuan* (enclosed courtyard), the air is thick with steam and the steady crackle of fire. A wok flashes over an open flame. Oil shimmers, spits, and releases a familiar, irresistible aroma.

Leaning toward a slightly trembling phone camera, a nearly 70-year-old chef speaks in a warm Beijing drawl: "Watch this step carefully — this is called coating. Don't lose focus."

To millions online, he is simply "Second Uncle". In real life, he is Sun Lixin — once the executive chef of the century-old restaurant Bianyifang, best known for its Peking duck, and a veteran of countless state banquets.

In 2019, alongside Zheng Xiusheng, the former executive chef of the Beijing Hotel, he co-founded "Lao Fan Gu", a moniker meaning veteran master chefs. The duo's account has since amassed a Douyin (a social media platform) following of more than 16 million.

But Sun's journey to internet fame was anything but overnight.

Born in 1956, Sun stepped into the kitchen straight out of middle school. His formative years were shaped by Tuo Dailiang, a revered Sichuan cuisine master who once oversaw a massive national banquet marking the 10th anniversary of the People's Republic of China (in 1959).

At 16, Sun learned his first dish, Kung Pao Chicken, and never strayed far from its disciplined principles: a balance of numbing spice, heat, savoriness, freshness, and a subtle sweet-sour finish; precision in knife work; and harmony in texture.

"My master cooked for top leaders, but he was always extremely low-key," Sun recalls. "He told me not to chase fame, just focus on making every meal well."

That philosophy would later define Sun's own career. By his 20s, he had already risen to head chef at one of China's earliest foreign-affairs hotels. Over decades, he became known not only for preserving tradition but also for quietly pushing its boundaries.

One of his most unlikely legacies is a dish now found on menus across China: blueberry yam.

The idea emerged from thrift. While preparing a traditional dish of osmanthus yam strips, Sun found that scraps were inevitably discarded. Unwilling to waste them, Sun steamed and mashed the leftovers.

The result was bland — until he borrowed from Western pastry techniques, adding whipped cream and condensed milk, piping the mixture into delicate mounds, and finishing it with blueberry sauce. What began as an anti-waste experiment became a nationwide staple.

If blueberry yam was an inspired improvisation, Sun's reinvention of roast duck was a deliberate, years-long pursuit.

After taking on a leadership role at Bianyifang, he noticed a shift in diners' expectations toward healthier eating. Roast duck, an iconic dish of Chinese cuisine, was synonymous with richness. Sun wanted to change that without losing its soul.

Starting in 2003, he worked with nutrition experts to overhaul the process. Vegetable juices replaced traditional marinades. Even the liquid poured into the duck cavity — once spiced water — was reimagined. The result was a technique he describes as "roasting outside, simmering inside", producing a duck that was lower in fat and oil while retaining its signature depth of flavor.

The innovation earned a national patent and industry acclaim. But for Sun, the goal was never recognition. It was continuity.

"Preserving tradition doesn't mean refusing changes," he says. "You keep the roots, but give them new life for today."

Having already modernized state banquet dishes for changing tastes, Sun soon realized the medium for sharing them also needed to evolve. In 2019, he turned to a different audience: home cooks.

"Lao Fan Gu" began modestly on Douyin. Early videos were sprawling, sometimes stretching a single dish across dozens of episodes. Viewers quickly lost patience. The team adapted, condensing lessons into concise, digestible segments. Then came a breakthrough: a meticulous re-creation of a historic state banquet menu sparked a surge in followers.

What sets "Lao Fan Gu" apart is not production polish, as there are no studio lights or staged backdrops, but authenticity. Filmed in a real, working home kitchen, the videos capture Sun and Zheng in constant motion, joking like crosstalk performers as they cook. Fans have dubbed it "the crosstalk kitchen".

Yet beneath the humor lies rigor. When demonstrating a smooth walnut dessert once served at state banquets, Sun pauses to emphasize a point: even a stray piece of jujube skin, he notes, would count as a serious mistake in a professional kitchen.

As their audience grew, so did its diversity. Some viewers were complete beginners; others were seasoned chefs. Striking a balance became a challenge.

"If it's too technical, beginners can't follow it," Sun says. "If it's too simple, professionals don't learn anything."

The solution was a dual-layered approach: precise breakdowns of advanced techniques alongside plainspoken explanations in everyday language. Complex methods like stock-making or battering are dissected step by step, while timing and heat are explained in a way that anyone with a home stove can grasp.

