

High-level protection

Conservationists help to unravel mysteries of Tibetan antelopes

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PBOC governor calls for IMF quota reform

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Fallen bridge probe

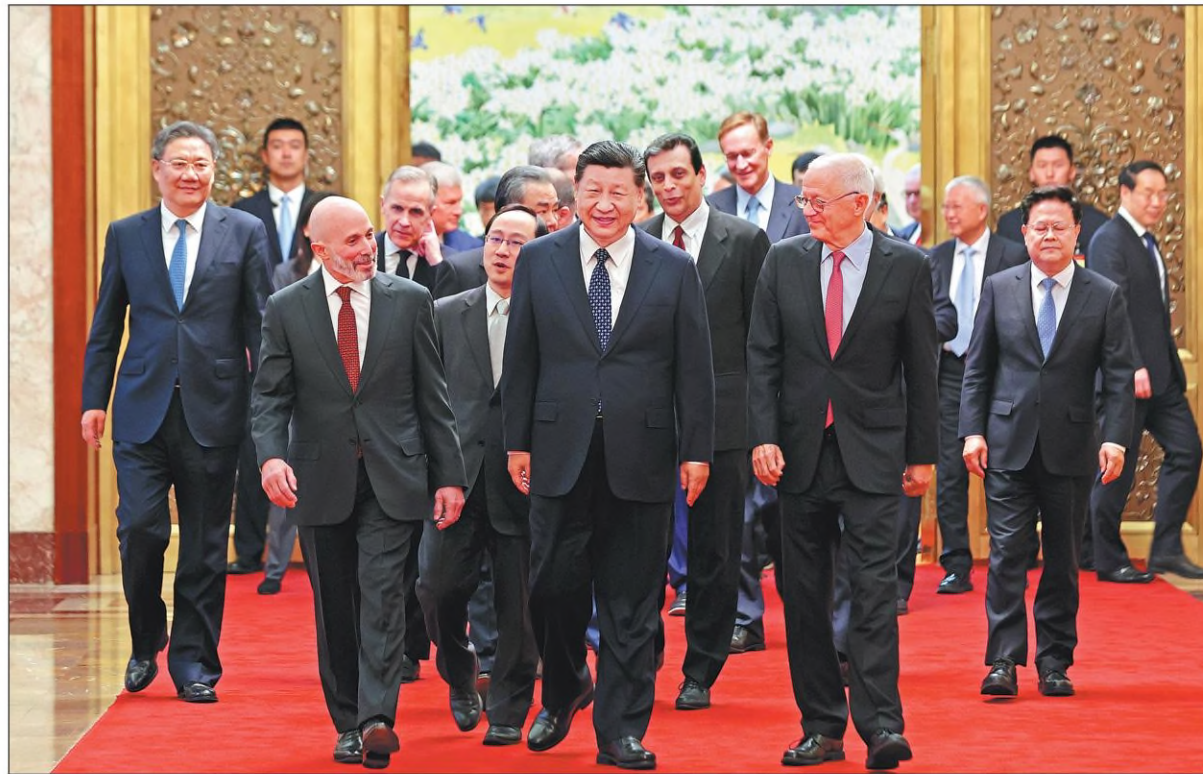
Senator: Anyone found liable must pay toward rebuilding

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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

## Xi: Economy in good shape



President Xi Jinping meets on Wednesday with representatives of the business, strategic and academic communities of the United States at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

### Common interests of China and US are increasing, president says

By CAO DESHENG caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese economy is healthy and sustainable, and China will consistently improve its business environment to provide broader development space for enterprises from various countries, including the United States, President Xi Jinping said on Wednesday.

He made the remarks during a meeting in Beijing with representatives from US business, strategic and academic communities.

China did not collapse as predicted by the "China collapse theory", nor will it peak as forecast by the "China peak theory", Xi told the US guests.

The meeting took place amid intensive meetings of senior Chinese officials with global business executives in the past weeks, and it is widely considered as a significant step China has taken to stabilize the expectations of foreign investors with regard to the Chinese market.

On China-US relations, Xi said that whether China and the US engage in cooperation or confrontation matters to the well-being of both peoples and the future of humanity. "The two countries' respective success presents an opportunity for each other. As long as both sides regard each other as partners, show mutual respect, coexist peacefully and pursue win-win cooperation,

China-US relations can get better." He talked about his meeting with US President Joe Biden in San Francisco in November, saying that the most important common understanding they reached was that China-US relations should stabilize and improve.

In line with the consensus reached by the two heads of state, working groups from both countries have maintained communications over the past months, and have made progress in fields such as politics, diplomacy, the economy, trade, finance, law enforcement, anti-drug cooperation, the fight against climate change and people-to-people exchanges.

Under the current circumstances, the common interests of China and the US are not diminishing but are increasing, Xi said, citing traditional fields such as the economy, trade and agriculture, and emerging areas including climate change and artificial intelligence.

Promoting the recovery of the world economy and addressing international and regional issues all require China and the US to coordinate and cooperate with each other, he added.

Xi urged the US to establish the right strategic perception about China, handle sensitive issues properly and promote the sustained, stable and healthy development of China-US relations.

China-US relations cannot go back to the old days, but they can embrace a brighter future, he said, urging the US to meet China halfway to explore the right way to get along with each other for a sus-

tained and stable relationship.

On the Chinese economy, the president said that the prospects for China's development are bright, and "we have confidence and determination about that".

China will consistently promote high-quality development and advance Chinese modernization, which will not only allow the Chinese people to enjoy a better life, but also make greater contributions to the sustainable development of the world, Xi said.

He reiterated China's commitment to reform and opening-up, saying that China's reform will not pause, and its opening-up will not stop.

He noted that the Chinese government is planning and implementing major measures to comprehensively deepen reform to build a world-class, market-oriented business environment that is governed by a sound legal framework.

Faced with the new situations and changes in China-US economic and trade relations in recent years, both sides should adhere to mutual respect, mutual benefits and consultation on an equal footing, act in accordance with market rules to expand and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, respect each other's development rights, and pursue win-win outcomes for both China and the US as well as the world, Xi said.

More US companies are welcome to participate in the joint building of the Belt and Road, participate in the China International Import Expo, and continue to "invest in China, deepen their presence in China, and achieve success in China", he added.

Evan G. Greenberg, chair of the

board of directors of the National Committee on US-China Relations, Stephen A. Schwarzman, chairman and CEO of Blackstone, Cristiano R. Amon, president and CEO of Qualcomm, Graham Allison, founding dean of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, and Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council, spoke at the meeting.

They noted that China's exceptional economic growth and transformation over the past decades speak to its strong resilience and vitality.

They expressed confidence that China will realize its development goals and contribute to a stronger, more integrated global economy.

Sharing close economic ties, the US and China can only develop and thrive in peaceful coexistence, and the Thucydides Trap — when a rising power causes fear in an established power, which escalates to conflict — is not inevitable, they said.

They said that US businesses applaud the measures that China has recently rolled out to further reform and open up, are optimistic about China's development prospects, will maintain their strong commitment to the Chinese market, and will pursue close and long-term cooperation with China.

The US business, strategic and academic communities support the US and China in bolstering exchanges and communication at all levels, enhancing mutual understanding, trust and cooperation, joining hands to address global challenges, and fostering a stable, sustainable and productive US-China relationship, they added.

## Severing of Sino-Dutch supply chains opposed

By XU WEI xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

China and the Netherlands highlighted their shared commitment to opposing the severing of industrial and supply chains as President Xi Jinping hosted visiting Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte in Beijing on Wednesday.

Xi told Rutte, who is on a two-day working visit to China, that any deliberate action to create barriers in science and technology and sever industrial and supply chains will only sow division and confrontation.

"The experience from history tells us economic globalization may face headwinds, but the general trend of history will not change."

"Decoupling or the severing of supply chains will only lead to a dead end, while openness and cooperation are the only choice on this planet," he said at the meeting.

Rutte said that decoupling and the severing of supply chains are not a policy option of the Dutch government, as any action that harms the development interests of China will backfire.

The meeting between the two leaders took place after Dutch companies faced pressure from the United States to cut off the supply of advanced chipmaking equipment to Chinese companies.

Xi stressed on Wednesday that the binary black-and-white men-

tality which supposes that one side must outcompete the other is long outdated.

A world of true security should feature deep integration and interdependence, he explained.

The Chinese people are entitled to the right of legitimate development, and no force can stand in the way of China's sci-tech progress, he added.

Xi assured the Dutch leader that China stands ready to expand imports of high-quality products from the Netherlands, and the nation welcomes more investment from Dutch companies.

He called upon the Netherlands to provide a fair and transparent business environment for Chinese companies.

The president called on both sides to actively advance traditional cooperation in agriculture, water management and energy, while exploring the potential for cooperation in sectors such as artificial intelligence, green transformation and the silver economy.

Xi expressed the hope that both sides should continue to adopt more measures to make it easier for the exchange of personnel, after China adopted a 15-day pilot visa-free policy for Dutch citizens, and to encourage exchanges in education, culture and at the people-to-people level.

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## WATER RESCUE TEAM SHARPENS ITS ICE-DIVING SKILLS

Little-heralded outfit braves depths of Beijing winter for intensive training

By XIN WEN xinwen@chinadaily.com.cn

The temperature gauge registers an unseasonably warm 5 C, yet the frozen expanse of water in northeastern Beijing feels significantly colder.

In the distance, the late January sky is clear and blue, and ice fishermen quietly tend to their lines. But the tranquillity is soon disrupted by the roar of a chain saw, which draws a small crowd of curious onlookers who circle a group of firefighters and their equipment.

One of the firefighters cuts a triangular hole in the 20-centimeter-thick sheet of ice and three others emerge from a tent dressed in



attire more suitable for a colder environment. They make their way toward the newly opened hole, located no more than 6 meters from the shore.

The firefighters are undergoing their annual training in ice diving, which usually takes place during the coldest time of the year in Beijing.

The training typically includes exercises such as ice-cave traversal and underwater searches.

See Diving, page 2

## Blocking the road



Protesting farmers dump a load of potatoes onto a main boulevard during a demonstration outside the European Council building in Brussels on Tuesday. Dozens of tractors sealed off streets around the European Union headquarters, where the 27 EU agriculture ministers were meeting to discuss the crisis in the sector that has led to months of demonstrations across the region. HARRY NAKOS / AP

## All factors point to nation's stable growth

The Western narrative of the so-called "China collapse theory" refreshed itself recently, although China achieved GDP of over 126 trillion yuan (\$17.4 trillion) and a growth rate of 5.2 percent in 2023.

Some Western media outlets, such as The Wall Street Journal, have continued in recent months rolling out reports against the most robust growth engine of the global economy, under headlines such as "China's economic pain worsens" to "What's wrong with China's economy". The Economist magazine has since August been concerned with "Why China's economy won't be fixed".

Despite Western disinformation, talk among some in the United



States about decoupling, some European Union "de-risking" and the imposition of numerous obstacles, China has succeeded in upgrading its industrial and supply chains, which has ultimately fostered emerging industries and future-oriented sectors, and promoted innovation and the digital economy.

Last year, China's sales of new energy vehicles reached 9.5 million, an increase of 37.9 percent year-on-year, and the turnover of technologi-

cal contracts grew 28.6 percent, according to data from the National Development and Reform Commission. Furthermore, National Energy Administration statistics showed that the nation's total consumption of electricity grew 6.7 percent year-on-year in 2023.

Lithium batteries, electric vehicles and photovoltaic products enhanced the nation's exports as well as the added value of strategic emerging industries, and were thus cited as the "new three" products during the two sessions, the annual gatherings held in Beijing this month of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies.

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Measures needed to counter bigger NATO presence in Asia-Pacific  
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## PAGE TWO



A firefighter undergoes ice-diving training in Miyun district, Beijing, in January. WANG ZICHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY



The ice layer, seen on the day of the firefighters' training, is about 20 centimeters thick.

WANG ZICHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY



A diver surfaces from the icy water after training in late January. WANG ZICHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Diving: Breaking the ice to save lives

From page 1

The firefighters belong to the Miyun Firefighting Water Rescue Team, a professional rescue outfit established in 2012 to meet the growing demand for aquatic rescue operations.

In June 2019, the Ministry of Emergency Management's Fire and Rescue Administration also established the National Water Rescue Beijing Brigade, to build upon the foundations put down by the Miyun team.

In China, there are now eight water rescue brigades similar to the one in Miyun district, which are comprised of hundreds of firefighters with expertise in such rescues. In recent years, they have participated in various operations during natural disasters including the 2021 Henan floods and the 2023 Beijing deluge.

### Cold comfort

The teams have largely remained out of the spotlight, and few people are aware of the dangers involved in the rescuers' work.

In northern China, the toughest rescues occur in winter. A person waiting to be rescued in the South China Sea can survive for around 30 hours, but during the depths of a northern winter they may lose consciousness in just 20 minutes.

"Our mission is to rescue people trapped in the water, but in most cases their vital signs are absent when we find them," said Zheng Haiyang, a 26-year-old firefighter from Dezhou, Shandong province, who has trained as a water rescuer with the Miyun team for about eight years.

Every winter, there are about five incidents in Beijing requiring ice-diving rescues.

"We can't use common sense to understand why people fall through the ice," said Zheng. "On some occasions, people in danger of drowning after falling into the water may have simply wanted to take a shortcut across an ice surface or to retrieve some items from where they were ice fishing."

The team of 16 firefighters is always in a race against time and has implemented a 24-hour on-call system.

"The time window for such rescue operations is limited," said Zheng. "From receiving the alarm to dispatching our firefighting team to the rescue site, at least 15 minutes are required. A person cannot endure that long in the frigid waters of Beijing."

In 2012, a practical diving skills training program was introduced to enhance the professional skills of the team's firefighters.

The Beijing Municipal Public Security Fire Corps, which became the Beijing Fire Rescue

Corps in 2018 as part of a reshuffle, also supplied high-quality equipment to the diving firefighters.

### Buddy system

Ice-diving rescue operations require up to five people working together to ensure safe procedures. A pair of divers is supported by two safety buddies on the ice as well as an emergency backup diver. A large tent is also pitched near the ice hole to keep the divers warm after they leave the water.

Zhao Qiang, the rescue team's deputy head and chief diving instructor, said the ice hole is triangular as the shape makes it easier for the divers to exit the water.

"However, it is still a challenging task, and the divers require assistance from their safety buddies to navigate the slippery ice surrounding the hole," he said.

Zhao said ice diving is more dangerous than free diving in the sea, but it can be a safe operation if procedures are properly followed.

The primary danger in ice diving is the submerged diver not being able to locate the exit hole.

"In the summer, we divers can naturally surface from any water body," Zhao explained. "However, during the cold of winter, if we get lost under the ice or the tank runs out of compressed air, the situation becomes perilous due to the enclosed nature of the space under the ice. The only escape from such danger is to find the triangular ice hole."

Hypothermia — long exposure to cold that causes body temperature to dangerously drop — is another major threat to ice divers. However, this risk has been greatly reduced thanks to the use of dry diving suits.

Zhao said that unlike wet suits, which allow water to enter and be trapped and heated by the body's temperature, a dry suit prevents any water from getting in. Compressed air is pumped into the suit to create a thin layer of air that insulates the diver from the cold.

"We have a dozen sets of dry suits," Zhao said, adding that he recommends to the divers they also wear cotton clothing under their suits to stay warmer.

"Otherwise, if the divers don't wear thermal clothing, the cold will reach their bodies more quickly," he said.

Before the divers enter the icy water, the chief instructor usually conducts a final check of all the diving equipment. He inspects the guide ropes for the divers and notes down all the pre-dive checks. Once these operations are completed, the divers can go under the ice.

At the next stage, two divers in diving suits loaded with equipment, move to the ice hole and with the help of two of their teammates slide into the water.

After inserting their mouthpieces, the divers slowly submerge beneath the icy surface.



A member of the Miyun Firefighting Water Rescue Team wears a heavy diving outfit. WANG ZICHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

"The visibility of the water in winter is the best of all the seasons," said Zhao. "The activities of microorganisms, algae and fish in cold water are not that frequent," he said, adding there is also less plankton, which means the water is not as muddy.

"In addition, beneath the ice ceiling the sunlight filters down and is gently diffused to bathe the scene in a soft and even glow of light," he said.

### 'Talking' underwater

Han Hongliang, a 29-year-old senior diver from Suqian, Jiangsu province, was responsible for ice safety during this year's ice-diving training session in northeastern Beijing. He said that a drag signal made via a yellow hemp rope is the most important "language" used by ice divers in deep water.

"For instance, when I pull the rope slightly, I'm signaling to the diver to check if everything is OK underwater. When the diver tugs the rope in response, I understand that everything is going well beneath the ice," he said.

"However, if the diver continuously pulls the rope, it indicates that there may be an underwater emergency. This suggests that the diver is experiencing difficulties or facing an emergency from which they cannot easily escape."

Part of the divers' training involves each team member becoming aware of their responsibilities, Han said.

"When two of our teammates are diving, they are each secured by a yellow hemp rope to their signal buddies on the ice's surface, who manage the line. The third diver serves as a standby diver, fully suited up and ready to intervene at any sign of trouble from below."

This simple yet effective system of rope signals has become a vital means of communication between the divers and their colleagues on the ice.

Zhao, the chief diving instructor, said the duration of each ice-diving training session is meticulously calculated to ensure the safety and health of every diver.

"Generally speaking, underwater operations typically last about 20 minutes," said Zhao. "If a diver has not resurfaced after this time under the ice, the signal firefighter will use rope tugs to inquire about the diver's physical condition, sending him a signal and asking if he feels all right underwater."

"The diver can pull back on the rope to indicate that he is fine," he said. "But only the diver himself truly knows what is exactly taking place underwater."

All diving equipment must be treated with antifreeze to ensure it works in icy water.

"Unexpected things happen during ice diving," Zhao said. "Your air supply might be cut off due to your regulator freezing in the cold water, or you could get the shivers, or you might become entangled in a large fishing net and struggle to free yourself."