The impact is tangible. Viewers often return with updates — moving from tentative first attempts to proud successes — as the once-intimidating kitchen becomes a space of growing confidence.

One user, "yuanfangchuanlaifengdi", commented under a braised pork ribs video: "So detailed! I followed your recipe today — my ribs are stewing now, can't wait." Hours later, he returned with an update: "It's delicious. I used to add so many seasonings, but this simple version tastes even better."

Sun recalls a letter from a woman whose marriage had been on the verge of collapse. Her husband, once disengaged from household life, began cooking after watching "Lao Fan Gu". Gradually, he became more involved at home. "You saved my family," she wrote.

For Sun, the message was clear. "Cooking is a kind of glue for family harmony," Sun reflects. "That's the real meaning behind our motto: we cook well, and you eat well."

Today, "Lao Fan Gu" extends beyond short videos. The team develops ready-to-eat products, visits university campuses, and hosts livestreams demonstrating intricate regional dishes. Their audience's questions — about nutrition, relationships, daily life — have broadened the scope of what began as a cooking channel.

In 2022, Zheng passed away, marking a profound loss. However, the project continues, joined by other veteran chefs, including 75-year-old master chef Hou Yurui, a national judge and expert in Hunan cuisine. Known for his gentle demeanor and focus on health, Hou excels at explaining the underlying logic behind cooking techniques.

Alongside these seasoned masters, younger apprentices increasingly appear on camera, continuing the intergenerational relay of culinary knowledge. Sun remains at the center, steady as ever.

From a teenage apprentice to a master of state banquets, and now a mentor to millions of home cooks, his journey reflects a quiet arc of return. The techniques may be refined, the platforms modern, but the purpose is unchanged.

"In fact, banquet menus are quite simple, with many dishes using everyday ingredients," Zheng once said. "We hope people can learn them and re-create them at family gatherings, passing them down through generations."

That vision endures. In kitchens far from Beijing's *hutong*, in the glow of phone screens and the rhythm of home stoves, Sun and the "Lao Fan Gu" team continue to translate the grandeur of the banquet table into something intimate, repeatable and alive — one dish, one family, one generation at a time.

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Online
Scan the code to watch the video.

From indigo dye to dough art, Xinzhou turns tradition into experiences

TAIYUAN — In an ancient courtyard in Xinzhou city, in North China's relic-rich Shanxi province, Cui Yafei saw a plain white silk scarf turn lush green after it was soaked in dye for 10 minutes, and watched as it then turned indigo within minutes of being exposed to the air.

"Everyone is a designer here. Every piece is a unique memory shared between us and the traditional natural dyeing technique," says Cui.

For her, the hands-on process is far more rewarding than simply taking "check-in" photos at famous landmarks.

The "magic" is part of a traditional natural dyeing technique, a municipal-level intangible cultural heritage project in Xinzhou. The indigo dye is extracted from the leaves of isatis root, a herb that Zhao Hui, the local inheritor, treats with profound respect.

"If maintained well, the dye could outlive me," Zhao says, noting that her workshop in Xinzhou ancient city now offers over 100 different color variations, which are attracting a growing number of young visitors.



Steps of Dong ethnic embroidery (left) and indigo dyeing (middle and right) captured on April 21 in Liping county, Guizhou province. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

The rise of the "handmade economy" marks a shift in Chinese consumption trends, where travelers increasingly seek cultural experiences and emotional value over material purchases.

Xinzhou, known in ancient times as Xiurong, with a history dating back to the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), has transformed into a living folklore museum, integrating cultural heritage protection with high-quality tourism development.

Just steps away from the dyeing workshop, another group of tourists was busy kneading dough at a traditional *huamo* (steamed buns with elaborate decorations) shop. Under the guidance of Gao Juan, a district-level inheritor of the local *huamo*-making techniques, a lively fish-shaped *huamo* took form in seconds.

"Beyond traditional shapes, we now offer tourists an experience of making cartoon-style buns," Gao says, adding that her business has significantly benefited from the "heritage plus experience" travel model.

Local government support has played a crucial role in the revival. To date, 30 creative cultural shops have opened on a dedicated street in Xinzhou ancient city, including 12 intangible cultural heritage projects.

The trend is resonating across China. In Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, young people are lining up to try their hands at the pottery wheel; in Jiangsu province's Suzhou, crowds gather to craft unique lacquer fans using mineral pigments; and in the tea workshops of Fujian province, visitors learn the 1,000-year-old art of tea making from master craftsmen.