"In our training process, we simulate all possible extreme conditions that come to mind, ensuring that our firefighters will not panic when they dive to save people in real situations and have ways to deal with the complications."

During this year's training session, Lu Bingxin, 25, from Tai'an, Shandong, in addition to carrying a 15-kilogram air tank, was weighted down with 12 kg of lead to help offset the buoyancy of his suit.

He was teamed with diver Hu Yazhuo, 29, from Shenyang, Liaoning province, and they both slid through the ice hole into the water. The firefighters who acted as signal men held the ropes connected to them tightly as they went in search of the target object.

Lu and Hu later said rope signals were constantly made during the search and when they were trying to return to the exit hole.

### Providing answers

Despite all the meticulous preparation, engaging in a diving rescue operation for the first time is far different from the training process.

Han clearly remembers his first rescue operation when he had to dive 18 meters to rescue someone.

"I was very scared the first time I went into the water for a mission. Though my former instructor was diving with me, I couldn't stop clenching my fists and gripping the rope," he said. "It felt like the veins on the back of my hands were bulging, and I was worried that my lungs would collapse because we dived quite deep."

Thankfully, his instructor gestured for him to relax. "Suddenly I calmed down and began to swim slowly in search of the person needing rescue," Han recalled.

Unlike on land, underwater firefighters have no solid support. The longer they stay submerged, the more their bodies can stiffen, potentially leading to muscle fatigue.

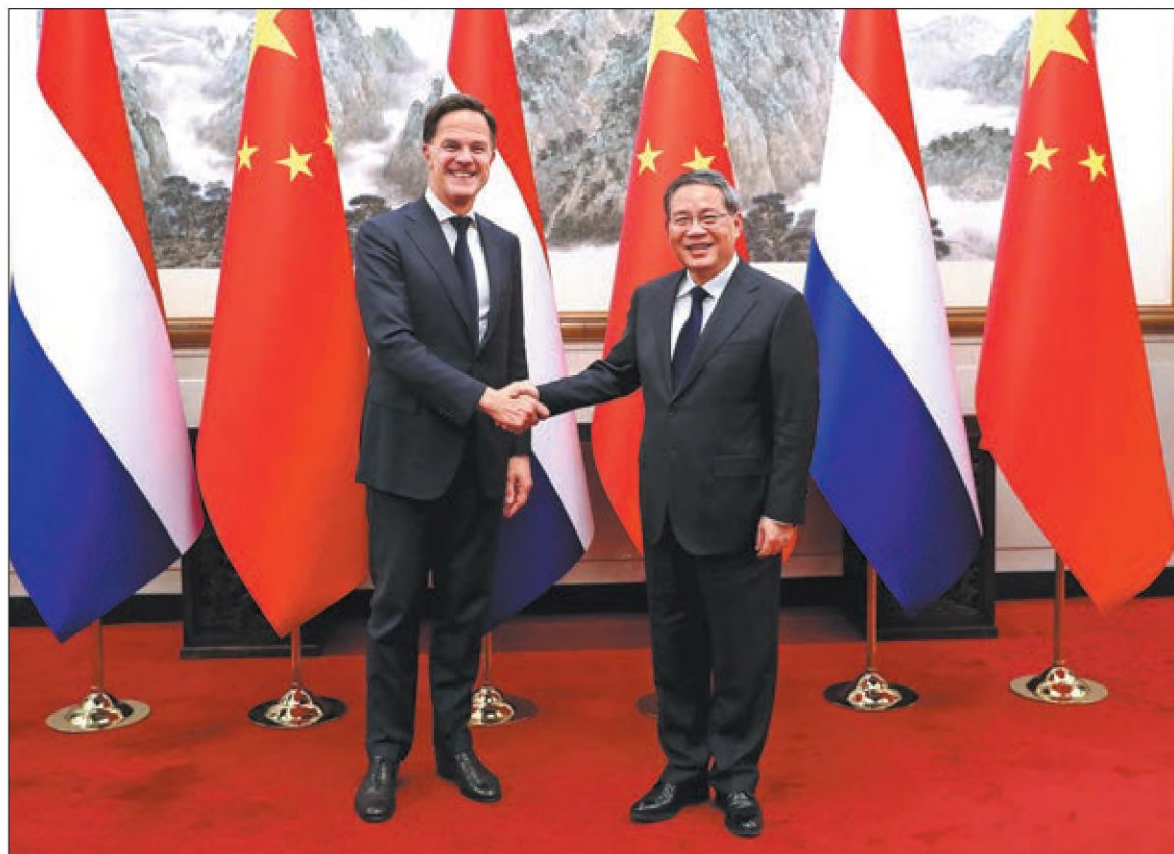
Despite the complexity and variability of the underwater environment, and the need to master techniques related to scuba and ice diving, Zhao said saving lives is the top priority on every mission.

"Many Chinese people believe in the importance of seeing a loved one again, regardless of whether they are alive or dead," said Zhao. "In every rescue mission, our utmost effort is to provide answers to the families of the victims, and that's what we strive to achieve."



A firefighter enters the water at the ice-diving training site in Miyun, Beijing, in January. WANG ZICHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS



Premier Li Qiang meets with visiting Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Wednesday at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing.  
ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

## Meeting: Collaboration called mainstream of Sino-EU ties

From page 1

Rutte stressed that his country values its friendly relations with China, saying that his government stands ready to deepen the partnership, better facilitate the exchange of personnel and enhance cooperation in the economy, trade and cutting carbon emissions.

According to the Foreign Ministry, the nation's imports from the Netherlands grew 35.1 percent on a yearly basis in 2023.

China is the second-largest trading partner of the Netherlands, while the European country is China's second-largest trading partner in the European Union.

Premier Li Qiang, who also met with the Dutch leader on Wednesday, said that both sides should expand the scale of economic and trade cooperation and tap into the potential for collaboration in fields such as artificial intelligence and green transformation.

China has always believed that

cooperation is the mainstream for ties with the EU, and partnership is the most correct orientation for China-EU relations, he said.

Li urged the EU to adopt a prudent stance with regard to restrictive measures in trade or using trade relief measures.

Rutte's itinerary in Beijing included a dialogue with students at Peking University on Wednesday morning and a trip to the capital's traditional alleyways.

Ding Chun, director of the Center

for European Studies at Fudan University, said that Rutte's trip to China will help stabilize trade and economic ties between the two major economies.

He said the Dutch leader has displayed a pragmatic attitude toward enhancing bilateral cooperation, especially in speaking out against decoupling from China.

"It is in the interests of both China and the Netherlands to seek closer partnerships, instead of decoupling or cutting off supply chains," he said.

## Economy on track to grow steadily, experts say

By OUYANG SHIJIA

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China will continue to remain a top contributor to global economic growth in 2024 on the back of its robust economic recovery, participants attending the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 said on Wednesday.

The forum, which is being held in Boao, Hainan province, started on Tuesday and runs through Friday.

Dismissing speculation that China's economy is peaking, the participants said the country is on track to achieve steady and sustainable growth in the next few years, fueled by its accelerated pace of economic transformation as well as intensified efforts to develop new quality productive forces and expand high-standard opening-up.

Justin Yifu Lin, dean of Peking University's Institute of New Structural Economics, said he believes that the Chinese economy will expand by over 5 percent this year if the government steps up policy support and deepens reforms to foster new growth drivers and upgrade traditional industries. "China will remain the primary driver of global economic growth," he added.

Huang Yiping, dean of Peking

China will remain the primary driver of global economic growth."

Justin Yifu Lin, dean of Peking University's Institute of New Structural Economics

University's National School of Development, said China's 2024 annual growth target of around 5 percent "is achievable".

"China's key economic indicators in the first two months were probably slightly better than expected," he said. "The economy is relatively stable. We might see some support for economic growth going forward with some hope of further improvement."

Figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics show that the country's industrial output in January and February grew 7 percent year-on-year after a 6.8 percent rise in December, and fixed-asset investment increased 4.2 percent year-on-year during the January-February period.

Despite downward pressures and challenges such as issues surrounding the real estate sector and

local government debt, Huang said the Chinese economy may continue to improve this year as the country is set to expand its fiscal spending, and a soft landing of the United States economy will also be positive for the external environment and exports.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of consultancy Roland Berger, expressed strong optimism about China's economic prospects, stating that the "fundamentals of the Chinese economy are very strong".

Dismissing speculation that the Chinese economy is showing signs of peaking, he said the Chinese economy is expanding at a steady pace.

"The old China stories of the past — low labor costs, relatively few added-value products, massive exports and massive fixed asset investments in infrastructure building fueling the economy — are gone," he said. "The new China story relies on advanced manufacturing, decarbonization, increasing consumption and the services economy."

Looking into the longer term, he said he sees huge growth potential in the Chinese economy given its large middle-income segment and its steady economic transformation process.

"I think China plays a very important role in the world economy. Last year, China contributed about 30 percent of economic growth globally," said Carl Fey, professor of strategy at BI Norwegian Business School.

Fey highlighted the marked shift in China's exports of the high-tech "new three" products — photovoltaics, lithium-ion batteries and new energy vehicles — saying that the country has made considerable progress in terms of boosting innovation and high-tech sectors.

Official data reflects the marked shift with exports of the high-tech "new three" products witnessing substantial growth. Exports of the "new three" grew by nearly 30 percent last year, according to the General Administration of Customs.

Fey praised the country's intensified efforts to foster the development of new quality productive forces, saying that those moves will help promote sustainability and high quality in the long run.

When it comes to concerns about the stability of the Chinese economy, he said the government has adopted very good policies to deal with issues that may hinder development.

"I think China will probably meet its (around) 5 percent growth target this year," he added.

## China, Sri Lanka vow to enhance BRI cooperation

Xi, Gunawardena agree to boost partnership for better logistics, clean energy and tourism

By MO JINGXI

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President Xi Jinping and visiting Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena spoke highly of the Port City Colombo and Hambantota Port projects in Sri Lanka, and agreed to keep promoting the Belt and Road cooperation between the two countries as they held a meeting on Wednesday in Beijing.

Noting that China and Sri Lanka boast time-honored friendship, Xi said it is in line with the fundamental interests and common aspirations of the two peoples to consolidate and further develop bilateral relations.

China is ready to work with the South Asian country to cement political mutual trust, strengthen sharing of experiences on state governance and expand practical cooperation, among other things, he said.

Xi called on both countries to make concerted efforts to deepen cooperation on logistics, energy and industry. He also urged the countries to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in fields such as the digital economy, green economy, clean energy, cultural tourism and marine economy.

He said that China will keep expanding its imports of high-quality and distinctive products from Sri Lanka and encourage Chinese enterprises to invest and start businesses in that country. It is hoped that Sri Lanka will provide a fair and transparent business environment, he said.

Xi said that China is willing to strengthen cooperation with Sri Lanka in poverty alleviation in rural areas, and assist the country in achieving its economic transformation and upgrading as well as sustainable development.

He added that China will continue to provide support for Sri Lanka's socioeconomic development as long as its ability permits.

After Sri Lanka suffered its worst economic and political crisis in 2022, the Chinese government announced 500 million yuan (\$69 million) worth of emergency humanitarian assistance to the country that year. It was the largest financial aid Sri Lanka received at the time.

Gunawardena, who started his six-day visit to China on Monday, said that Sri Lanka will not forget that China has always extended a helping hand in a timely manner when his country has faced difficulties. The two countries are bound together by a shared destiny in times of adversity, he said.

Port City Colombo and the Hambantota Port, which are flagship projects under the Belt and Road cooperation framework, have greatly boosted Sri Lanka's socioeconomic development, as well as the overall development of the region, Gunawardena said.

Sri Lanka will continue to work with China to promote the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, deepen bilateral friendship, and expand cooperation in trade and economy, education, tourism and poverty relief, he said.

Sri Lanka will also strengthen close communication and coordination with China on a multilateral level, and push for building a community with a shared future for Asia as well as the humankind, he added.

Before Gunawardena assumed his current office in July 2022, he held several Cabinet positions in Sri Lanka including minister of transport and minister of foreign affairs.

In August last year, he made a visit to China and attended the seventh China-South Asia Expo in Kunming, Yunnan province.

## Stamp of approval



Tony Estanguet (left), president of the Paris 2024 Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Amelie Oudea-Castera, the French sports, Olympic and Paralympic Games minister and Philippe Wahl, French group La Poste CEO, unveil the official stamp for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games during a presentation at the Musee de la Poste in Paris, France, on Tuesday. GONZALO FUENTES/REUTERS

## Growth: GDP target to permit reasonable, moderate social progress

From page 1

The Government Work Report delivered during the two sessions announced China's economic targets for 2024, projecting that GDP will grow around 5 percent, the consumer price index will rise about 3 percent, over 12 million new urban jobs will be created, grain output will reach 650 million metric tons, energy consumption will stand at 2.5 percent per unit of GDP, and the ratio of deficit to GDP will be 3 percent. These are all achievable, judging from the momentum so far this year.

By announcing the economic achievements and accomplished targets of 2023 and the projected goals for 2024, Chinese policymakers

have decoded the real essence of the nation's macro economy, mainly comprising diversification, digitalization, modernization, qualitative industrialization and openness.

Critical statistical economic analysis indicates that 5 percent GDP growth for 2024 is achievable. Europe's Airbus, French multinational software company Dassault Systems and Germany's Bayer highly appreciated China's GDP targets in 2023 and 2024, vividly reflecting the world's confidence in the Chinese economy despite meaningless statements and misinformation by some Western media outlets.

Evidently a GDP growth target of around 5 percent will permit reasonable and moderate social progress through sustained momen-

tum, qualitative industrialization and consumer confidence.

The two sessions could also be cited as a true reflection of economic transparency, greater social and economic integration, and consolidation of fiscal and monetary targets, and they highlighted the strategic importance of new quality productive forces and new drivers of China's sustainable economy, especially scientific and technological innovations.

China has made technological breakthroughs in quantum computing technology, integrated circuits, artificial intelligence, biomedicine and new energy sectors, and the country's aforementioned "new three" products are expected to maintain robust

growth in coming years, which would contribute to achieving the economic targets.

The new forces, coupled with expansion of domestic demand, promotion of big data and the launch of an AI-plus initiative, will give further scope, utility and performance to Chinese growth. These new factors will also help to shift the nation's economic structure from low-cost manufacturing to high-value services.

China's economic structural transformation, green and low-carbon elements, and social and market improvements all showed its real economic strength.

The policymakers of China are also giving more attention to investment in new urbanization

and rural vitalization, education, food security and energy security.

Moreover, as Premier Li Qiang told the China Development Forum in Beijing on Sunday, China is committed to expanding opening-up, which will create more opportunities for the rest of the world. Global investors should cheer again for the commitment.

Minister of Industry and Information Technology Jin Zhuanglong told the forum on Monday that the country will implement measures regarding the complete removal of restrictions on foreign investments in China's manufacturing sector.

It is also hoped that market access to the services sectors, such as finance, telecommunications and healthcare, will also be widened.

Thus, contrary to what Western media are suggesting, all factors point to strong Chinese economic growth that will remain stable, sustainable and resilient.

Despite a recent claim in The Wall Street Journal that "China's economic model is crumbling", the effective and sustainable Chinese system is commendable in overall scientific decision-making, management of risks, market regulation, sound economic performance, and democratic social and economic governance, as well as featuring win-win connectivity with related economies elsewhere.

The author is executive director of the Center for South Asia and International Studies in Islamabad, and director of the Global Development and Connectivity Institute in Islamabad. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

# CHINA

**Editor's note:** Thursday marks the 65th anniversary of the emancipation of serfs in the Xizang autonomous region, when democratic reform in 1959 ended feudal serfdom and freed some 1 million serfs that accounted for more than 90 percent of the region's population. This page is dedicated to showing the livelihood improvements of Tibetan people living on the plateau.



Workers assemble and inspect pressure cookers at Xizang Shangchu Cooking Utensils Technology in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, in October. PHOTOS BY PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

By PALDEN NYIMA and DAQIONG in Lhasa

## Self-developed cooker relieves high-altitude pressure in Xizang

Free, subsidized provision of tailor-made cooking utensils a display of region's effort to improve the livelihoods of residents

After a video of a pressure cooker exploding went viral in May 2022, authorities in Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region, decided to take action.

Xizang is commonly referred to as "The roof of the world" due to it being located on the world's highest plateau with an average altitude of 4,000 meters above sea level. Due to this high altitude, the air is thinner with less oxygen, so cooking takes longer. As a result, pressure cookers are often relied upon for faster, more convenient and safer food preparation.

Recognizing the impact of this issue on the lives of plateau residents, the government of the autonomous region launched an initiative focusing on the research, production and operation of a series of multifunctional cooking utensils designed specifically for the plateau region.

During an inspection of the region's department of economy and information technology in 2022, Wang Junzheng, Xizang Party secretary, emphasized the importance of developing and promoting pressure cooker products tailored to the plateau's unique conditions.

To address the challenges, the department collaborated with leading domestic cooking utensil enterprises. Within just three months, their joint efforts resulted in the development of a series of 14 multifunctional cooking utensil products specifically designed for the plateau region. The team applied for 18 patents for their innovative designs.

Xizang Shangchu Cooking Utensils Technology, established in 2022 with an investment of 40 million yuan (\$5.5 million), was the first company to produce high-altitude multifunctional cooking utensils.

With seven production lines, the company has an annual production capacity of 1 million high-altitude multifunctional pressure cookers.

"The establishment of the company provides residents with cooking utensil options more suitable for high-altitude environments, offering new possibilities for addressing high-altitude cooking challenges," said Gao Fushuai, a manager at the company.



**Left and lower right:** Residents use Xizang-made pressure cookers in Nyanrong county, Xizang autonomous region, in March last year. PHOTOS BY PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY **Upper right:** Pressure cookers await packaging at Xizang Shangchu Cooking Utensil Technology in Lhasa. LI ZHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

"This initiative also helps drive the economic development of the Xizang region and provides residents with more convenient and efficient cooking tools, contributing to the improvement of people's living standards," he said.

Gao said the company produces an average of 2,000 plateau pressure cookers a day and around



50,000 a month, and has sold more than 700,000 in total.

The government has provided thousands of these pressure cookers free of charge or heavily dis-

counted to residents.

"Thanks to the subsidies, our villagers could buy the pressure cookers for only 100 yuan last year, while it would cost nearly 900 yuan

if bought in a regular store," said Yeshe Drolma.

"Due to the high altitude, low air pressure and low boiling point in Xizang, even with a strong fire, the water temperature only reaches around 80 C. Therefore, a good pressure cooker is an essential cooking utensil for the local population," she said.

"This pressure cooker is safer, more convenient and practical compared to the traditional pressure cookers we have been using for decades," she said, adding she is very grateful to the government for persuading the enterprise to produce such a good pot for local residents.

With an average altitude upward of 4,000 meters, Nagchu city is one of the harshest areas in the region in terms of living environment.

"With the new high-altitude multifunctional pressure cooker, the yak meat we cooked in this pot is tender and delicious," Zomtsa, a woman from a herding family in Nyanrong county of Nagchu, was quoted as saying by Xinhua News Agency.

According to Xinhua, official statistics from the regional department of economy and information technology show nearly 500,000 households in Xizang have started using locally produced high-altitude cooking utensils, benefiting nearly a million people.

The Xizang-made pressure cooker is just the tip of the iceberg for the region in terms of the efforts that have been made to improve people's livelihoods.

The regional government's efforts and investment in lifting social welfare go far beyond the support for making cooking utensils. According to the region's latest government work report, 12.14 billion yuan will be allocated to implement 21 practical measures to make people's lives better this year.

The work report shows subsidies will be raised for students, basic medical insurance, elderly care and disabled services and border residents. Government spending will also go to grassroots heating, high-altitude oxygen supply, the optimization of people's dietary structure and a pilot forest insurance program.

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## Plucky young graduate hits right note with Tibetan guitar business

By PALDEN NYIMA and DAQIONG in Lhasa

Many young Tibetan college graduates long for a stable job in the public sector after graduation, but Samdrub Norbu is an exception. The 23-year-old founder of Yangchak Art has been running a Tibetan guitar business for more than half a year since getting his degree from Tibet University last year.

Samdrub Norbu, born to a Tibetan family in Lhokha, dubbed as the birthplace of the Tibetan people and a cradle of Tibetan civilization in the Xizang autonomous region, is captivated by Tibetan culture.

He has a distinctive dual motive: earning a profit while preserving Tibetan musical instrument culture.

"The Tibetan guitar is what I love. That's why I chose this business," Samdrub Norbu said. "I don't know what the results will be in the future, but I am happy every day about what I have been trying so far, and I don't feel tired at all even

though I am busy all the time."

As a college student, he majored in music and had the opportunity to learn piano and the Tibetan guitar — or *dranyan* in the Tibetan language. During this period, he apprenticed with one of his music teachers, Jamyang, and also learned from his classmates, especially those from the region's Ngari prefecture, which is famous for the Tibetan guitar. Since then, the guitar has become one of his best friends in life, and it almost never leaves his side.

Despite finally achieving success, Samdrub Norbu's business activities in Tibetan instruments got off to a shaky start. While still studying in college three years ago, he opened a shop in his home county selling musical instruments.

However, the business failed and he lost almost 500,000 yuan (\$69,000), which had a huge impact on him and his family.

"The most pain I suffered while having difficulties was not physical, but mental," he said. During his darkest days, his relatives — apart



**Left:** Samdrub Norbu tunes a Tibetan guitar — or *dranyan* in the Tibetan language — in his shop in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, on March 13. **Right:** Tencho, a staff member at Samdrub Norbu's Tibetan guitar company, strings a guitar. PHOTOS BY PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

from his supportive mother and father — friends and even his girlfriend, abandoned him.

Despite the failure and setbacks in life, his strong determination to



fulfill his dream emboldened him once more and supported him in the success of running the same business again after his graduation.

According to him, the majority of his classmates chose to find stable jobs in the government, with a few also starting their own businesses, selling clothing, coffee and local products.

In just a few months since opening the first shop in Lhasa last year, his business has already expanded, with a second shop opening in Lhasa four months ago. The number of staff in his workshop has grown to 10.

Besides selling various Tibetan guitars, he also operates a workshop to produce them himself and runs Tibetan guitar learning courses for beginners.

The Xizang government has been actively encouraging young entrepreneurs like Samdrub Norbu to start their own businesses and has implemented a series of support policies.

Samdrub Norbu has yet to take advantage of these policies but plans to do so in the future.

He said the government provides a startup fund of 60,000 yuan for each college student

entrepreneur if they meet the requirements. The support also includes subsidies for rent, water and electricity bills.

"My business is good now. I can pay the salary of 10 workers, and I am able to manage the normal operation of the business so far, and therefore, I am pleased with my current situation," he said.

Samdrub Norbu's dream goes beyond running Tibetan guitar workshops. He aims to found an art school in the future.

"Along with the growth of society and the improvement in people's livelihoods, I believe more parents in the region will send their children to learn arts. Therefore, I think a good art school is essential," he said.

"Like the Tibetan saying, 'There is no room for sorrow in a place where one can find music and dancing,' I believe what I have been doing can bring happiness to others."

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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.

# PLATEAU SPECIES PROTECTED

Tibetan antelopes are a unique species related to goats and sheep that are found exclusively on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The efforts of conservationists have helped unravel some of the mysteries of the antelopes and shelter them from threats. **Yan Dongjie** reports.

## THREATS

Tibetan antelopes face a variety of threats such as:

- Being poached for their fur
- Human disturbance and climate change
- Predators like lynx, snow leopards and wolves

During the 1980s and 1990s, the fur of Tibetan antelopes became extremely popular as a material for shawls. Each shawl required the pelts of five Tibetan antelopes.



## SIZE

The Tibetan antelope has a body length of 1.2-1.4 meters, a tail length of 14-16 centimeters, a shoulder height of 65-70 cm, and a weight of 45-60 kilograms.

## HORNS

Males have thin, black horns that extend almost vertically from the top of the head, generally measuring around 60 cm in length, with the longest recorded at 72.4 cm.

Males and females only come together in the mating season. Males challenge each other to determine dominance and create groups of 10 to 20 females with whom they mate.

**W**u Xiaomin is the first scientist in China to conduct scientific investigations into the summer birthing grounds of Tibetan antelopes. Over the past decade, he has traveled to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau many times, gradually unraveling the mystery of Tibetan antelope migration.

The Tibetan antelope is listed as a first-class protected wild animal in China and was classified as near threatened in the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species in 2016.

Excessive hunting, human activities and habitat changes have posed threats to the birthing and migration of Tibetan antelopes, which led to a rapid decline in their population. However, over the past few years, the situation has been changing.

Wu, now a senior expert at the Shaanxi Institute of Zoology of Shaanxi province, explained that as a result of a series of conservation measures implemented for Tibetan antelope habitats, their population has steadily increased. As of last year, the population of Tibetan antelopes in China exceeded 300,000, with the largest population found in the Changtang area, reaching 200,000.

**EXTINCTION RISK**  
International Union for Conservation of Nature classification

← Less risk → Most risk →

LC NT VU EN CR EW EX

Near Threatened Extinct

In 2016 they were reclassified on the IUCN Red List due to the increased population.

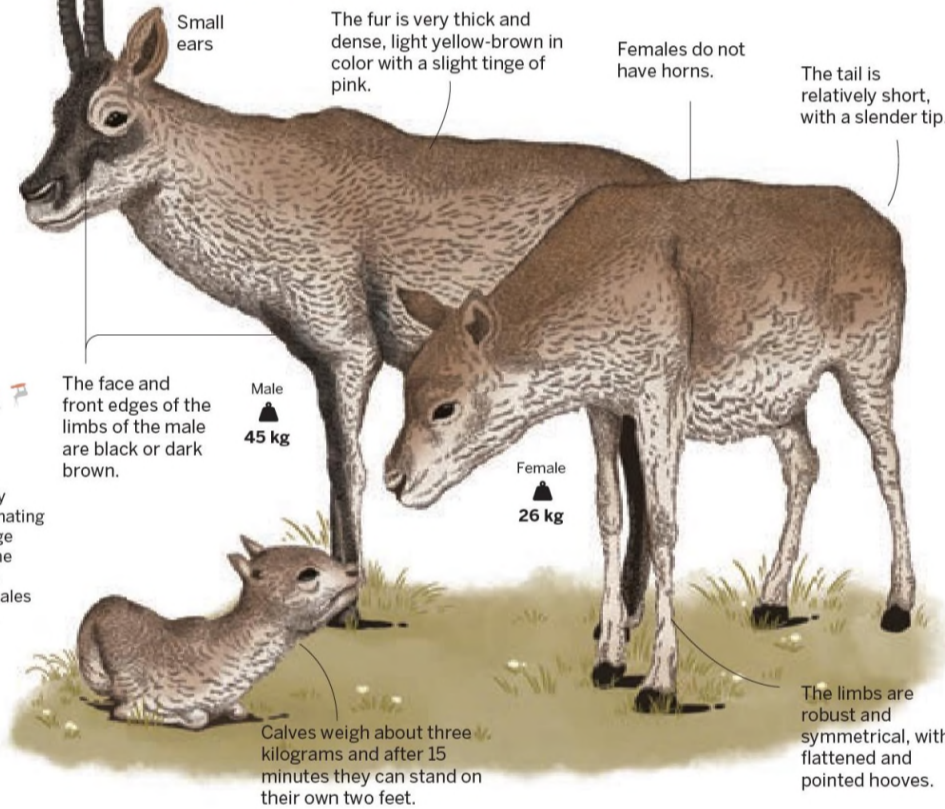
## MONITORING

As a result of a series of conservation measures aimed at the Tibetan antelope population, their habitat and genetic diversity, the population has steadily increased.



- Monitoring stations along the migration route assist with safe passage
- Traffic control and ban on car horns
- Teams patrol the area several times a month

## ANATOMY AND BEHAVIOR



They can reach speeds of up to **80 km per hour**

Cheetahs can reach up to 120 km per hour

## MIGRATION JOURNEY TO GIVE BIRTH

The mating period for Tibetan antelopes runs from mid-November to mid-December each year, and the young are born from mid-June to early July the following year.

On the journey to give birth, herds of female antelopes make one of the most extensive migratory treks from Xinjiang, Xizang and Qinghai to Zhuonai Lake to give birth. They spend half a month there and then return with their calves to where they normally graze in the Changtang reserve.

## POPULATION



Online See more by scanning the code.



## ELEVATION



Sources: Shaanxi Institute of Zoology, CGTN, China Current, ifaw.com

GRAPHIC BY YAN DONGJIE, LI XIANTIAN AND JORGE CORTES / CHINA DAILY

## WORLD

## Australia's move on nuclear submarines raises concern

By LIU JIANQIAO  
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Despite growing concerns over costs, capabilities, and risks to national interests, Australia has committed to collaborating with the United States and the United Kingdom to advance the AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines, a move experts predicted would escalate domestic opposition and heighten regional tensions.

Australia has pledged \$3 billion to support British industry in constructing nuclear-powered submarines, ensuring the timely delivery of its new fleet, as announced by both countries last Friday.

Grant Shapps, British defense secretary, emphasized the ongoing importance of AUKUS while drawing attention to the so-called "China threat" in his remarks.

However, the trilateral agreement has faced domestic criticism and protests from the outset. On March 18, local unions and environmental groups in Australia urged the government to abandon plans for a base while holding a protest outside the parliament house, the latest demonstration in a series, some of which drew as many as 5,000 protesters.

The establishment of the base is a key component of AUKUS, Australia's largest defense initiative since World War II. In total, the submarine project could cost up to \$240 billion over the next 30 years.

"We don't want to be part of someone else's belligerent nuclear plans," said Arthur Rorriss, head of the South Coast Labor Council, comprising unions representing 50,000 workers in the area.

They fear the base could choke an infant clean energy sector by taking up scarce land and ushering in security curbs, as well as the permanent presence of US warships. Faced with strong opposition, the government said it hadn't decided on Port Kembla, a favorable location for the base, as local media had reported.

Chen Hong, director of the Australian Studies Centre at East China Normal University in Shanghai, said the protests against AUKUS signify a growing awareness among Australians of the detrimental consequences of the military pact on national interests and regional stability.

"By taking part in the US-led trilateral

eral military pact, Australia hopes to get nuclear submarine technologies and more security promises from the United States and the United Kingdom. However, this move will drag the country and its people into a potential war as the Australian government keeps supporting US hegemony and surrenders its land for US warships," Chen said.

AUKUS, established in 2021, aims to bolster Australia's military capabilities by providing it with nuclear-powered submarines.

## Fueling tensions

"Through AUKUS, the US and its Western allies are trying to weaponize Australia and force the country to join its 'anti-China' bloc. Plus, the US has kept pushing forward its 'Indo-Pacific' strategy, which also involves Australia, fueling tensions in the whole region," he said.

Daryl Guppy, an international financial technical analyst and former national board member of the Australia China Business Council in Melbourne, said that some Australian politicians have moved closely with the US on the assumption that US and Australian interests are largely the same, which has undermined Australia's sovereign independence.

Apart from the political turbulence, Chen also said the nuclear submarine pact will raise concerns over nuclear proliferation and cause environmental influences that will damage the health of local communities.

"Australia has long championed nuclear-weapon-free zones and was a founding member of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. However, Australia's attempt to acquire nuclear submarines will undermine its nuclear-free promise," Chen said.

As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Australia recently, experts are expecting that the two countries can collaborate to improve the bilateral relationship.

"China and Australia can work together to find more common grounds and build a more stable, mature and fruitful comprehensive strategic partnership, which will benefit the peoples of the two countries," Chen said.

Agencies via Xinhua contributed to this story.

## New China-Thailand pact set to bear fruit

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok  
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China and Thailand signed a memorandum of understanding last week before the start of the annual durian harvest season, to jointly promote tropical fruit exports and guarantee their prices for the benefit of Thai farmers.

About 20,000 metric tons of Thai durians and mangosteens, valued at more than 3 billion baht (\$82.44 million), are expected to be exported to China from April to June this year, according to the MoU.

The MoU between the Thai-Chinese Agricultural Import-Export Association and the China Fruit Marketing Association is expected to provide stricter quality control for the fruits being exported. Moreover, the logistics chain will also be improved by utilizing cold chain and frozen technology, among other things.

Thai Minister of Commerce Phumtham Wechayachai said at the signing ceremony at Chanthaburi Province

that they will strive to make it more convenient for the Thai fruit trade to operate, and "offer help to support the whole chain of fruit export."

"I've been to China many times and noticed that our Thai durians have received great welcome from Chinese people for their high quality and good taste. And Chanthaburi is now famous in China for both its fresh fruits and gems," he added.

As Thailand's major production base for tropical fruits, Chanthaburi contributed to about 80 percent of the kingdom's annual fruit exports.

A report by the Kasikorn Research Center in Thailand this week noted that Thailand's fresh durian exports to China recorded a 10-fold increase over the past six years, while it is estimated that Thai durian shipments to China will see a year-on-year growth of 12 percent this year.

The increase has been attributed to improved transportation, with Thai durians now transported to China via the China-Lao-Thai Railway. This has reduced the travel time to just four days compared to the previous eight to 10 days via the sea route.

The fresh fruit trade between China and Thailand has also opened up other business opportunities, especially tourism, during harvest season for tropical fruits.

"I believe there will be a great potential to introduce fruit harvest tours to Chinese people," said Pimi Suthanin, whose family runs a durian farm in Chanthaburi's neighboring province Trat.

Pimi, who had spent a year in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region as an exchange student, said that since Thailand is a popular destination for Chinese tourists, "it might be more interesting if we can add durian harvest" to their wish list when they are in the kingdom.



A vendor checks the ripeness of durian fruit on the side of a rural highway in Yala, Thailand, on Aug 14. MATT HUNT VIA GETTY IMAGES



Humanitarian aid is airdropped over the Gaza Strip. United Kingdom's Royal Air Force airdropped more than 10 metric tons of food supplies into Gaza for the first time on Monday. LEAH JONES / AFP

## Calls for implementing Gaza resolution grow

Divisions deepen between close allies as Israel remains adamant on its stand

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong  
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The international community is demanding effective enforcement of Monday's United Nations Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire in Gaza during Ramadan after Israel refused to change course.

The calls have grown specifically louder in the Middle East, led by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, which have urged countries to expedite their recognition of the Palestinian state.

Majed bin Mohammed Al Ansari, official spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, stressed the need for the international community "to shoulder its responsibility toward the crisis in the Gaza Strip," especially after the UN resolution.

Qatar's Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva, Hind Abdulrahman Al Muftah, urged on Tuesday the international community to take a "collective and urgent measure" to recognize Palestine.

However, while continuing raids and air attacks in Gaza and Lebanon in the last 24 hours, Israel has recalled its negotiators from Doha after deeming mediation talks on a Gaza truce "at a dead end" due to demands by Hamas, a senior Israeli official said on Tuesday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday blasted his country's top ally, the United States, which chose not to block the UN res-

olution. He said the resolution had emboldened Hamas and he vowed to press ahead with the fighting.

Netanyahu has said Israel can only achieve its aims of dismantling Hamas and returning scores of hostages if it expands its ground offensive to the southern city of Rafah, where over half of Gaza's population has sought refuge, many in crowded tent camps. The US has said a major assault on Rafah would be a mistake.

The passage of Monday's resolution further deepened the divisions between the close allies.

## Controversial decision

Netanyahu's canceled visit to Washington raised criticism in Israeli media that Netanyahu was straining Israel's most important alliance in order to placate hardliners in his governing coalition.

"He is prepared to sacrifice Israel's relations with the United States for a short-lived political-media coup. He has completely lost it," Ben Caspit, a columnist in the Israeli newspaper Maariv, wrote.