Experts believe the shift reflects a profound change in consumer demand. "Consumers are no longer satisfied with passive reception; they are more willing to pay for unique emotional value, social experiences, and memories of the process," says Yan Chun, a folklore scholar and associate professor at Shanxi Normal University.

The rise of the "handmade economy" has taken ancient traditions out of deep alleys and brought them to the public, activating new consumption momentum, Yan adds.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

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CULTURE

Sketching from memories

Picture book artist taps her inner child and grandmother's stories to create award-winning works, report **Li Muyun** and **He Chun** in Changsha.

"Everyone has a child inside," says Cai Gao, the 79-year-old renowned picture book artist who has spent decades nurturing her inner child and her work. "Anything that stops me from being a child, I cut it loose. No mercy," she asserts.

This unwavering inner child has propelled her to the pinnacle of her career. On April 13, Cai became the first Chinese illustrator to receive the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the highest international accolade given every other year to writers and illustrators of children's books. The announcement was made at the annual news conference of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) during the Bologna Children's Book Fair in Italy.

The night she received the news, Cai's thoughts were not on the prize or herself, but on the people and the land that shaped her.

Born in 1946 in Changsha, the capital city of Central China's Hunan province, Cai grew up during the last days of an era when stories were passed down orally from generation to generation. Her worldview was profoundly influenced by the tales her grandmother shared with her while sitting in the courtyard, sewing by hand.

She fondly recalls her grandmother in an immaculate plain blue cotton gown with a fresh flower — either a jasmine or gardenia — pinned to her collar.

"She loved life, and made our daily existence feel like a celebration," Cai reminisces, adding that her grandmother often took her to see both local and visiting opera troupes. This exposure allowed Cai to sketch the characters and preserve the performances in her memory.

Despite never having the opportunity to attend art school, Cai considers her childhood experiences — playing in the courtyard of pomegranate trees, listening to her grandmother's nursery rhymes, and watching theater plays — as the "best education".

"My childhood cannot be replicated," she says. "I'm lucky to have had all of that."

Many of her books echo her childhood memories, including *Where the Moon Goes, I Go*.

"The girl picking the pomegranate in that book is me," she says with a broad smile. "It's easy to illustrate your own childhood. Art is not such a big deal for me because it is never far from life."

Graduating from Hunan First Normal School (now Hunan First Normal University), Cai began her career as a rural teacher. Despite the challenges of rural life, she found beauty in her surroundings and never abandoned her passion for art. Reflecting on her six years working and living in the countryside, she describes herself as a "Sunday artist", seizing any spare moment outside of her teaching duties to pick up her brush.

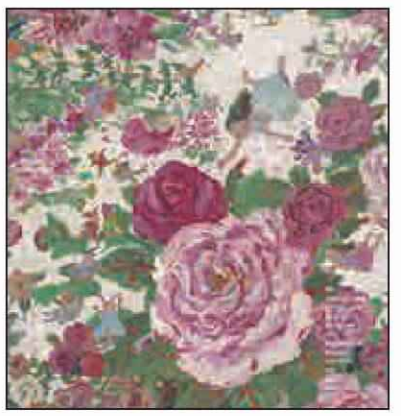
In 1982, at 36, Cai started working as an editor for children's books at Hunan Juvenile and Children's Publishing House in Changsha. This position allowed her to delve deeply into the world of picture books, both editing and illustrating. Her talent was internationally recognized in 1993 when her book, *Bao'er*, won the Golden Apple Award at the 14th Biennial of Illustration Bratislava, making her the first Chinese artist to receive this prestigious accolade.



Cai Gao (right) interacts with readers at a book sharing and signing session in Changsha, Hunan province, on April 18.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



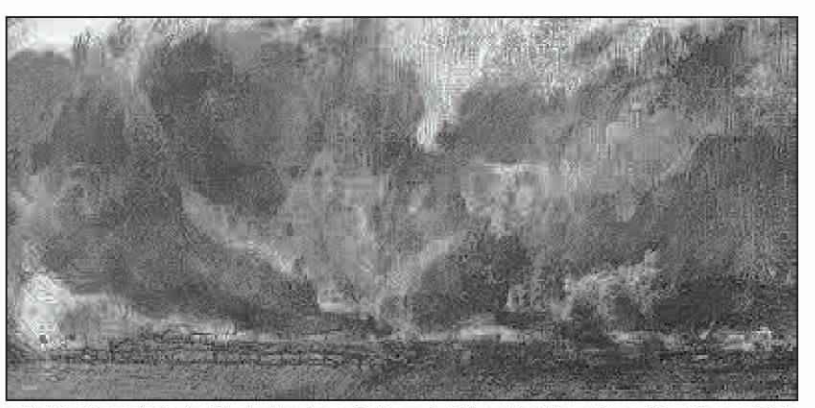
> "The girl picking the pomegranate in that book is me ... Art is not such a big deal for me because it is never far from life."
>
> **Cai Gao,** the first Chinese illustrator to receive the Hans Christian Andersen Award











Top: Illustrations from Cai's work *How I Came to Be Me*. **Above left:** An illustration from Cai's work *Where the Moon Goes, I Go*. **Above right:** Another illustration from Cai's *Blazing City 1938*.

The story of *Bao'er* is adapted from a tale by Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) novelist Pu Songling's masterpiece *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio). Cai selected the only story featuring a child as the protagonist and reimagined it, focusing on a boy's love for his mother and his courage in confronting evil and darkness.

In Cai's book, when the boy focuses intensely, his eyes turn a clear blue, symbolizing his determination and insight. "Blue is the color of enchanting, clear water, with sunlight lingering deep inside," Cai explains. "Children's eyes are clear and innocent, allowing them to see through to the essence of things."

Like *Bao'er*, many of Cai's works are deeply rooted in Chinese folk traditions and classical literature.

The picture book *The Land of the Peach Blossom* is inspired by the classic essay and poem *The Peach Blossom Spring* by Tao Yuanming from the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), reflecting the Taoist vision of life. Published in 2001 by Fukuinkan Shoten Publishers in Japan, the book's first edition of 5,000 copies sold out within a month. In 2003, two illustrations from the book were selected for inclusion in Japanese sixth-graders' Chinese textbooks.

Tan Fengxia, a professor at Nanjing Normal University and a member of the 2026 Hans Christian Andersen Award jury, praised Cai's work as a powerful model for how Chinese stories can transcend borders.

"She has embraced Western artistic influences with an open mind, blending them into a visual language that is distinctly rooted in Chinese tradition, yet speaks across cultures," Tan says. "She crosses cultural barriers by touching on universal themes: the love for our children and the desire to offer them something bright."

"I love Chinese culture. I love every written character of the Chinese language," Cai says. "I hope the world can see more of the finest Chinese works and, through them, gain a better understanding of China."

Among the works that most impressed the HCA jury was the 2023 edition of *Blazing City 1938*, a wordless, black-and-white picture book created by Cai and her daughter Xiao Aozi, who is also a painter. Through the eyes of a little girl, the book revisits the Wenxi Fire, a devastating catastrophe in Changsha during the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45). The fire destroyed over 90 percent of the houses in Changsha, leaving the city in ruins.

Shereen Kreidieh, president of the HCA Jury, describes Cai's work as "amazing".

"With just two colors and no words, it tells a complete story of war, allowing any child anywhere in the world to have a feeling of what's happening," Kreidieh says.

With her books, Cai hopes to convey the Chinese people's love for peace, a message she believes is increasingly important in today's global context.

"Our picture books should serve as bridges of understanding, bringing more harmony to the world," she says.

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Chinese animation selected for prestigious film festival

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai
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The Chinese animated feature *Nobody* has been selected for the Annecy International Animation Film Festival's official feature film competition, one of the festival's most prestigious sections, organizers announced in late April.

The festival, which was established in 1960, is held annually in France and is globally recognized as the premier animation film festival.

The 2026 edition is scheduled to take place from June 21 to June 27.

Produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio and Shanghai Film Infinity, *Nobody*, or *Langlang Shan Xiao Yaoguai* in Chinese (The Little Monsters of Langlang Mountain) is a feature-length spin-off of the acclaimed animated short film anthology *Yao-Chinese Folktales*. It was released domestically on Aug 2 and achieved phenomenal success with a cumulative box office of 1.72 billion yuan ($252 million), setting a new all-time record for Chinese 2D animated films.

Written and directed by Yu Shui, the film follows a little pig monster, an outcast neglected by his boss, who inadvertently forms a grassroots counterfeit-pilgrimage team.