He said Netanyahu has been testing US patience by dragging his feet on ensuring more humanitarian aid gets into Gaza and on drawing up postwar plans.

Belal Alakhras, a political analyst and Palestinian researcher at the University of Malaya in Malaysia, told China Daily that Israel's refusal to heed the UN's call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza carries some notable implications.

"This underscores Israel's increasingly isolated position, even among traditionally supportive member states who initially balked at the resolution but now recognize the need for diplomatic maneuvering," said Alakhras.

"The Israeli occupation's defiance and rejection of the cease-fire resolution shed light on the vulnerabilities and fractures within the rules-based international order led by Washington," he added.

Alakhras said the failure to effectively address such critical issues and influence member states' behavior "reveals a system seemingly designed for exploitation rather than genuine adherence."

"Those in more vulnerable positions within this framework are likely to bear the brunt of these shortcomings, potentially leading to distant and independent actions in the long term."

"These unfolding events mark a pivotal moment, highlighting the complexities and challenges within our current geopolitical landscape," he added.

Despite pressure, Israel — which launched retaliatory strikes in Gaza — has refused to end its bombardments. Al Jazeera reported on Wednesday that attacks in Rafah by Israel had intensified on the ground with buzzing sound of drones.

Four people had been killed and their bodies transferred to Abu Youssef al-Najjar Hospital while about 25 others had been injured and taken to hospitals.

Agencies via Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Lone warrior

A firefighter stands by a wildfire in Nogales, in the High Mountains area of Veracruz state, Mexico, late on Monday. The National Forestry Commission reported 58 active fires in 15 states, including in protected nature reserves in Morelos, Veracruz and Mexico states. FELIX MARQUEZ / AP



## 2 deaths, 100 hospitalizations in Japan supplement scare

TOKYO — Two deaths and more than 100 hospitalizations have been linked to a growing health scare in Japan around dietary supplements meant to lower cholesterol, the government said on Wednesday.

Authorities are investigating after the over-the-counter tablets were recalled by Japanese drugmaker Kobayashi Pharmaceutical following kidney complaints from customers.

The company has recalled three supplement brands, "beni koji cholesterol help" and two other products, which contain an ingredient called red yeast rice, or "beni koji".

Medical studies describe red yeast rice as an alternative to statins for lowering high cholesterol, but also warn of a risk of organ damage

depending on its chemical makeup. "The total number of suspected deaths (is now) two", while "106 cases of potentially linked hospitalization also came to light", top government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters.

The supplement's maker, Kobayashi Pharmaceutical, sells a wide range of health products marketed through television adverts in Japan, and has cautioned that it has not reached a conclusion on a causal link between the health problems and its products.

Kobayashi said it was aware of two deaths possibly related to the supplements it voluntarily recalled on Friday.

Dozens of Japanese firms that

used the "beni koji" provided by Kobayashi Pharmaceutical have also separately announced recalls.

The affected products include various health tablets, as well as rose-colored sparkling sake, salad dressing, bread and miso paste used in many traditional dishes.

Health Minister Keizo Takemi said on Tuesday that the government had told Kobayashi Pharmaceutical to "promptly provide information" on the situation.

The health ministry has also "instructed local authorities nationwide to collect information on health damage," he added, offering condolences to those affected.

On Tuesday, the drugmaker said that the first person reported dead

## Terror act on Chinese nationals condemned

By ZHAO JIA  
and WANG QINGYUN

People from all walks of life in Pakistan have strongly condemned the terrorist attack that killed five Chinese nationals and one Pakistani, saying the country will take all necessary measures to hunt down the perpetrators of the heinous act.

A suicide bomber on Tuesday rammed a vehicle into a convoy of Chinese engineers working on the Dasu Hydropower Project undertaken by a Chinese company in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chaired an emergency meeting with senior officials on Wednesday. Sharif pledged to utilize all national resources to conduct a thorough and joint investigation of the attack and assured the bereaved families that the perpetrators would be brought to justice swiftly. On the same day, Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari visited the Chinese embassy in Islamabad to convey condolences.

The country's National Assembly said that China is a sincere, trusted friend of Pakistan and the attack on Chinese citizens is intolerable.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said such dastardly acts cannot dent the resolve of the Pakistani nation to fight the scourge of terrorism.

"Today's attack was orchestrated by the enemies of Pakistan-China friendship," it said in a statement. "We will resolutely act against all such forces and defeat them."

Emphasizing that the life and safety of Chinese nationals in Pakistan are of paramount importance, it said Pakistan will continue to work with their Chinese brothers to ensure the safety and security of Chinese nationals, projects and institutions in the country.

On-site security forces are stepping up efforts to deal with the aftermath of the attack, General Syed Asim Munir, chief of army staff of Pakistan, said on Tuesday during a phone call with Beijing's envoy to Islamabad Jiang Zaidong.

The Pakistani military will investigate the attack and keep China informed of the investigation in a timely manner, Munir said.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi said the enemy has targeted citizens of a very reliable friend of Pakistan, and that the attack is not just on Chinese citizens but on Pakistan itself. The country is bound to strongly respond to the attack, he added.

Terrorists attempted to damage Pakistan-China relations through such an outrageous act, and Pakistan would never allow such incidents to occur, said Sarfraz Bugti, chief minister of the southwestern province of Balochistan.

Former Pakistani caretaker prime minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar said Pakistan and China will jointly overcome the challenge and maintain a solid bond of bilateral friendship and cooperation.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, co-chair of the Pakistan People's Party and ex-foreign minister, said he believes plotters and accomplices of the attack will be severely punished.

Contact the writers at zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## WORLD

## Russia says West behind Moscow attack

MOSCOW — The director of Russia's most powerful security agency said on Tuesday that he believed Ukraine, along with the United States and Britain, were involved in the attack on a concert hall just outside Moscow that killed at least 139 people.

"We believe that the action was prepared by both the Islamist radicals themselves and was facilitated by Western special services," Alexander Bortnikov, director of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, said on television.

"The special services of Ukraine are directly related to this," Bortnikov said, adding Kyiv had helped prepare Islamist radicals at a unidentified location in the Middle East.

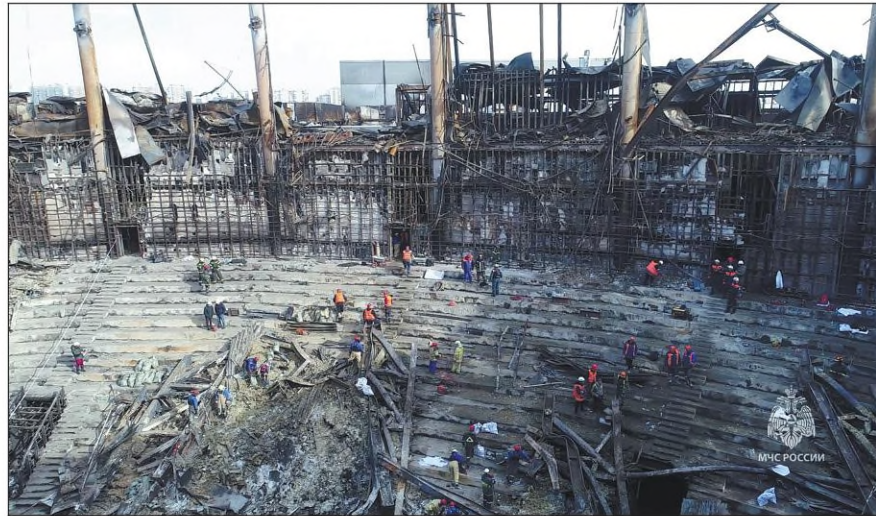
The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for the mass shooting.

When asked by Russian reporters if Ukraine and its allies, the United States and Britain, were involved in the attack on the concert hall, Bortnikov said: "We think that's the case. In any case, we are now talking about the texture that we have. This is general information."

Ukraine, which has repeatedly denied any link with Friday's attack, dismissed Russian claims.

Britain said they were "nonsense." Bortnikov, 72, who has served as head of the FSB since 2008, said Russia had yet to identify those who specifically ordered the deadliest attack in Russia for two decades, but said that retaliatory measures would be taken.

He offered no specific evidence



Workers remove debris inside the Crocus City Hall following a deadly attack on the concert venue in Moscow in this image taken from a video released on Tuesday. RUSSIAN EMERGENCIES MINISTRY VIA REUTERS

for the claims, which hard-liners in Moscow could use to justify an escalation of the war in Ukraine and to explain how Russian security services failed to prevent the attack.

Russian news outlet SHOT published a video of an exchange in which a reporter asked Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia's Security Council, whether it was "ISIS (Islamic State) or Ukraine?"

"Of course Ukraine," Patrushev replied. Asked about the remark later, he said there were "many" indications of Ukrainian involvement.

However, senior Ukrainian presi-

dential aide Mykhailo Podolyak said, "The lies are officially spread by Patrushev, and after that by the head of the FSB Bortnikov."

Two members of the Islamic State group had briefly entered and exited Turkey to extend their residence permit, local media reported on Tuesday.

Anonymous Turkish security sources informed Hurriyet Daily News that the Tajik assailants had been living in Moscow for a long time and needed to leave the country to extend their residency in Russia.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said on Tuesday the

attackers who carried out last week's massacre at a Moscow concert hall tried fleeing to his country first, but were turned away because of checkpoints.

Lukashenko told journalists that Belarusian and Russian security services had coordinated their actions as the suspects' car fled southwest from Moscow to the Bryansk region, bordering both Ukraine and Belarus, where it was apprehended.

He said Belarus had quickly set up checkpoints at the border.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## US puts new hurdles for Chinese cars

Investigation launched to make it harder for EVs to access market, experts say

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
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The White House's efforts to investigate China-made connected cars is "one additional pathway to make it even harder" for Chinese electric vehicles to access the US market, experts say.

China's connected cars are much superior in terms of competitiveness, Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-American Studies, told China Daily.

Although the "connected car" may not necessarily be an EV, compared with traditional fuel cars, EVs tend to use navigation tools, self-driving and other auxiliary functions that rely more on networking technology.

Over the decades, China's automotive industry's competitiveness in traditional fuel vehicles has not been as viable as that of Europe, the United States and Japan.

However, with the international automotive industry shifting focus to new energy vehicles, especially electric vehicles, China's science and technology enterprises began to "change lanes to overtake."

China was the world's top auto exporter in 2023, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Gupta said the US "investigation" or "probe," for purported national security reasons, was an advanced notice of proposed rule-making on connected vehicles from China.

"So that's part of the procedure before you actually write regulations," he said. "You can also frame it as an investigation because it's not that they're going to do this analysis, and then they're just going to put it out and leave it on the website and say, 'OK, this was our analysis.' This analysis will inform specific regulations that will be made, and these will effectively end up with the goal of trying to sideline Chinese EVs from the US market further."

Gary Hufbauer, a nonresident senior fellow at the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics, told China Daily: "I'm afraid the US will declare imported EVs from China a national security risk. If so, this would indicate that there is not much difference between 'de-risking' and 'decoupling.'"

"Even if imported EVs are not declared a national security risk, I expect high trade barriers, whether or not Trump is elected," he said.

Gupta said the EV market "shouldn't be" a national security issue, mentioning that the concern about data that could be gleaned from the cars based on where it has been driven was to some extent "understandable."

"But the fundamental reason that the executive order talks about is that connected vehicles may be connected in the future in a much bigger way to US critical infrastructure, and therefore, the foreign adversary could hijack that infrastructure using the connected vehicle," he said. "And I think that is a very unreasonable proposition. But that's where the main primary thinking is."

Gupta told China Daily: "The bottom line here is this has much to do with protectionism, and they just don't want to (allow the Chinese cars in)."

"So, this avenue through this cybersecurity pathway is one addi-

tional pathway to make it even harder for Chinese EVs to access and enter the US market," he said.

The executive order is not the only action the Joe Biden administration has taken to target Chinese EVs.

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 specifies that starting in 2024, no EV containing battery components produced by a foreign entity of concern — China, Russia, Iran, and DPRK — will be eligible for tax credit. Gupta said the objective was mainly "to put Chinese vehicles at a competitive disadvantage."

"They are playing both sides of using the national security agreement to essentially prosecute a trade war or a trade battle with China in the EV space," he said.

## Discriminatory subsidies

China said on Tuesday that it has initiated dispute-settlement proceedings against the US at the World Trade Organization, saying the "discriminatory subsidies" under the Inflation Act resulted in the exclusion of goods from China and other WTO countries.

Additionally, the current 27.5 percent tariff on Chinese-made vehicles, including the 25 percent imposed by the Trump administration, has largely precluded them from the US market.

Former president Donald Trump, who has won the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, pledged during a campaign stop in Ohio on March 16 to put a 100 percent tariff on imported Chinese vehicles, even if the cars were produced in Mexico.

However, Gupta said, "on the EV topic specifically" Trump may be better for China. "Because China doesn't have a problem taking its know-how and technology and manufacturing overseas. It's already being done in Europe. It's willing to do that, I'm sure, in America, and Trump will welcome that," he said.

"But while Mr Biden is more in the mainstream, where he really wants to ensure that China just is eliminated from the US market, and many of these rules which are being made foreign-entity-of-concern rules, these connected-vehicle rules, the whole purpose of them is to put Chinese cars at a competitive disadvantage rather than to really protect data or to protect national security."

"This is about competitive disadvantage and playing unfair competition rather than national security, even though it is all dressed up as national security," Gupta said.

Gupta also compared the US' blocking of China-made EVs with restricting China in semiconductors.

"I would say chips are, in terms of technological sophistication, that much higher than EV manufacturing and EV batteries," he said. "And the US basically wants to capture the commanding heights of technological superiority. And therefore, even in the chip space, I think the US frames it as national security. But what it wants to do is maintain its technological leadership and keep China as far behind."

Gupta said "the interesting fact between the chips and the EV sector" is that the US government has subsidized both sectors and set strong foreign-entity-of-concern rules. However, the US leadership in the chip sector framed much tougher foreign-entity-of-concern rules than in the EV sector.

## Briefly

## JAPAN

## Yen hits 34-year low against dollar

The Japanese yen hit a 34-year low against the dollar on Wednesday, just over a week after the Bank of Japan announced a much-anticipated interest rate hike in a shift away from years of ultraloose monetary policy. The unit weakened to 151.97 per dollar, its softest since 1990. The drop comes after a top bank official suggested it would continue to pursue an accommodative policy for the time being and has raised speculation that authorities will intervene in markets to prop up the currency. Earlier in the day, Bank of Japan board member Naoki Tamura said officials would not embark on a speedy program of monetary tightening.

## SYRIA

## US strikes kill soldiers, state media reports

US forces bombed eastern Syria in a dawn raid, killing at least seven soldiers, including a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and one civilian, Syrian and Iranian state media said on Tuesday. At least 19 other soldiers and 13 civilians were wounded in the strikes that targeted residential areas and military sites in Deir-al-Zour Province and caused significant damage to public and private properties, Syrian state media said. Iranian state media said an Iranian Revolutionary Guards adviser was killed in the US airstrikes. A rights group said the strikes in Syria killed 17, including a WHO worker. The US on Tuesday denied any involvement in the attack.

## BELGIUM

## Clashes force EU to review farm policy

EU member states on Tuesday agreed to unpick more eco-friendly requirements under the bloc's common agricultural policy in a new bid to pacify month-long protests by farmers who faced off with riot police in Brussels for the third time in two months. Police said they used tear gas and water cannons against farmers who targeted them with eggs and Molotov cocktails, with two officers injured, resulting in one arrest. The review was approved by a special committee as agriculture ministers met under tight security in the city's European quarter, which farmers thronged with 250 tractors, setting fire to tires and bales of hay.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Investigators seek clues in Baltimore bridge collapse

By AI HEPING in New York  
aiheping@chinadailyusa.com

As investigators were reviewing the data recorder of the cargo ship that hit and caused the collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, a lawmaker said Wednesday that if anyone is found liable, they will be pursued to add funds to the cost of rebuilding the bridge.

US Senator Chris Van Hollen, a Maryland Democrat, said that Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg will release federal funds for rebuilding efforts of the collapsed bridge.

The investigation into the crash of the cargo ship *Dali* into the bridge early Tuesday could take up to two years, National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy said Wednesday.

"We have an amazing team of individuals who are focused on very specific areas of expertise, and so I have no doubt that we will be able to pull this together in hopefully 12 to 24 months," she said at a news conference.

There is no cost estimate for rebuilding the bridge or the economic impact. But the eventual cost — including compensating the victims' families and paying out damages for disruptions to the supply chain — is expected to be significant.

The bridge was built in the 1970s for about \$60 million, but the cost of rebuilding it could

The bridge was built in the 1970s for about \$60 million, but the cost of rebuilding it could be \$600 million, an engineering expert told Sky News.

be \$600 million, an engineering expert told Sky News.

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the federal government would pay to reconstruct the bridge.

"It is my intention that the federal government will pay for the entire cost of reconstructing that bridge, and I expect Congress to support my effort," Biden said.

But the majority of the financial fallout is likely to rest primarily with the insurance industry, according to media reports.

Industry experts told the Financial Times that insurers could pay out losses for bridge damage, port disruption and any loss of life.

The bridge collapse could drive "one of the largest claims ever to hit the marine (re)insurance market," John Miklus, president of the American Institute of Marine Underwriters, told Insurance Business.

The *Dali* is covered by the Britannia Steam Ship Insurance Association Ltd, known

as Britannia P&I Club, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Britannia itself is liable for the first \$10 million in damages, both the FT and Insurance Business reported. Whatever remains is dealt with by the wider mutual insurance group and Lloyd's of London, a reinsurance market in the UK, according to the FT.

Insurance industry experts told The New York Times on Wednesday that Grace Ocean Private Ltd, the Singaporean company that owns the ship, could face the highest cost ever for a maritime incident.

Miklus said the bill has the potential to exceed the roughly \$1.5 billion that was paid out following the *Costa Concordia* disaster in 2012, when 32 people were killed as the ship ran aground off the Italian island of Giglio.

On Wednesday, divers recovered the remains of two people from a red pickup truck submerged in the Patapsco River, officials said, nearly 35 hours after a container ship crashed into the bridge, which crumpled into the water.

Sonar has indicated that there are more vehicles near the underwater rubble, authorities said during a news conference Wednesday evening.

At least six people, part of a construction crew that was repairing potholes and masonry on the bridge, are presumed dead. Two other workers were rescued.

## DPRK rules out summit with Japan

SEOUL — The government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will "reject any contact and negotiations with Japan" over the prospect of a summit between the two countries, a senior DPRK official said on Tuesday, just one day after urging the neighboring country to make a political decision for the improvement of bilateral ties.

The DPRK-Japan summit is "not a matter of concern" as "Japan has no courage to change history, promote regional peace and stability and take the first step for the fresh DPRK-Japan relations," Kim Yo-jong, vice-department-director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, said in the

second statement in two days carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim said Japan had clarified its stance through a news conference of its Chief Cabinet Secretary on Monday that it can never accept the fact that the abduction issue was settled.

She complained that the Japanese raised the issue of the DPRK nuclear and missile programs, saying it has nothing to do with Japan, and accused the country of "trying to interfere in and take issue with the exercise of sovereignty concerning the DPRK's legitimate self-defense."

Stating the DPRK government has clearly understood once again the attitude of Japan, the DPRK

senior official said: "The DPRK side will pay no attention to, and reject any contact and negotiations with the Japanese side."

Kim said in a statement issued by the KCNA on Monday that Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida recently conveyed his intention to meet leader meet DPRK's top leader Kim Jong-un in person as soon as possible. Regarding the possibility of a top meeting, Kim urged the neighboring country to make a political decision for a strategic option that conformed to its overall interests in a show of its true intention to improve bilateral relations.

XINHUA

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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. 1303

一城 CITY TALES 一街

**Editor's note:** An array of Chinese cities have maintained their cultural memories in the form of historical neighborhoods that have only added to their multilayered charm and vigor with the passage of time. China Daily is taking readers on a journey through some of the timeless city blocks where President Xi Jinping has left his footsteps and remarked on the preservation and revitalization of their heritage. In this installment, we take a stroll near the Haihe River in Tianjin's downtown, to an area that cultivated the city's merchant culture.

# A STREET TRADING ON A VIBRANT PAST

Amid the good-humored repartee of storytellers to the beat of bamboo clappers, the street-side stalls laying out propitious festive items, and the mouthwatering scent of delicious local specialties, Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street offers a condensed and distilled sample of the authentic Tianjin.

When asked about the ideal day trip to this historically and culturally interesting city block, Yang Kai, 56, a Tianjin native who has been plying his trade there for the past 35 years, says in the unique Tianjin accent, which exudes a laid-back, but witty air: "Don't come too early."

Ten o'clock is the ideal time to arrive, he recommends, after having a prolonged and satisfying breakfast. The block is noted for its two gateways of antique elegance, which stand at its southern and northern ends, but it doesn't really matter from which one a visitor starts their journey.

"If you are here for the cultural atmosphere — it is, after all, a cultural street — you're in for a treat. We have the Niren Zhang day figurines, Yangliuqing New Year pictures, bookstores... Take your time and browse the stores, especially now that each one offers its own experiential activities. These activities will take up a lot of your time, and two hours will have passed before you've realized," he says.

Lunchtime is a perfect moment to savor the many Tianjin delicacies available on the street, including Guoren Zhang (crunchy, coated varied nuts with diverse flavors), 18th Street Fried Dough Twists, pancake wraps, tea soup and stuffed buns.

In the afternoon, Yang recommends continuing to peruse the street's diverse array of stores, and the square at the block's center is an ideal place to take a rest.

Located beside the square are two sites dedicated to the sea goddess Mazu — the Tianhou Temple (Temple of the Queen of Heaven), built during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), and the Peking Opera Theater, built in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Shows featuring local characteristics, including *xiangsheng* (traditional comedic crosstalk), skills performances and folk dances, are frequently hosted on the square and on the theater's balcony.

Or, on the quieter days, visitors can simply sit at the foot of the theater and enjoy a clear view of the Haihe River.

Yang vividly remembers his first impression of the cultural street — it was New Year's Day, 1986, the first day that the block opened to the public after being closed. A high school student at the time, he immediately visited the street after hearing the news of its reopening.

"Like me, so many people came to have a look that the entry had to be limited. I wanted to buy a cassette. It was very popular and difficult to find, and the street, which had just opened, included a rare record shop," he recalls.

After purchasing the cassette, he paid his first-ever visit to the Yangliuqing Arts Store for a casual browse. Unbeknownst to him then, a few years later, in 1989, he would embark on a 35-year career there.

The store sells and displays Yangliuqing woodblock New Year pictures, a form of traditional decoration that combines woodblock printing with painting.

Comprising the four main procedures of sketching, engraving, printing and painting that require the collaboration of specialized artisans, it originated during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and has become representative of Tianjin's culture and customs.

The pictures have long been a necessary purchase for Tianjin residents preparing for Spring Festival. Their subjects include motifs depicting folk lifestyle, women and children, fictional stories, traditional opera, Chinese mythology, as well as landscapes and flowers.

"Around a month before Spring Festival, Tianjin residents will do their New Year shopping, including buying these New Year pictures. They all carry propitious meanings and are traditionally believed to bring blessings to the household," says Li Yan, an inheritor of the pictures' printing technique.

"For locals, it is now an artistic medium for a wider range of social occasions. They gift them to friends on their birthdays or to celebrate weddings. We have different themes suited to different occasions, but all with auspicious connotations."

While these pictures are still popular among the locals, the store is also seeking innovative ways to combine the tradition with contemporary life, producing a variety of products that serve as suitable souvenirs for tourists.

"We have been drawing inspiration from our heritage. Our latest merchandise includes bookmarks, coin purses and

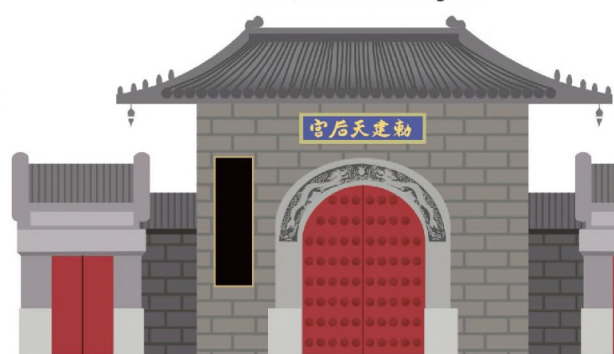
Long-standing vendors, time-honored brands and venerable local craftsmen invite visitors to step back in time and experience the true essence of an ancient mercantile hub, **Cheng Yuezhu and Yang Cheng** report in Tianjin.



When it comes to Tianjin specialties, fried dough twists are a signature snack, and the time-honored brand, 18th Street Fried Dough Twists, provides a choice selection. These sweet, deep-fried snacks are sprinkled with ingredients including osmanthus petals, peach kernels and sesame, which guarantee diverse flavors and a satisfying experience.



18th Street Fried Dough Twists



Tianhou Temple

The Tianhou Temple, or the Temple of the Queen of Heaven, lies at the center of the block. As Tianjin has historically been a port city and key waterway interchange, the locals built the temple during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), praying to the sea goddess Mazu for safe voyages. The temple has now become a museum of Tianjin's folk culture, customs and religions.

Antique Market



Since its opening in 1986, Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street has been known for its stores selling knick-knacks rarely seen in other parts of the city. At the antique market are a variety of stores that trade antiques, jade, paintings and handicrafts, as well as shops where visitors can browse vintage gadgets.

Guoren Zhang



With a history of more than 160 years, Guoren Zhang (crunchy coated nuts), established itself as a favored snack of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) royal court. Peanuts, cashews, almonds and pumpkin seeds can all be tasted in a single handful.

Clay Figurine Zhang Art Gallery



Clay Figurine Zhang Family Store



The Niren Zhang clay figurines are rated as a national-level intangible cultural heritage. The art form's founder Zhang Mingshan (1826-1906) won wide acclaim by combining traditional Chinese manufacturing techniques with Western aesthetics. His sixth-generation descendant Zhang Yu is now an inheritor of the art form and also runs the family store.



The Clay Figurine Zhang Art Gallery lies within Tongqingli, a residential complex built in 1913 that combines Chinese and Western architectural styles. The gallery houses a collection of more than 1,000 clay figurines made by Zhang Mingshan, and a statue has been erected at his former residence.

The Peking Opera Theater, built during the Qing Dynasty, is also dedicated to Mazu, the sea goddess. It now frequently hosts various performances with local characteristics, including *xiangsheng* (comedic crosstalk) and traditional opera, that can be viewed from the square outside.



Yan Fu Statue

Yan Fu (1854-1921), a renowned Chinese scholar, translator and educator, was known for introducing advanced Western thinking to China. He lived in Tianjin for more than two decades, and a statue has been erected at his former residence.



Yangliuqing Arts Store

The Yangliuqing Arts Store features Yangliuqing woodblock New Year pictures, a national-level intangible cultural heritage. The art form integrates woodblock printing with Chinese painting, and comprises four main procedures of sketching, engraving, printing and painting. It originated during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and to this day remains an essential purchase for Tianjin residents when preparing for Spring Festival.

fridge magnets adorned with imagery found on the ancient pieces. They have proved popular among the younger crowd," Su says.

"For tourists, the pictures might not be easy to carry. With these products, all visitors to the cultural street can take something featuring our intangible cultural heritage back home with them."

This seamless merging of tradition and innovation is not something new. Similar to Yang Kai's experience, in the recollections of Zhang Yu, 46, the sixth-generation inheritor of the Niren Zhang clay figurine art form, the neighborhood has long been a hub for all kinds of cultural stores that captivated him as a youngster.

"This place has always been very lively, especially back in the day when we could buy a lot of things here that couldn't be found anywhere else. The block provided the widest variety and the highest quality of traditional Chinese stationery. It also boasted all sorts of books, old and new, and the latest toys, some of which I'd never seen before," Zhang recalls.

"When it comes to Spring Festival, the block is filled with a festive and joyful ambience. Even if you're not shopping for anything specific, simply come here for a walk, and you will feel the anticipation of the approaching New Year."

The Niren Zhang clay figurines were invented by Zhang Yu's ancestor Zhang Mingshan (1826-1906), who won wide acclaim by combining the traditional Chinese clay figurine manufacturing techniques with Western aesthetics.

Since 2000, Zhang Yu has been working on the street and running the Clay Figurine Zhang Family Store. He also serves as the curator of the Clay Figurine Zhang Art Gallery, which sits in a courtyard house inside the block's historical Tongqingli complex, secluded from the hustle and bustle of the main street.

At the gallery, which has offered free entry since its founding, visitors are treated to a regular exhibit of more than 100 representative Niren Zhang clay figurines — from antiques created by Zhang Mingshan himself, to Zhang Yu's contemporary works — or, they can attend workshop sessions to learn how to make the figurines themselves.

Zhang Yu has observed a shift in tourists' preferences — instead of simply gazing and buying souvenirs, many

tourists have grown fond of spending time getting to learn local culture.

"A lot of people are keen on participating in our workshops in the long term. Some of them have gradually delved deeper into the art form and become aficionados, but we also welcome those who come just to have a try, and perhaps find it interesting enough to come again if they have a chance," he says.

"I think this represents the openness of our traditional culture. Everyone can participate in their own way, but as long as they get to learn about traditional culture, a seed has been planted in their hearts."

The charm of the Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street lies in its every corner, from the shops and their wares, to the historical architecture and intangible cultural heritage. But Zhang Yu gives yet another tip that might provide visitors with a unique Tianjin experience — talk to the shop owners when you have the chance.

"A feature of the cultural street is that most shop owners are present in their shops every day, many having spent two or three decades here. You can learn a lot by talking to them, and they are more than willing to chat with visitors," he says.

"We enjoy talking with others. It doesn't matter whether the customers buy anything, and indeed visitors to the cultural street don't necessarily need to buy anything. What matters, I believe, is to see Tianjin's old streets and feel the distinctive personalities of the natives."

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



**Top left:** Zhang Yu, the sixth-generation inheritor of the Niren Zhang clay figurines, works on a figurine of Confucius. **Top right:** Artisan Su Liyan demonstrates the printing technique of the Yangliuqing woodblock New Year pictures. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**  
**Above:** A view of the Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street. **YU GUANGHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY**

## Clear direction for the prosperous path of iconic block

By **CHENG YUEZHU** and **YANG CHENG** in Tianjin

Ever since New Year's Day, 1986, when the Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street first opened to the public under its new name, the block has been a site of festivity and entertainment for Tianjin residents and tourists alike.

Its history, however, predates the formal establishment of Tianjin as a city, and its cultural and historical significance endures to this day.

Across Chinese cities, Tianjin is the only one with a record of its exact founding date. On Dec 23, 1404, Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) officially established the city, giving it a name meaning "the emperor's ferry dock," because of the region's role as a key waterway interchange.

"Tianjin is a major city that has flourished under the dual influence of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal and the Haihe River, featuring both river and maritime transportation," says Zhu Yang, dean of the cultural heritage college at the Tianjin University Research Institute of Architectural Design and Urban Planning.

"The Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street, located in Nankai district, lies between the old Tianjin city and the Haihe River. Where two branches of the Grand Canal converge with the river, this is the cradle of Tianjin."

According to Zhu, the block first took form around the Jin (1115-1234) and Yuan (1271-

1368) dynasties, as evidenced by the Tianhou Temple, the core structure of the block that was built during the latter period.

In ancient times, the city mainly served in an administrative and military capacity, and the vibrant commercial areas were located outside the city walls, especially near the confluences of waterways around the city. By the Ming and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, the cultural street area has become a major hub for merchants.

When the project of establishing the Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street first commenced in 1985, the focus was to protect the local historical sites and renovate contemporary buildings to reflect the antique elegance and tradition of Tianjin's architectural styles.

"A history of over 600 years has shaped Tianjin's distinctive architectural style, which seamlessly blends influences of the past and present, the East and the West, unique folk customs at festive occasions, as well as a rich cultural heritage evident in everyday life, from cuisine and clothing, to objects for household use," says Zhang Hongpeng, director of the block's management committee.

"The Haihe River has witnessed centuries of water transportation, and the Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street serves as a hub for Tianjin's time-honored brands, handicrafts, specialties and folk culture, making it a cultural stronghold of the city."

Included in 2007 as one of the first-batch 5A tourist attractions in China, the highest rating of its kind, the site now boasts 200,000

square meters of diverse commercial and cultural venues.

The historical buildings in the area include the Tianhou Temple, the Yuhuang Temple, a Taoist temple built in the Ming Dynasty, and Tongqingli, a residential complex built in 1913 that combines Chinese and Western architectural styles.

Several museums have been established at these venues to showcase traditional culture, including a folk customs museum established at the Tianhou Temple, a museum of embroidery art, and a museum of Chinese shoe culture.

One of the directors of the block's recent upgrade project, Zhu says that each iteration of its planning has prioritized the preservation of historical buildings and the block's original layout, with an emphasis on utilizing these buildings to accommodate tourism, cultural, commercial and folk activities.

"Throughout its planning and construction phases, the cultural street has consistently focused on serving both local residents and tourists. Culture is its defining feature, and folk customs and products beloved by the public are its highlights," Zhu says.

On Feb 1, President Xi Jinping visited the Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street, inspecting the goods for the Spring Festival holiday season, as well as the protection and utilization of the historical and cultural block.



Tongqingli, a residential complex built in 1913 that combines Chinese and Western architectural styles, at the Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street. **PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**

establish the block as a platform to showcase and promote traditional Chinese culture.

"We will preserve the ancient buildings, promote traditional culture, as well as provide comprehensive and enhanced services to bring a better experience to visitors," Zhang says.

"More activities will be organized to present traditional culture, folk customs and the essence of Tianjin, in order to enrich people's lives. We will attract more intangible cultural heritage elements and time-honored brands to open up branches here, so that more young people can see with their own eyes how traditions are being passed down."

Zhu explained that, to enhance the experience for both visitors and residents, environmental upgrades will be adopted throughout the block, including optimizing the quality of public spaces, such as squares and pavements, introducing greenery and improving the street signage.

Infrastructure and emergency prevention facilities will be enhanced to ensure the safety of the area, and modern technological methods are also going to be implemented to expand its reach and visibility.

"Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street has effectively combined heritage preservation with cultural experiences, standing out as an excellent example of the integrated development of culture, commerce and tourism," Zhu adds.

"A block of historical and cultural interest should embody an authentic history, a well-preserved outlook and a bond with contemporary life, and also guarantee a high-quality experience for residents, shop proprietors and tourists."

GRAPHICS BY LIU CHEN AND TEXT BY CHENG YUEZHU / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

## BACK TO BASICS

Sports doctor advocates for a better approach to spinal health among young patients, to better prevent a wide range of maladies later in life, **Li Yingxue** reports.

**C**rooked posture, vision problems, digestive issues, and even allergies — while these health woes may appear unconnected, one expert suggests they could share a common origin: spinal health issues.

Li Yanhu, esteemed director of the sports health medical research center at the National Institute of Sports Medicine, which is under the General Administration of Sport of China, elucidates this critical link, highlighting the spine as the cornerstone of vitality.

"The spine serves as the body's fundamental support system, tasked with bearing weight, providing structural integrity, and facilitating essential functions such as movement and shock absorption," Li explains. "Yet, its significance is frequently underestimated, overshadowed by more apparent health concerns."

Emphasizing the pivotal role of early intervention, Li advocates for a paradigm shift in healthcare practices, urging a holistic approach that, from infancy, prioritizes spinal health.

As medical discourse increasingly turns its gaze toward preventive care, the spotlight now falls on the spine — a silent sentinel, the welfare of which profoundly influences overall well-being.