The group embarks on an absurd, self-styled journey to the West, hoping to receive immortality from Buddha. The film explores universal themes of family, friendship, growth, and dreams.

The competition section of the Annecy Festival is renowned for its stringent artistic standards and forward-looking industry vision, representing one of the highest benchmarks in global animation.

According to Shanghai Film Infinity, a subsidiary of Shanghai Film Group, the selection of the film is a significant milestone that not only marks another prominent showcase for Chinese animation artistry on the world stage but also opens a core channel to the global market, promising broader international attention and potential cooperation opportunities.

Following its domestic triumph, *Nobody* has begun its international release, opening in markets including Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and the North American countries.

Its overseas performance has been notably strong in Vietnam, where it has already entered the top five highest-grossing Chinese-language films of all time.

Nobody continues a historic connection between Chinese animation and the Annecy Festival that dates back to 1962, when *Tadpoles Looking for Mother*, one of the world's first ink-wash animated short films, produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio, amazed audiences with its unique techniques and won the Children's Film Award at Annecy.



A poster for the Chinese animation film *Nobody*.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

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CULTURE



From left: Pianist Zhang Haochen; violinist Lyu Siqing (left) and cellist Li-Wei Qin (center); and violinist Ning Feng are performing during the NCPA May Festival. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Mozart takes center stage at NCPA May Festival

Beijing's flagship chamber music event returns with a star-studded lineup, marking the composer's 270th anniversary with global collaborations, **Chen Nan** reports.

Every spring, the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing presents a grand celebration of chamber music — its annual NCPA May Festival.

Running until May 24, the festival is showcasing a diverse array of performances including new works, international ensembles, and the multifaceted forms of chamber music.

This year's festival is especially significant as it marks the 270th anniversary of the birth of Mozart. His works are being featured throughout the event, including at the opening concert last Friday.

Titled *Bows and Strings VI*, the concert saw an impressive ensemble of 10 distinguished artists, including renowned violinist Lyu Siqing, cellist Li-Wei Qin and clarinetist Wang Tao, joining forces with the China NCPA Orchestra under the baton of resident conductor Lai Jiajing.

Together, they performed several of Mozart's iconic masterpieces, including a groundbreaking version of his *Serenade in C Major, K 648*, newly adapted to include brass instruments and piano, which is a departure from traditional string arrangements. Referred to as "A Very Little Night Music", the serenade for two violins and bass is a previously unknown piece. Composed by Mozart when he was in his early teens, the piece dates back to the mid-to-late 1760s and consists of seven miniature movements for a string trio.

"This sense of collaboration and artistic exploration is at the heart of the NCPA May Festival, making it one of the most anticipated musical events of the year in China and beyond," said Lyu, the NCPA May Festival's artistic director, at the NCPA in Beijing on April 15. "With a diverse and star-studded lineup, the 2026 festival promises to be an unforgettable celebration of music, talent, and cultural exchange."



Beyond the opening concert, Lyu, who is also a leading performer at the festival, is presenting several more performances. On Monday, he collaborated with cellist Qin and pianist Chen Sa as a trio in a chamber music concert titled *Dawn and Echo in Vienna*, with music pieces such as Mozart's *Piano Trio in B-flat Major, K 502* and Franz Schubert's *Piano Trio No 2 in E-flat Major, Op 100 (D 929)*.

Then, on May 21, he will take the stage again with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in a symphonic performance, paying tribute to the grandeur of classical music with pieces including Tchaikovsky's *Polonaise*, an excerpt from *Eugene Onegin*, Act 3, Scene 1, Op 24, and Jean Sibelius' *Violin Concerto in D Minor, Op 47*.

The festival will also feature an outstanding lineup of international and Chinese soloists, including violinist Ning Feng, pianist Zhang Haochen, and renowned ensembles such as the Berlin Philharmonic Piano Quartet, Cappella Andrea Barca, the Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra, and the Hong Kong String Orchestra.

A highlight of the festival will be the performance by violinist Ning and his mentor, the esteemed German musician Antje Weithaas, who will perform alongside I Musici, which was founded in 1951 in Rome, Italy, and is one of the oldest active chamber music groups in the world. The duo will also join forces with the China NCPA Orchestra and conductor Lyu Jia for a performance of Mozart's *Symphony No 36 in C Major, K 425 (Linz)* on May 15, where Ning will take on the viola part, bridging the gap between violin and viola in a fascinating crossover.