For the past 15 years, 57-year-old Li has been passionately spreading awareness about spinal health, especially among teenagers. He travels nationwide, tirelessly promoting a "teen spine project."

Through talks, research, and teaching exercises, like stretching and bedtime routines, he aims to help youngsters protect their spines from a young age. His mission? To ensure fewer kids suffer from back problems.

## A personal mission

Li graduated from the Beijing University of Chinese Medicine in 1988, specializing in acupuncture and massage. For 20 years, he served as a physical therapist for China's national table tennis, track and field, and tennis teams.

"I'm proud that during my 15-year tenure with the table tennis team, none of the players missed a match due to injury," Li says.

After his career with Team China, Li pursued advanced studies in sports medicine, earning both a master's degree and a doctorate. Today, he also works as a doctor at the Sports Hospital of the National Institute of Sports Medicine.

However, his deeper interest in spinal health began with his daughter. In 2008, at just 7 years of age, she battled severe scoliosis, which resulted in significant damage to her jaw, facial structure, and overall well-being. Despite consulting numerous doctors, Li couldn't find a satisfactory solution.

Given his expertise in treating patients with spinal pain, Li took it upon himself to explore treatment options for his daughter. After over a decade of therapy, she has now fully recovered.

"It was a tough journey back then, enduring all the pain of treatment," Li recalls. Today, seeing his daughter standing graceful and healthy brings him immense joy.

Li also noticed that many of the patients seeking treatment and struggling with spinal disorders were adolescents. Some suffered from severe facial asymmetry due to scoliosis, which, in some cases, even led to depression.

He once treated a patient who came to him with scoliosis, but also had allergic rhinitis, autism, depression and constipation. She was in poor health and couldn't even run.

"For years, she'd been to many hospitals seeking help, and her parents felt as hopeless as I did when I

first faced my daughter's condition," Li recalls.

Exams revealed her scoliosis had deformed her chest, impairing her lung and heart function, Li says. After two months of treatment, her scoliosis improved significantly, and her cardiopulmonary function recovered.

During continued care, her constipation, depression, allergic rhinitis and facial asymmetry issues improved. Many, including her parents, were amazed at the results.

"In medicine, the approach matters. While we follow standards, we mustn't be bound by tradition. Some complex cases require breaking tradition and taking a holistic approach to find breakthroughs in recovery," Li stresses.

After years of research, he discovered that many patients only see spinal issues as joint problems. However, the spine is crucial for overall health, and problems with it affect the whole body.

"The spine houses the central nervous system, and when it's deformed, it puts pressure on the nerves and blood vessels, affecting circulation and balance. This can lead to nerve pain, reduced blood flow to the brain, and hormonal imbalances. In severe cases, it can even cause vision, smell, and hearing problems," Li explains.

He points out that the physical changes and facial asymmetry caused by scoliosis are just surface signs. Many children experience memory loss, headaches, insomnia and behavioral issues due to spinal problems, but parents and teachers often overlook this.

"When we move, our posture affects the pressure on different body parts. Adolescents, in particular, are still growing, so if their posture isn't right, it can affect their development," Li says. "Many parents, teachers, and kids don't realize the consequences of poor posture."

Since witnessing his daughter's difficult recovery from scoliosis and seeing numerous adolescents and their parents struggle with the condition, Li has been passionately promoting adolescent health education.

"Scoliosis has become the third major health threat to children and teens in China, after obesity and myopia," Li states.

Data from the Chinese Preventive Medicine Association's Spinal Disease Prevention and Control Committee shows that over 5 million primary and secondary school students in China are affected by scoliosis, with around 300,000 new cases each year.

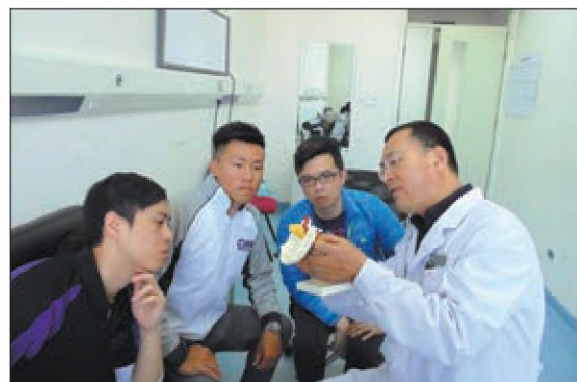
Li now leads two special projects at the General Administration of Sport of China: Adolescent Spine, Vision and Cardiovascular Health, and Public Health Education. Each project has launched various programs, such as the Adolescent Spine and Vision Health Manual and a 90-second exercise to address spinal health among young people.

But just having effective methods isn't enough; it's about putting them into action. Li emphasizes the need to build a comprehensive spinal health management system involving the government, schools, healthcare workers, teachers, parents and children.

"Emphasis on spinal health should start from birth," Li says. Educating parents on proper practices, like holding and breastfeeding infants, is crucial. Incorrect posture during breastfeeding can also lead to issues like cervical distortion in mothers, which Li says contributes to postpartum depression.

"Early education on topics like sleeping and crawling for infants is essential," he says. "This is true proactive health management, focusing on prevention."

Additionally, he says that it's essential for adolescents to under-



**From top:** Li Yanhu, director of the sports health medical research center at the General Administration of Sport of China, writes a prescription; Li (right) explains an illness to a patient at the Sports Hospital of the National Institute of Sports Medicine in Beijing; Li asks a pupil about her spinal health in Rizhao, Shandong province; Li gives lessons to primary school students on spinal health.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

go spinal health assessments, which can help determine their spinal health status and identify scoliosis patients early. Targeted physical exercises, such as spinal health routines, can aid intervention efforts, helping adolescents develop good posture and promote healthy growth.

"This is a prime example of blending sports and medicine," Li remarks. He stresses that in the past, the importance of prescribed exercises hadn't been

fully recognized.

Some healthcare professionals used to believe that observing children with potential scoliosis was enough. However, in sports medicine, there are various methods to intervene early and prevent the need for surgery.

In 2021, the National Health Commission mandated scoliosis screening in the annual physical examinations for primary and secondary school students, adding it to their health records. Li sees this as a

significant step forward, and a tangible commitment to promoting proactive health initiatives.

## It's great outdoors

Having dedicated years to spinal health, Li says that his understanding of the subject has steadily grown and accumulated.

With increasing responsibilities, his schedule has become busier. In addition to his hospital duties and supervising students, he travels nationwide to give lectures and conduct research. His speaking pace matches his bustling daily agenda.

Last year, Li took on a new role, that of a member of the National Committee of the 14th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and feels the weight of that responsibility.

For two consecutive years, his proposals have been related to the spinal health of adolescents. This year, his suggestion to extend recess between classes at elementary schools from 10 minutes to half an hour sparked discussion on social media.

During his research, Li found that although the overall physical fitness of Chinese children and adolescents has improved in recent years, issues such as obesity, myopia, spinal curvature and psychological disorders still persist. One significant factor contributing to these problems is the prolonged sedentary behavior and lack of exposure to sunlight among children.

Li explains that research indicates children who engage in outdoor activities for two hours a day in the sunlight can significantly improve their vision. Exposure to sunlight allows children to release pent-up negative energy accumulated from prolonged indoor confinement, leading to a more positive mindset.

Li's proposal has gained significant support from other political advisers. Olympic table tennis champion Wang Liqin, a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee, also suggested extending outdoor break times.

"Even though children have more exercise time now compared to the past, there's still a gap to reach the recommended 1.5 hours of daily outdoor activity," Wang says. In his proposal, he wrote that he hopes to extend break times to encourage children to leave the classroom and spend time outdoors after class.

Working with the national team has taught Li the crucial importance of sports for both physical and mental well-being. "Sport is the best teacher of resilience and success," he says.

"I think we should encourage children to stay physically and mentally healthy through aerobic exercise and outdoor activities."

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## A time for tomes in Tongzhou

It was past 4 pm when I reached the Beijing Library. I quickly realized that this was no ordinary storehouse of knowledge, but a delightfully imposing, gargantuan building barely an hour's drive from Chaoyang district, where I live.

It probably rivals any great library in the world, and holds a sizable number of books, mostly Chinese, in its cavernous interior, an architectural feat in itself. Much had been written about its grand opening late last year, but I had paid scant attention, assuming somehow that it would be just another of those institutions open to the public where rows and rows of books are kept neatly stacked but lie unread for decades for lack of a committed readership.

But I was in for a surprise. The library, located on the city's outskirts in Tongzhou district, is a must-visit for any serious bibliophile, and was teeming with readers when I visited over the weekend.

Its amazing layout, the ease and convenience of its display and its stupendous collection — albeit with literary works still being added each day — and the technical finesse that makes the borrowing and returning of books seamless, left me spellbound.

I was soon mentally thanking a dear friend for suggesting that I pay a visit to this steel leaf-and-canopy marvel.

The library has a fairly substantial collection of books in foreign languages, chiefly English, and I was delighted to see books by both contemporary and classical writers, with some of my favorites thrown in for good measure.

I think a visit to this modern-day masterpiece is one of the best ways to spend a lazy Sunday. There is nothing better to do than being curled up with a book in a tiny corner of the humongous library from 10 am to 8 pm, I decided.

Though it is a good hour away by subway with at least one transit stop en route, the library is only a 5-minute ride by taxi from the drop-off station, Beiyunhe West.

While there, I almost missed the absolutely fantastic children's section, and was astounded to see kids of practically all age groups poring over comics and other tiny-tot literature.

There is also a magazine section kept in drawers that open for you to pick and choose; and one area is devoted to LPs (long-play, or full-length vinyl records) of classical and modern Western music, as well as other well-known composers and albums. I am not sure if these are available to borrow, though.

And, if you are in the mood for coffee while reading, the cafeteria also comes equipped with two robotic contraptions that serve you at least five varieties of caffeine from a vending machine.

For the tech-oriented, there is also a separate metaverse experience hall that is dazzling and quite futuristic. I even managed to speak into a microphone to ask the Mandarin-speaking virtual assistant's name.

Membership of the library is open to foreigners, though you need to show your passport before they process the request.

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An inside view of the Beijing Library in Tongzhou district. BIJU DWARAKANATH / CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Series of unfounded cyberattack claims latest smear campaign

In a new smear campaign against China, the United States and some of its key allies have accused the country of being responsible for a series of hackings over the last decade or more targeting officials, journalists, parliamentarians and institutions in the US and the United Kingdom, with the authorities in the two nations filing charges or imposing sanctions against what they perceive to be Chinese culprits involved in the "malicious" cyber activities.

The US Justice Department on Monday announced charges against seven hackers who it claims are living in China. And on the same day, the UK government imposed sanctions on a company and two individuals that it claims are connected to a breach in the country's cyber defenses that it alleges may have given the Chinese intelligence agency access to information on tens of millions of UK voters held by the Electoral Commission. New Zealand joined the anti-China witch hunt the following day, with its security minister claiming that hackers linked to the Chinese government launched a State-sponsored operation that targeted its parliament in 2021.

Such claims are unwarranted and unfounded. They have zero credibility as they are unsubstantiated. The concerted efforts of three of the so-called Five Eyes to sling mud at China have drawn a strong rebuke from Beijing, with a Foreign Ministry spokesman on Tuesday calling the US and UK moves targeting Chinese individuals and other entities nothing but "pure political maneuvering". In London, Charge d'Affaires at the Chinese embassy Yang Xiaoguang urged the UK government on Tuesday to stop its "self-staged anti-China farces, and refrain from going further down the wrong path".

The US has in recent years drip-fed accusations of China hacking into US businesses working in the defense, telecommunications and manufacturing sectors to steal business and trade secrets. Microsoft said in May last year that State-backed Chinese hackers were targeting the US' critical infrastructure. Yet not one of these claims has had the support of any evidence.

In stark contrast, there is a mountain of evidence proving that it is the US that poses the biggest cybersecurity threat globally. WikiLeaks has published thousands of secret CIA files detailing some of the hacking tools the US government employs to gain access to the information on computers, smartphones and even smart TVs. Cyber Command, the US military's hacking unit, has made no secret of it being ready to conduct "offensive" cyber operations if need be. Not to mention the massive surveillance activities conducted by the National Security Agency that targeted prominent figures such as former German chancellor Angela Merkel, whose personal cellphone was tapped.

China has also fallen victim to cyberattacks from the US. For example, while investigating a cyberattack on Northwestern Polytechnical University in Xi'an in 2022, China's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center extracted spyware called Second Date, which is "cyber espionage malware developed by the NSA". The center and the Chinese cybersecurity company 360 also detected a cyberattack on the Wuhan Earthquake Monitoring Center last July, with preliminary evidence indicating that the attack had come from the US.

China firmly opposes, and fights against, all forms of cyberattacks. The US should stop hyping up the "China hacking theory" and refrain from politicizing cybersecurity, so that countries can work together to deal with the challenges cybersecurity faces globally by strengthening their capacity to defend against malicious cyber activities for the common good of humanity.

## Ramping up the fight against terror

Four days after the terrorist attack in Moscow, the terrorist attack in northwest Pakistan on Tuesday is a reminder of the urgency with which countries should strengthen their counterterrorism collaboration.

The suicide attack in Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killed five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver. Although the loss of life was less than in the Moscow attack, the nature of the act was no different, and it should be strongly condemned. Terrorism is a common enemy of humanity and poses grave threats to people's lives and social stability worldwide.

The rapid advancements in information technology, cloud computing, big data, artificial intelligence and digitalization of industries including telecommunications, logistics and financial sectors make it easier than ever to plot, organize and launch terrorist attacks, as the ongoing probe into the Moscow attack indicates.

But they also make it easier to spot, prevent and fight terrorism.

That being said, the Pakistani side should waste no time in using all necessary means to carry out a thorough investigation to identify all those behind the attack, which no party has claimed responsibility for, and bring them to justice at an early date. That will be the best condolence for the families of the victims.

The five Chinese nationals who were killed were construction workers and engineers heading to Dasu Dam, the biggest hydropower project in Pakistan, where they worked.

Suspicion is likely to fall on Baloch separatists being the orchestrators of the attack. They have claimed responsibility for previous such terrorist attacks, including the one in July 2021, in which at least 13 people, including nine Chinese nationals, were killed when a suicide bomber detonated his vehicle near a bus carrying Chinese and Pakistani engineers and workers.

The Pakistani authorities should take practical and effective measures to protect the safety of Chinese citizens and institutions in the country where a large number of China-funded infrastructure projects are underway under the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, an important part of the Belt and Road Initiative. At the same time, Chinese citizens and companies in Pakistan must pay close attention to the local security situation and make every effort to ensure they don't become easy targets for terrorist attacks.

It should be noted that Tuesday's attack came less than a week after Pakistani security forces killed eight Balochistan Liberation Army militants who opened fire on a convoy carrying Chinese citizens outside the Chinese-funded Gwadar Port in the volatile southwestern Balochistan province.

"Strategic projects and sensitive sites vital for Pakistan's economic progress and the well-being of its people are being targeted as a conscious effort to retard our progress and sow discord between Pakistan and its strategic allies and partners, most notably China," the Pakistani military said in a statement.

Yet those trying to use such attacks to damage China-Pakistan relations should know that any attempt to undermine China-Pakistan cooperation will never succeed. The two countries are all-weather strategic partners and "iron brothers", and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has made great contributions to Pakistan's economic and social development, and will carry on as planned.

China opposes all forms of terrorism and firmly supports Pakistan's actions to combat terrorism. China will work more firmly with Pakistan to safeguard the safety of Chinese personnel, projects and institutions in Pakistan.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## EU's law on artificial intelligence could herald a 'Brussels effect'

The European Parliament recently passed an artificial intelligence law, paving the way for what it describes as its trend-setting regulation to come into force later this year. The European Union has long been at the forefront in the development of rules and standards governing artificial intelligence. Adoption of the act will have a new impact on global AI governance.

The law reflects the long-term strict approach of the EU to the governance of artificial intelligence, highlighting the need to prevent high-risk AI from encroaching into the basic rights of individuals, social democracy and the rule of law and environmental sustainability. It sets clear limits on the functional use of artificial intelligence, prohibiting the biological classification of people based on sensitive information collected, and the use of unauthorized facial images to build facial recog-

ognition databases. It also bans preventive law enforcement interventions based on the assessment of an individual's characteristics, and behavioral manipulation of people by exploiting their weaknesses.

Apart from regulating the artificial intelligence technology, the bill also makes corresponding provisions on the application norms for artificial intelligence according to the place of use, and adopts strict management norms for the use of artificial intelligence in critical infrastructure, education and vocational training, employment, basic services, certain systems of law enforcement, immigration and border management, justice and other fields, with specific measures including keeping a log of usage, ensuring monitoring and accepting complaints from citizens, to ensure transparency.

The bill also stipulates that general-purpose AI and its models must comply with

the EU copyright law and disclose details of the data content used to train their models. In particular, it focuses on the "deep-fake" of photographs and audio and video content, believing this can bring systemic risks, and thus requires developers to disclose data sources and comply with copyright law, especially for deepfake content.

The EU always remains conservative on the development and governance of artificial intelligence, paying more attention to risk prevention and control than innovation. The adoption of the AI Act is believed to mark the beginning of a new AI era whose importance cannot be overstated. Some even believe the law will make the EU the "de facto" global standard for trustworthy AI, and with its unique "Brussels effect", the bloc will successfully promote its AI governance norms on a global scale.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## Ma's return-to-roots trip good for cross-Strait ties

The timing of former Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou's visit to the Chinese mainland, leading a group of Taiwan youths — from April 1-11, during the Qingming Festival holiday — adds to the significance of this visit.

Chinese people pay respects to their ancestors at the festival. It is like a shared tradition that binds the 23 million Taiwan compatriots with their 1.4 billion family members on the mainland.

That the 20 youths accompanying Ma will participate in a memorial ceremony for the Yellow Emperor in Shaanxi province best explains how they are undertaking this trip in search of their roots. They are expected to

feel the warmth of their compatriots.

Even for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan, Ma's visit is a positive step because it can serve to reduce cross-Strait tensions, diluting the antagonism that the DPP has earned for itself. During her eight years in power, Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen ruined mutual trust across the Strait, bringing cross-Strait ties to a new low.

Reportedly, the DPP-controlled Taiwan authorities plan to stage offshore live-fire military drills in Kinmen Island and nearby areas. The Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council has responded saying it will closely monitor any military movements in

the region, and should the DPP act recklessly, provoke or create trouble, its designs will be defeated.

If it continues to go the wrong way, the DPP will only create bigger trouble for itself. Contrary to DPP's gesture, Ma's return-to-roots trip is expected to promote exchanges and cooperation in various fields between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, enhance mutual understanding and emotional connection and promote the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations, so that compatriots on both sides benefit and work jointly for national rejuvenation.

— ZHANG ZHOULIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Commitment to opening-up remains undimmed

The ongoing Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 in Boao, Hainan province, and the China Development Forum held in Beijing on Saturday have both demonstrated China's commitment to continuing to embrace the world as well as the world's confidence in the future of the Chinese economy.

Since the beginning of this year, positive indicators for China's economy have continued to accumulate. In the first two months of this year, the added value of the national industrial enterprises above designated size

increased by 7 percent year-on-year, the total retail sales of consumer goods grew by 5.5 percent, manufacturing investment by 9.4 percent, and the combined imports and exports of goods by 8.7 percent.

A series of policies launched by the Chinese government to stabilize the economy, promote opening-up and attract

foreign investment continue to have effect, creating more favorable conditions for foreign investment.

In January and February, 7,160 foreign-invested enterprises were newly established across the country, a year-on-year increase of 34.9 percent; the actual use of foreign capital was \$29.76 billion, of which \$3.91 billion was actually used in high-tech manufacturing, up 10.1 percent year-on-year.

China is in an important period of accelerating its economic transition and promoting high-quality development, which presents huge opportunities. China sincerely welcomes companies from all over the world to invest in the country and continue to create a market-oriented, legal and first-class business environment.

In the past five years, the rate of return on foreign direct investment in China has been approximately 9 percent, which is at a relatively high level internationally. In 2023, the foreign direct investment in China accounted for approximately 15 percent of the world's total, ranking first among developing countries.

It is fair to say that China's comprehensive advantages in attracting investment, including its large market size, complete supply chain, sound infrastructure and rich human resources, remain outstanding. If the country can take full advantage of its technological innovation, industrial upgrading and domestic and foreign capital to promote new quality productive forces, it can maintain relatively stable and rapid development even though the international environment is relatively unfavorable.

Despite the United States' attempts to check its development, China is still a main source of impetus for the world's development and its contribution to world economic growth will continue to stay at around 30 percent.

With some major economies resorting to protectionism, the formation of regional cooperation is worthy of encouragement. Developing countries have no reason not to work together to promote the international trading system based on World Trade Organization rules.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

## Dialogues with Thinkers

**Editor's note:** March 28 marks the 65th anniversary of Tibet's democratic reform, which liberated more than 1 million people from serfdom and slavery, and started Tibet's modernization process. Li Decheng, deputy director-general of China Tibetology Research Center, shares his views on the significance of the democratic reform with China Daily's Zhu Ping. Excerpts follow:

## Democratic reform started Xizang's modernization

**Q1: Why is the democratic reform in Tibet a bigger milestone in the history of human rights than the abolitionist movement in the United States?**

**A1:** Before the democratic reform, Tibet was a decadent, backward and dark feudal serfdom, far from being any kind of paradise. Under the feudal serfdom, the religious-political administration was led by feudal lords. The social structure consisted of two major classes: the serfs and the serf-owners. The serf-owner class primarily comprised government officials, nobles and the upper clergy, accounting for about 5 percent of the total Tibetan population. They owned all of Tibet's land including pastures, and the majority of livestock.

Serfs, who accounted for 90 percent of the population, and slaves, who comprised 5 percent, had limited or no freedom and were firmly tied to the land, serving their feudal lords for generations. Additionally, they were forced to perform backbreaking labor and shoulder heavy tax burdens. They also suffered due to usury and exploitation by the upper class.

In the feudal serfdom in old Tibet, serfs and slaves led a miserable life. The slave-owners exercised arbitrary powers over them, including the use of the "13-Article Codes" and the "16-Article Codes", which divided people into three classes and nine levels. The life of people who belonged to the highest class had the highest value for their lives, equivalent to gold, while the life of the lowest class had very little value, equivalent to a rope made of grass. This unequal and oppressive class system made old Tibet a treacherous place, not a paradise. It was the darkest, most decadent and backward society, even more brutal than medieval Europe.

That's why the democratic reform in Tibet, which liberated Tibetans, was a more progressive movement than the abolitionist movement in the United States, though the historical and social conditions of the two movements were different.

After the American Revolution, the Southern and Northern states had two different social systems: the South mainly had a feudal system with slave-owners and a plantation economy, while the North had a capitalist economy under a capitalist system. The North required a huge number of workers to fuel the "industrial revolution", while the South bought and sold slaves and used slave labor for agricultural production. That resulting contradiction between the North and the South led to the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, and Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and eventually the victory of the North in 1865, leading to the abolition of slavery.

However, after the abolition of slavery, the freed individuals who became wage laborers were subjected to exploitation and oppression by the Northern bourgeoisie. They did not gain true liberation like the former Tibetan serfs did following the democratic reform. The serfs in Tibet not only got personal freedom and enjoyed equal rights but also received land and livestock, and access to pastures and other means of livelihoods, becoming the masters of their destiny and country.

Post-emancipation US did not guarantee equal rights for the former slaves either, with racial segregation and discriminatory policies remaining a persistent issue in American society. The former slaves in the South, despite being eligible for employment, faced racial discrimination and violence — a situation totally different from Tibet where equal rights were granted to the former serfs and slaves following the democratic reform.

**Q2: Why did the democratic reform kickstart the modernization process of Tibet?**

**A2:** In the 1950s, Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme, the then vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said that if the feudal serfdom was retained, the serfs would soon perish, leading to the demise of Tibetan society. Therefore, he concluded, the democratic reform should not only liberate the huge serf population and unleash social productivity but also save Tibetan society.

Without the democratic reform, which granted the serfs and slaves personal freedom and made them masters of their own destiny and country, Tibet would not have entered a stage of benign development or transformed into a socialist society. From this standpoint, the democratic reform in Tibet did lay a solid political and social foundation for Tibet's rejuvenation and socialist modernization.

Tibet's economic development in the past was at a very low-level. Historically,

Tibet's economy was undeveloped, lacking in scale and growing at an extremely slow pace. However, after the democratic reform and the liberation of productive forces, the former serfs used their labor and enthusiasm to build contemporary Xizang (the Xizang autonomous region was founded in 1965). Consequently, agriculture, industry and various social undertakings in Xizang experienced rapid development.

In terms of education, under the old Tibetan feudal serfdom, there were hardly any modern schools. However, after the launch of the democratic reform, modern schools were built, and they provided education from the kindergarten and primary to the middle, high school and even the university level. Xizang today provides universal education, with nearly 100 percent enrollment rate for the children of the vast population of farmers and herdsmen. This historical leap was not possible under the old Tibetan feudal serfdom, in which only a few nobles had access to a certain level of education, as there were no modern schools.

So rapid has been the pace of Tibet's development that in the two decades before 2017, Xizang's GDP and social development grew in double digits, consistently ranking the highest in the country.

Additionally, in terms of public health, under the feudal serfdom, the average life expectancy in Tibet was only about 35.5 years. But following the democratic reform and Tibet's transition to a socialist society, the health and living standards of the people have continuously improved. At present, life expectancy in Xizang is as high as 72.19 years.

**Q3: Some Western politicians and media claim the democratic reform has undermined religious freedom in Xizang. What's your response to this claim?**

**A3:** This is not reality. Before the democratic reform, the Tibetan people did not have religious freedom. First, in terms of faith, whether to believe in a particular religion or sect should be the voluntary choice of an individual. However, under the feudal serfdom, there was no freedom of choice. Monasteries would force some people to become monks or nuns, with different monasteries having different rules. For instance, in some Tibetan monasteries, it was stipulated that if a family had three sons, at least one, or even two, of them had to become a monk.

Moreover, before the democratic reform, more than 90 percent of the people in the Tibetan monasteries were impoverished monks and nuns. Only a small minority, roughly 3 percent, belonged to the upper echelons of the monasteries who enjoyed certain religious and feudal privileges, and oppressed and exploited the impoverished monks and serfs. There were even prisons in the monasteries, where the "disobedient" monks and serfs were thrown in and treated cruelly. Therefore, the upper echelons of the monasteries, the monastic feudal lords, and the vast impoverished monks and nuns were not equals, which goes against the basic tenet of all religions.

After the democratic reform, Xizang implemented a policy that ensured religious freedom, and allowed the people to choose which religion or sect they wanted to follow. The believers could freely practice their religion and choose where to study the scriptures, and the monks achieved equality. Unlike in the past, the vast number of monks and nuns were equals and could freely study the scripture of their choice and engage in religious activities. They were no longer forced to perform menial tasks.

There has been a change in the management of monasteries, too. In the past, the upper echelons of the monasteries, essentially the feudal lords, controlled the monasteries. After the democratic reform, a democratic management system was introduced, granting the impoverished monks and nuns the right to manage the monasteries. Under the feudal serfdom, there was no religious freedom. Only through democratic reform of the religious system have the Tibetan people achieved true religious freedom.

**Q4: How can modernization better protect Tibetan traditional culture?**

**A4:** Chinese modernization represents the comprehensive progress of society, and encompasses not only economic and social advancement but also the development and advancement of culture. This comprehensive modernization model applies to Xizang as well, where economic, political and social development coexists with cultural advancement and ecological civilization construction.

The cultural development in Xizang has indeed accelerated modernization, while the protection of traditional culture has made a significant contribution to cultural development and advancement. Since the peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951, particularly after the democratic reform in 1959, the Tibetan traditional culture has been better protected and developed. For instance, traditional Tibetan medicine (TTM) has achieved important milestones in protection and development. And the Party and the government have provided substantial support and assistance for the development of Tibet's traditional culture.

For example, in 2019, the government allocated 1 billion yuan (\$138.90 million) for building a new campus for the Tibet University of Traditional Tibetan Medicine. The university has trained more than 7,600 specialized talents in TTM, which has played an important role in safeguarding public health, promoting cultural development and even contributed to economic development. For instance, TTM practitioners cover an impressive 94.4 percent of the population in Xizang, indicating TTM's crucial role in maintaining public health.

Indeed, the TTM sector has achieved rapid development, which has helped it to standardize and scale up production. This has not only contributed to the economic and physical health of the people but also helped boost local cultural endeavors and even economic growth.

From this perspective, Tibetan traditional culture has undergone transformative development, providing crucial support for Xizang's modernization. For instance, the Beijing Tibetan Hospital, sponsored by the China Tibetology Research Center, is the only Tibetan hospital in Beijing but plays an important role in promoting TTM and Tibetan culture and helps local people with effective medical services.

**Q5: Some Westerners claim that Xizang's development has come at the cost of the environment. Is it true?**

**A5:** Chinese modernization embodies an important principle, that is, of harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. This principle is reflected in the modernization practices in Xizang. Xizang's high-altitude environment is unique — it is known as the "Roof of the World" and is one of the crucial sources of water for the Chinese nation. Therefore, the protection of its environment, water sources, ecological assets and preservation of various species are of utmost importance.

In recent years, Xizang has been especially emphasizing the importance of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature in its modernization process. It advocates green and sustainable development. The central government, on its part, has made substantial investments in these areas, actively supporting environmental protection. For instance, from 2012 to 2022, the central government cumulatively allocated more than 29 billion yuan in the form of subsidies and rewards for grassland resource protection in Xizang.

Tibetan Buddhism, too, advocates for environmental protection and ecological conservation. For example, it promotes the concept of non-violence and emphasizes the protection of sacred mountains, rivers and lakes, which can support the construction of ecological civilization and prompt believers to participate in the process.

The Tibetan people know full well the importance of animal protection. The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is home to many unique and rare animals such as the Tibetan antelope, wild yak and the Tibetan wild donkey. The Tibetan people treasure these and other animals. Their heightened awareness about and care for the environment and the flora and fauna reflect their strong consciousness, and their belief in the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

**Q6: Why do we need to have a sense of a Chinese national community to promote modernization in Xizang?**

**A6:** Forging a strong sense of a Chinese national community is important to promote the modernization of Xizang. It reflects the fundamental interests of all ethnic groups. And only by forging a strong sense of Chinese community, safeguarding the territorial integrity of the motherland, and strengthening ethnic solidarity can we protect the interests of all ethnic groups. From this perspective, Xizang should take measures to foster a strong sense of Chinese national community. Only by doing so can we safeguard the unity of the motherland and strengthen ethnic solidarity.

Safeguarding the unity of the motherland and strengthening ethnic solidarity are an important part of the Party's policy for governing Xizang in the new era, demonstrating the extreme importance of fostering a strong sense of Chinese national community.

As the struggle against separatism enters a critical period, hostile overseas forces continue to engage in activities aimed at splitting the country, which not only undermines social stability in Xizang but also is a blatant interference in the nation's internal affairs.

Foreign forces have been trying to use the "Tibet issue" as a pretext to interfere in China's internal affairs, harming Xizang's modernization process. So we need to counter not only separatist activities but also slanderous attacks. There is also a need to safeguard the unity of the motherland and strengthen ethnic solidarity. Only by fostering a strong sense of a Chinese national community can we lay a solid political and social foundation for Xizang's modernization.

**Q7: What's your view on Western criticism of boarding schools in Xizang?**

**A7:** In Xizang, where the population is sparse and educational resources are dispersed across a vast expanse of land, people have a strong desire to be educated and are aware of the right to education. The Party and the government attach great importance to the well-being of the Tibetan people and the education cause, with their goal being to create favorable conditions for Tibetan children to receive quality education according to their wish.

The form of boarding school education in Xizang is fundamentally different from colonial-era boarding school education in Western societies. Students in Xizang have the freedom to study at fixed hours and can return home during their free time and holidays. Through this approach, the vast farming and herding communities have gained the right to education and effectively improved the overall literacy rate of the entire nation. Over the years, students who have been educated in Xizang have made significant contributions to the development of Xizang and the country as a whole.

Therefore, the criticisms from Western politicians and media, as well as external separatist forces, using the so-called boarding school education rhetoric, are not based on reality. Theirs is an attempt to smear China, but they cannot shake our determination and confidence to keep improving the quality of education in Tibet.

Also, the teaching of the national common language is one of the basic conditions for modern society and modern life. Following some Westerners' logic, we can also say the promotion of the English language worldwide is an example of cultural hegemony by English-speaking countries. However, without common languages of international communication, the international community and people from different language groups across the world would not be able to communicate with each other, leading to isolation, which is not desirable. Similarly, without a common national language in China, each ethnic group could remain isolated, hindering cultural exchanges and the sharing of civilizational achievements, which is also not desirable.

The Tibetan language and script are currently being widely promoted and used. The central government has made extensive efforts to protect the Tibetan language and script. The Tibetan language and script are taught at various levels and types of schools in Xizang, ensuring the children inherit and develop the language and script of their forefathers.

Furthermore, many newspapers and periodicals in the Tibetan script are published in the region. For instance, in our China Tibetology Research Center, our Chinese Tibetan Studies magazine also has a Tibetan script edition. For our researchers, too, we have Tibetan language classes, enabling them to learn the Tibetan language and script. Indeed, the Tibetan language and script are being well promoted and widely used. They are also being inherited and developed by the Tibetan children, contrary to the foreign politicians' claims that the Tibetan language and script face extinction.

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



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## Rachmat Kaimuddin

## Indonesia's EV is open for business

Indonesia's latest import incentives for global electric vehicle (EV) makers to produce EV in the country offers them a golden opportunity to make inroads into the country's EV nascent industry that is now open for business.

However, timing is crucial, and the ones who reap the most return will be those who come in first to capture the market share of Indonesia's EV industry that is set to go on a fast lane.

Under the new incentives packages, international automakers that produce EVs in Indonesia, south-east Asia's largest automotive industry, are eligible to get import duty exemption on completely built-up four-wheeler EVs and completely knocked-down four-wheelers EVs with local component requirement below 40 percent until 2025. This will provide international manufacturers greater access to Indonesia's lucrative automotive market which saw the production of 1.4 million cars — with 41 percent of those for exports — and the sales of 6 million motorcycles in 2023.

The domestic market will also be presented with more options of EVs, which in turn will make the EVs more affordable for millions of Indonesian consumers. The effort to make EVs more affordable is a critical factor because affordability has been cited as a key purchasing factor, with over half of those recently polled by analytic firm Standard & Poor's or S&P Global believing that EV pricing worldwide is too high.

For global EV makers, seizing the opportunity to manufacture EV in Indonesia not only provides access to a burgeoning market but also serves as a strategic move to diversify their manufacturing bases, especially to serve the RHD (Right-Hand Drive) market. By taking advantage of the tax incentives, these manufacturers can position themselves at the forefront of the global EV revolution, tapping into Indonesia's potential as a key player in the global transition to sustainable transportation. Moreover, the allure of tax exemptions on completely built-up EV imports offers a compelling incentive to penetrate the Indonesian market.

Indeed, the EV market potential in Indonesia is enormous. Currently, the automotive market contributes 4 percent of Indonesia's total GDP at \$1.3 trillion and the country has an ambitious goal to provide 2 million EV passenger cars by 2030. Although the current proportion of four-wheeler EVs accounts for 2.2 percent of total vehicle sales, once the sales touch the tipping point between 5 to 10 percent, EV adoption tends to jump drastically due to the multiplier effects of early adopters. Furthermore, as Indonesia's population expands to approximately 300 million by 2030, its purchasing power is predicted to increase, with GDP per capita expected to rise from \$5,000 to \$10,000 by 2030, making it a more attractive market with a bigger pool of potential buyers and more car ownership.