Top: Violinist Lyu Siqing (third from right), the artistic director of the NCPA May Festival, announces this year's edition in Beijing on April 15. **Above:** The Berlin Philharmonic Piano Quartet will perform in Beijing on May 16.

For those who appreciate the richness of European chamber music, the festival offers an exciting opportunity to experience the Kodaly Quartet's 60th anniversary celebration, showcasing the unique flavors of Hungarian chamber music.

The Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra will bring a poetic touch to the festival with its program, embodying the exquisite aesthetics of European chamber music. Additionally, the China NCPA Orchestra will collaborate with pianist Zhang Haochen in a unique fusion of works by composer Chen Qigang and Mozart.

The festival will close with a touch of jazz featuring the legendary Grammy winner Kurt Elling, one of the world's foremost jazz vocalists.

Cellist Qin, who has participated in previous editions of the NCPA May Festival, underscored the significance of chamber music in a recent interview. He highlighted how chamber music offers a unique opportunity for musicians to express their artistry beyond solo performances.

"In chamber music, the cello often plays the 'heartbeat' role, providing rhythmic support," he said at the NCPA in Beijing on April 15. "At first, this may seem monotonous or even boring, but as I gained more experience, I came to appreciate the flexibility of chamber music, the way it allows multiple musicians to combine their voices into a rich, multilayered performance. It's like being both a lead character and a supporting role in a film, and that complexity brings something special to the audience."

In keeping with its community engagement, the festival will once again feature its public performances, bringing music into the heart of the city. These concerts will reach audiences in urban spaces, such as factories, campuses and public areas, providing an opportunity for frontline workers and local residents to experience the joy and warmth of music.

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Literature and learning bridge China and Greece

By **TAN YINGZI** and **DENG RUI** in Chongqing





Left: The 3rd Global Forum on Mutual Learning Among Civilizations began on April 16 at Southwest University in Chongqing.
Right: A Greek guest tries traditional Chinese painting under the guidance of a teacher at the event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The cultural ties between Greece and China are growing ever stronger, highlighted by a series of collaborative events and initiatives held in Southwest China's Chongqing recently to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the two countries' comprehensive strategic partnership.

Amid the buzz of these celebrations, Greek author and Chinese literature translator Dimitris Sotakis shared his excitement at the 3rd Global Forum on Mutual Learning Among Civilizations, held in mid-April. "We now have many possibilities for collaboration in China in the field of literature that I represent," Sotakis told China Daily.

He added that over the past year, his literary works have found a receptive audience in China, with his second book translated and published on the Chinese mainland. His invitations to major book fairs and events in China further underscore the growing interest in Greek literature.

"Contact with the Chinese language and its way of thinking also acts as a mirror for Greek. It forces us to reevaluate concepts we take for granted, to see our language not as something static, but as a dynamic system that evolves through encounters with differences. This interaction is not one-way, but a continuous dialogue that enriches both sides," he said, adding that there are still many significant contemporary Chinese writers whose works remain unknown in Greece, emphasizing the need for translation programs to bridge this gap.

Held from April 14 to 16 at the Center for Chinese and Greek Civilizations, also known as the Chinese KELKIP, at Southwest University in Chongqing, the forum brought together experts in the Greek language and culture from Greek universities and Chinese institutions with Greek studies departments across China, serving as a crucible of ideas and cultural exchange.

A highlight of the event was the launch of the Sino-Hellenic University Alliance for Mutual Learning Among Civilizations, which unites universities from both nations to foster educational exchange. This initiative promises to be a cornerstone for future scholarly collaboration.

The forum also saw the release of two book series aimed at enhancing mutual learning. One is the Contemporary Greek Legal Classics Translation Series — the first collection in China focused on Greek law. The other, the Documentary Series on Sino-Foreign Medical Exchanges Along the Silk Road, features Sino-Arab and Sino-Persian volumes.

Cui Yanqiang, director of the Chinese KELKIP, noted that the Greek law series was a collaborative effort between legal scholars and university professors from both countries.

In a video speech, Shahbaz Khan, director and representative of the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia, commended the center for its efforts to promote dialogue, educational exchange, and deeper understanding between cultures. "By bringing together two rich intellectual traditions, the center has created a meaningful platform for reflection and cooperation," he said.

The celebrations continued on April 18 with a salon in honor of World Greek Language Day. The Ambassador of Greece to China, Evgenios Kalpyris, awarded representatives of nine centers of Greek studies at Chinese universities for their outstanding contributions to promoting Greek studies in China. He highlighted the Greek language's 4,000-year history and its "undeniable global dynamism".

Greece established the Greek KELKIP in Athens in 2021, while Southwest University, with its strong background in humanities and philosophy, especially in Chinese and Greek civilizations, collaborated with other Chinese universities to set up the Chinese KELKIP two years later to engage in comprehensive cooperation with Greece.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/22/2026 12:27:49 PM

SPORTS

ICE HOCKEY





Above: Team China's young stars are jubilant after beating Estonia in a penalty shootout and claiming the silver medal at the International Ice Hockey Federation Men's World Championships Division I Group B tournament in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Tuesday. **Below:** China's Hou Yuyang celebrates scoring a goal during the match. XINHUA

CHINA CLAIMS HISTORIC SILVER

Young, all-Chinese roster reaches heights not seen in three decades

By **SUN XIAOCHEN**
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From having to rely on naturalized troops at its home Olympics to securing a silver medal at the worlds with an all-Chinese roster, China's men's ice hockey has come a long way over the past four years.

With gloves tossed in the air and the crowd on its feet roaring, pucksters in red and white collided in bear hugs, as the wild celebration at the Universiade Center Arena in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Tuesday sent a strong message to ice hockey's elite — the long-overdue rise of China's men's program is happening for real and, remarkably, on its own.

The elation was triggered by the host squad's 3-2 penalty shootout win (4-3 overall) over Estonia in its fifth and final round-robin game at the International Ice Hockey Federation Men's World Championships Division I Group B tournament to clinch a silver medal at the third-tier event in the IIHF Worlds system. It marked the Chinese men's best result since the current multi-division worlds format was adopted in 2001.

The awe-inspiring podium finish, witnessed by a rapturous home crowd, is expected to place Team China at 24th overall in IIHF's 2026 standings, after the completion of the top- and second-tier championships at the end of May, giving the country its highest-ever ranking in the traditionally Western-dominated sport since it claimed 20th place way back in 1994.

Team China's strong campaign at the six-nation Shenzhen tourney — eventually won by Estonia with four straight regulation wins, two more than the host — has produced a more profound boost, beyond just statistical feats, for the game domestically, given its dramatic shift of strategy over the past four years.

Rather than recruiting North American-born players with Chinese heritage, like the country did around the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, this current national program has put together a new breed of young talent all born and raised in China, yet nurturing their hockey prowess in overseas minor leagues, and mixed them up with the best of the domestic league to represent their nation on the international stage.

Ten of Team China's 23 players in Shenzhen are currently honing their game in overseas programs, such as the US college league, the Japan-based Asian league and Canada's Ontario Hockey League.

The untapped potential of this young cohort, and the camaraderie among them, have created a more united squad with greater pride in representing their home country than the naturalized Olympic squads of four years ago, where over half of China's men's and women's lineups were born either in the United States or Canada.

And, arguably, nobody has embodied the program's new approach more than China's teen prospect Wang Haoxi.



The 18-year-old, 1.96-meter Beijing native, who became the highest-selected Chinese player in NHL history after being picked by the San Jose Sharks at 33rd overall in the 2025 draft, lived up to his billing as the new face of Team China by winning the tournament's Best Defenseman award.

Wang, who goes by the name Simon in Canada where he plays in the OHL, made no secret of Team China's ambition, throwing down the gauntlet to the world's elite.

"No, it did not exceed our own expectations, because we know how good a team we are," Wang said after the penalty shootout victory over Estonia.

"Our team is very strong, and we fought our hardest in every game. If we hadn't needed overtime to beat Romania (in the second game), we could've secured the gold and the promotion," said Wang, who appeared in 57 games in the 2025-26 OHL season, recording 26 points between the Oshawa Generals and Niagara IceDogs.

Tying with Estonia on the total number of wins, Team China had to settle with a runner-up finish, three points shy of the European side, due to, as Wang pointed out, its two overtime wins.

With an upbringing and development path similar to Wang's, 17-year-old goalie Tu Yueran couldn't hold back his pride after making his senior international debut for Team China in Shenzhen, having stood out in Canada's minor program.

Tu's composure beyond his years and solid skills took over in the critical shootout as he denied three of Estonia's five attempts to help secure the win together with teammate Zheng Mingju, who sent the crowd into frenzy by scoring China's final and fifth penalty to close out the match.

"Being able to represent China is the best feeling in the world (for us). I am glad we got the job done," said Tu, who goes by the name Eric in Canada and, somewhat appropriately, has an image of the impenetrable Great Wall on the back of his helmet.

"To play for your country with so many people rallying behind you feels so different from playing for a club overseas," said Tu, who made 1035 saves representing the Calgary Hitmen in 45 games in the 2025-26 Western Hockey League season.

"Winning the game gave us a lot of confidence. We had that belief in the room already, and winning has just added to that."

China's head coach Perry Pearn, a Canadian former assistant coach with the NHL's Vancouver Canucks, said the trajectory of China's young core is fascinating.

"It's exciting, because we let some young players go (without being called up) that are pretty close to being here, who are playing pretty good junior hockey in North America," said the 74-year-old, who coached Canada's women's national team and Japan's men's squad before taking the China's men's team job in 2025.

"I don't think it will be long before they are ready to come here. Of course, Eric (Tu) and Simon Wang are pretty good kids from the standpoint of hockey in general. I think that really bodes well for the Chinese game."

BASKETBALL

Thunder strikes first against Lakers as Pistons down Cavs

The Oklahoma City Thunder overpowered LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers 108-90 on Tuesday to grab a 1-0 lead in their NBA Western Conference semifinal series.

A balanced offensive performance and steely defensive display from the reigning NBA champion were enough to seal victory over the depleted Lakers, which started brightly, but trailed for the final three quarters.

Chet Holmgren led the Thunder with 24 points and 12 rebounds, while reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Ajay Mitchell added 18 points apiece.

"We were a little choppy, a little rusty, but offensively we just stuck with it," Gilgeous-Alexander said, saluting a Thunder defense that restricted the Lakers to their lowest score in a playoff game since 2021.

"We just try to make people play outside their comfort zone, as simple as that," Gilgeous-Alexander said of the Thunder defense. "Whatever guys like to do, we like to take that away from them."

The commanding Thunder victory underscored the size of the task facing the fourth-seeded Lakers if they are to defy the odds and upset the champion in the best-of-seven series.

Oklahoma City completed a 4-0 regular-season sweep over the Lakers, winning each game by an average margin of 29.3 points.

Tuesday's series-opener at Oklahoma City's Paycom Center echoed the Thunder's regular-season dominance, with the champion pulling away down the stretch to score an emphatic win.

James, who had defied his 41 years to lead the Lakers to a surprise 4-2 upset of the Houston Rockets in the first round, led Los Angeles with 27 points in a losing effort.

Rui Hachimura added 18 points with Marcus Smart bagging 12 and Deandre Ayton 10.



Oklahoma City Thunder center Isaiah Hartenstein celebrates as fans react to his basket during a second-round NBA playoffs series game against the Los Angeles Lakers in Oklahoma on Tuesday. AP

Detroit quells late rally

In Tuesday's other playoff game, Cade Cunningham scored 23 points as the Detroit Pistons held off a second-half rally to beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 111-101 in their NBA Eastern Conference semifinal series opener.

The top-seeded Pistons looked to be cruising to a comfortable win after dominating in the first half and taking a 17-point lead in the third period.

But, a spirited Cleveland rally saw the Cavaliers close to within four points before Detroit finally pulled clear again in the fourth quarter.

Jalen Duren had three dunks, two rebounds and a block in a 67-second stretch to break open a tied game.

Cunningham was one of six Detroit players to finish in double figures, with Tobias Harris adding 20 points while Duncan Robinson bagged five three-pointers on his way to a 19-point haul at the Pistons' Little Caesars Arena.

Daniss Jenkins added 12 points from the bench with Ausar Thompson and Duren scoring 11 points apiece.

Donovan Mitchell led Cleveland with 23 points, including four three-pointers, while James Harden scored 22 points with eight rebounds and seven assists.

"It was a great team win — defending the ball, rebounding the ball," Cunningham told broadcaster NBC.

"We've got a great system in place. You've got somebody that will come in behind you whenever you get tired.

"But it's one win, we've got to come back and do it again."

Detroit had battled into the conference semifinals after coming back from 3-1 down to defeat Orlando 4-3 in the first round.

Cunningham said the Pistons are anxious to avoid a repeat.

"You've got to protect home court. We didn't do that in the last series, so we want to do that this series," Cunningham said.

"They want to come in and steal one, so we've got to do this again the day after tomorrow."

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