Early EV industrial adopters can also access the thriving ecosystem of ancillary industries and services, triggered by the incentives. As the domestic automaker industry evolves to embrace electric mobility, there will be a surge in demand for components, infrastructure and services specific to electric vehicles. This surge is expected to catalyze the growth of a diverse array of supporting industries, including battery manufacturing, charging infrastructure development, and software and technology solutions tailored to EVs. The resultant expansion of the supply chain will not only fortify the automotive sector but also engender a network of interconnected industries, thus amplifying the economic impact of the incentives. And Indonesia is well placed to leverage this opportunity as the country is home to the largest deposits of nickel which is an essential component of EV batteries. The resource-rich country is also eyeing to build a lithium refinery with 60,000 tons capacity to complement its nickel-based battery industry.

Again, the timing of the investment couldn't be better because the government has lured two of the world's leading EV battery manufacturers to Indonesia as Republic of Korea's LG Energy Solution sets to begin production this year and China's Contemporary Amperex Technology Co (CATL) plans to start the construction of its production plant this year. In addition, the government has also rolled out a set of incentives for companies providing public EV charging stations such as lowering electricity tariffs for them.

But the Indonesian market, like any other competitive market in the world, expects producers to offer innovation and affordability by offering the most suitable products to the market. Take the mobile phone market landscape for example, Chinese brands now dominate the market with a total combined market share at a whopping 69.5 percent as of 2022, thanks to their competitive pricing and innovation.

Entering a nascent market has its risks. But if you enter a market that is run by a pro-form government like Indonesia, the competitive advantages will outweigh the risks. Not only do the import incentives demonstrate Indonesia's determination to implement clear structural reforms in the EV industry, but they also represent bold policy choices that will put the EV industry in an accelerated mode. And that's a risk that is worth investing in.

*The author is Indonesian Deputy Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*

## GLOBAL VIEWS

RONNIE LINS

## Collaboration for a new era

As traditional education no longer meets job market demands, South-South cooperation between China and Brazil will help reform their educational systems for the digital age

South-South cooperation has become an important pillar for mutual development among southern hemisphere countries, encompassing critical areas such as infrastructure, economy and sustainability. However, in a world increasingly shaped by exponential technological advances, a new significant challenge arises: the potential exacerbation of social inequalities due to the unemployment's impact on global economies. Urgently, we must adapt the educational system to this new reality. The ability of countries to adjust their educational system to meet the emerging global

context will set them apart, determining their future economic, social and sustainability development stages.

As the technological revolution redefines the job market, the current education's inadequacy becomes a growing concern, as it has the potential to worsen social inequalities by increasing unemployment and reducing nations' per capita income. This scenario gives China and Brazil a chance not just to strengthen their traditional sector ties but also to explore the collaborative potential in reformulating education and economic modernization, aligning it with the 21st-century demands and reducing the risks of growing social disparities.

In a rapidly changing world where artificial intelligence and digital technologies redefine knowledge and work boundaries, educational systems must adapt to new realities.

Traditional education is no longer fully meeting contemporary job market demands, and requires urgent revision. Thus, South-South cooperation between China and Brazil becomes a crucial opportunity for both countries to collaborate in reforming their educational systems. Together, they can develop strategies that, while respecting their intrinsic characteristics, adequately prepare their future generations for the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, ensuring the development of essential skills to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and technologically advanced global environment.

Adapting education to the new digital era poses an imminent challenge for countries such as China and Brazil, seeking not just economic growth but also innovation and social equity.

First, effectively incorporating digital

technologies into the educational system will be crucial. This includes not just the availability of technological resources but also their curricular integration, ensuring technology is used pedagogically and innovatively. It will be essential to establish innovation labs focused on artificial intelligence, big data and the internet of things, where students can engage in real projects, such as developing adaptive learning apps or intelligent energy management systems. Moreover, launching exchange programs where Brazilian and Chinese students participate in hackathons or robotics competitions in both countries will foster collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Curricular reform should include digital competencies and 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity. The challenge lies in balancing new demands without overlooking fundamental disciplines and humanistic skills. Incorporating subjects such as computer programming from elementary education, and using collaborative platforms where students from both countries can work together on projects, are crucial. Introducing courses on digital entrepreneurship and open innovation will prepare students to create and manage tech startups, with shared mentorship from Brazilian and Chinese experts.

Second, educators' professional development must align with new technologies and teaching methods. The challenge lies in offering continuous training that enables them to integrate technology into their pedagogical practices, fostering more interactive and engaging learning. Creating courses on virtual teaching tools and augmented reality will allow teachers to incorporate these technologies into their teaching. Additionally, organizing online seminars on active methodologies like



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project-based learning and flipped classrooms will provide practical implementation examples across different educational contexts.

Implementing new evaluation and certification criteria is necessary as teaching and learning methodologies evolve. The challenge lies in developing assessment forms that recognize and value the competencies and skills acquired in the new educational context. In the new era, the ability to perform tasks that add value to products and services will be vital. Adopting e-portfolio platforms where students can showcase their skills in transdisciplinary projects, thereby facilitating competence-based assessment, is suggested. Developing a digital badge system recognized in both countries, which certifies skills in areas like cybersecurity, software development and

data analysis, is also recommended.

Third, ensuring access and inclusion for all students, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status, is imperative. Everyone should have access to quality education and new technologies, especially those from resource-limited families. This challenge involves not just infrastructure but also inclusive pedagogical strategies. Developing accessible digital libraries in rural and marginalized urban areas, and providing educational content in multiple languages, including Portuguese and Mandarin, are essential. Creating scholarship programs to enable students from underprivileged communities to access high-level technological education, by offering financial and technological support, is also crucial.

However, overcoming resistance from parts of the educational system that are accustomed to the traditional model will be challenging. This includes not just teachers and administrators but also parents and students who may have different perceptions of quality education. The increase in unemployment in sectors that likely become extinct or will be significantly reduced will aid the persuasion process. Strengthening action through community forums on technological education, with interactive demonstrations of how technology can enhance learning and prepare young people for the future, is vital. Conducting workshops for parents and educators to showcase emerging technology sector careers and how education is evolving to meet these new opportunities is essential.

Fourth, integrating notions of digital security and ethics will be crucial. Students and teachers must be aware of the risks and responsibilities associated with the use of digital technology. Implementing curricu-

lar modules on cybernetics to encourage students to consider technology's social and ethical impacts, with international case studies, is a step forward. Organizing cybersecurity competitions between schools and universities in both countries will encourage students to develop real digital security challenge solutions, stimulating intellectual engagement.

Raising awareness about sustainability and continuous updating knowledge about it must be present in public policies at all levels in both countries. This process can be bolstered by creating a bilateral think tank to monitor technological education trends and propose regular updates to educational programs. Establishing partnerships with technology companies to fund education research scholarships, encouraging new solutions and development of pedagogical approaches that are sustainable and innovative, is critical. Technology evolves rapidly, and the educational system must adapt sustainably and agilely to these changes, ensuring that investments in educational technology are enduring and effective.

Last year, China proposed the Global Initiative on Data Security, advocating mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit, opposing ideological division or the building of exclusive groups, promoting information exchange and technological cooperation, and proposing to strengthen international cooperation and assistance for developing countries to bridge the digital divide and governance gap. This initiative is not only conducive to building a stronger and more resilient global AI ecosystem but also ensures the fair distribution of the value and benefits created by artificial intelligence.

Overcoming these challenges requires Brazil and China to adopt a collaborative approach, sharing experiences, resources and knowledge. This collaboration can serve as a significant benchmark for developing countries. Engaging stakeholders from various sectors, including government, the tech industry, educators and the community, will be vital in shaping an inclusive, effective and future-ready educational strategy.

The author is director of the China-Brazil Center for Research and Business. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LING SHENGLI

## An unwelcome guest

China should take measures to counter NATO's push into the Asia-Pacific, which is aimed at tackling 'challenges' from China and halting its rise

Since describing China as a country that "presents both opportunities and challenges" in the 2019 London Declaration, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has increased its vigilance against China and mentioned the "systemic challenges" posed by China in several strategic documents. The alliance has enhanced political and security cooperation with partners in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia, to expand its presence in the region.

NATO's interest in the Asia-Pacific is driven by multiple factors including the geopolitical climate, the United States' competition strategy toward China, and coordination among its European allies. The bloc's eastward expansion is aimed at fighting "China's challenges" by strengthening its ties with Asia-Pacific partners and linking together security issues in the Asia-Pacific and the Atlantic.

Since there are no detailed policies and action plans for NATO's interference in Asia-Pacific affairs, several possible scenarios exist for its eastward push.

In the first scenario, the bloc will continue expanding the scope of its collaboration with Asia-Pacific countries and deepen the level of cooperation; in the second, NATO will elevate Asia-Pacific partners to the status of quasi-allies; the third scenario will see the alliance admit new members from the region. For now, it seems that the former two scenarios are likely to become a reality.

NATO's Asia-Pacific move serves the US' strategy of countering China, and will have profound implications on the security of China's neighboring regions and the Asia-Pacific area as a whole, as well as the dynamics of China-US competition.

First, NATO's shift to the Asia-Pacific will complicate the security situation of China. The group has reached an agreement on expanding security cooperation, respectively, with Japan, the ROK, Australia and New Zealand, which will increase these countries' military interoperability with NATO, and enhance their capacities to cooperate

**NATO's extending to the Asia-Pacific region will help expand the US' military and political influence in the region, and secure wider support from regional countries on security issues. Interventions from outside players have complicated the security situation of the Asia-Pacific and intensified the competition among internal and external forces.**

with the bloc in operations, posing new threats to the security of China's surrounding areas. It is clear that the US is pushing NATO's eastward expansion with the aim of bringing its European allies to the Asia-Pacific to contain China.

Second, NATO's eastward expansion will undermine the multilateral security mechanisms of the Asia-Pacific. Countries in the Asia-Pacific have established a series of multilateral security regimes, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Defense Ministers' Meeting, ASEAN-China, Japan and ROK (10+3) leaders' meeting, and Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. These cooperation mechanisms are inclusive and open, in sharp contrast to the exclusive and confrontational nature of NATO.

Third, NATO's push to the east will drag some Asia-Pacific countries into the exclusive group, escalate bloc confrontations in the region, and increase the risk of a China-US conflict involving a third party. In addition, the bloc's expansion into the Asia-Pacific will collide with the region's existing security architecture and intensify competition among regional security arrangements.

The US has long been pursuing a strategy that balances its Atlantic and Pacific alliances to maintain its global hegemony, and gain strategic dominance in both the Pacific and the Atlantic. NATO's extending to the Asia-Pacific region will help expand the US' military and political influence in the region, and secure wider support from regional countries on security issues. Interventions from outside players have complicated the security situation of the Asia-Pacific and intensified the competition among internal and external forces.

Despite the negative implications NATO's eastward expansion may have on the Asia-Pacific region, as a collective movement, it still faces several limiting factors.

First, NATO needs to address other security concerns, such as terrorism, cybersecurity and hybrid threats, as well as nuclear proliferation. The security priorities differ among members of the alliance, hindering NATO's capacity to allocate large amounts of resources to the Asia-Pacific.

Second, NATO members have divergent attitudes toward China. The US and its European allies hold different perceptions of the "China threat", which impedes coordination among member states of NATO and the bloc's expansion to the Asia-Pacific.

Third, third-party factors are inhibiting NATO's eastward push. For instance, the "10+X" cooperation framework with ASEAN at the core has grown into a key security regime of the Asia-Pacific. NATO's intervention in Asia-Pacific affairs goes against the principle of common security upheld by ASEAN and hinders its effective operation. This may provoke opposition and countermeasures from regional states.

All in all, NATO's push into the Asia-Pacific is aimed at tackling "challenges" from China and assisting the US' strategic goal of halting China's rise. China should take measures on several fronts to counter NATO's move.

First, it is necessary for China to unequivocally oppose NATO extending its reach to the Asia-Pacific and draw a crystal-clear redline. Even some European countries are cautious about NATO's turning eastward, fearing it will exacerbate their relations with China. By expressing strong objections to NATO's eastward push, China will deter



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

these reluctant European countries from challenging China's core interests and weaken their support for NATO's interference in Asia-Pacific affairs.

Second, China ought to strengthen economic and trade cooperation with European countries. Since the US and Europe don't share same views on the "threat" from China, and US allies have divergent economic and security interests to pursue, China should expand trade and economic cooperation with US allies to increase the costs of "decoupling" from China and prevent them from confronting China.

Third, China should also deepen collaboration with Asia-Pacific countries in more fields. The security of the Asia-Pacific is of immense significance for China's development, and thus enhancing political and security cooperation with regional states will help improve China's ties with its neighbors, and maintain the stability of the region. It is imperative for China to carry out all-round cooperation with ASEAN, sta-

bilize economic and trade ties with Japan, the ROK, Australia and New Zealand, and expand collaboration with other regional countries to discourage them from supporting NATO's advance into the Asia-Pacific.

Fourth, instead of the NATO mechanism that focuses on bloc confrontation, the Asia-Pacific region needs a more inclusive and fair security regime that can help address security threats and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of regional countries and counter NATO's expansion into the region. To this end, China should enhance its political and security cooperation with other regional countries and push for establishment and improvement of regional security mechanisms.

The author is director of the International Security Research Center at China Foreign Affairs University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## BUSINESS

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# Micron Tech cements bond with China

US chipmaker begins Xi'an plant expansion; to increase investment

By MASI  
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US memory chipmaker Micron Technology will strengthen cooperation with local supplier ecosystem in China, as it aims to maintain a big part of its global business in the world's second-largest economy despite challenges, company executives said.

Their comments came as Micron held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new factory in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Wednesday, highlighting the company's commitment to the Chinese market.

Sanjay Mehrotra, president and CEO of Micron, said in a speech that the US company has been continuously investing in the Chinese market for over 20 years, with a presence in Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, and Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

"Together, we will continue to share the future of the semiconductor industry here in China and across the globe. The best is yet to come," Mehrotra said.

Asked how Micron would position the Chinese market in its global business amid challenges, Manish Bhatia, executive vice-president of global operations at Micron, said: "China is a critical part of our global business. We are focused on being able to support that business."

China, Bhatia observed, has many different innovations in customer-oriented products and it is a very important part of Micron's global presence. The company wants to make sure that it has a strong share of business in China.

"There's a huge appetite for newer technology solutions in China. And we want to be able to support that desire from Chinese consumers for leading-edge products and support our customers who want to use them," Bhatia said.

Micron said it will set up new engineering labs in Xi'an to shorten the time taken to serve customers. Meanwhile, the company will be working with local suppliers to develop a better ecosystem around that factory and help the company execute its orders faster.

The US company's total investment so far in Xi'an has exceeded 11

billion yuan (\$1.5 billion), and the recent additional investment plan of 4.3 billion yuan emphasizes Micron's ongoing commitment to its local customers, the company said.

Micron first announced the plan in June last year. The investment will be used to open a new production line to make chips to strengthen its Xi'an plant's packaging and testing capabilities.

The new production line is expected to be completed in 2025 and the company expects to have production output from this new space toward the second half of calendar year 2025, Micron said.

According to the local government, the annual output value of the new production line is expected to hit 3.6 billion yuan.

On Saturday, China's Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao met with Mehrotra, and said that China welcomes Micron to continue to take root and deeply cultivate the Chinese market, and achieve better development while complying with Chinese laws and regulations.

Mehrotra said Micron plans to increase its investment in China, meet the demand of Chinese customers and contribute to the development of China's semiconductor industry and the digital economy.

The Xi'an plant expansion comes after the Cyberspace Administration of China said in May last year that products of Micron sold in China had not passed the latest cybersecurity review, and operators of the country's key information infrastructure should stop purchasing its products.

Roger Sheng, vice-president of Gartner, a US market research company, said the investment plan clearly showed Micron's attitude toward the Chinese market, which accounted for around 11 percent of the company's \$30.8 billion global sales in 2022.

Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, said that for many foreign companies, China is a big market, a key part of their supply chains and a major source of innovation. "Any attempt to decouple from China is infeasible," Pan said.

## Boao Forum



Participants discuss AI issues at the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 in Boao, Hainan province, on Wednesday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

## Experts, execs stress responsible AI

By CHENG YU in Boao, Hainan  
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No country, including the United States, can single-handedly lead the future development of artificial intelligence, and only global cooperation can ensure that AI will remain safe and beneficial for all, said field experts and company executives at the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 in Boao, Hainan province, on Wednesday.

Their remarks were an attempt to address "AI anxiety" among sections of the Chinese AI industry consequent to the launch of text-to-video model Sora by US firm OpenAI.

Zeng Yi, a researcher of the Institute of Automation, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and a member of the United Nations High-level Advisory Body on AI, said: "The US will not lead the future AI development alone, nor will China. Unless we move forward hand in hand, no country will."

Zeng emphasized that AI is a foundational technology and an enabler.

"The world is vast enough to allow China, the US and many other countries to find their own opportunities in building infrastructure and driving applications."

"If the culture of China differs

from that of the US, then please provide a profound understanding of how a different culture might envision the empowerment of technology in the future and how we can deeply integrate science and humanity to offer more possibilities for the world."

The more pressing issue, he said, is how the world can unite to truly develop AI that is safer, more reliable and more trustworthy.

Stuart Russell, a professor of computer science at UC Berkeley and a leading AI researcher, said that competition in the field is by and large healthy, but the idea of a zero-sum game is a "huge mistake".

"If AI can be created to be safe and beneficial, and more capable than human beings, then it can function as a source of unlimited wealth," he said. "In that sense, there is no need to compete for such technology."

Russell further said that a more important issue is to coexist healthily and safely with this technology, which is still an open question for the world.

Chinese tech companies such as iFlytek, Alibaba Group, Tencent Holdings, Baidu Inc, ByteDance and Huawei Technologies as well as thousands of startups are scrambling to develop AI large models. Many of them have gathered momentum over

the past year.

As of October, China had developed 254 AI large models with a parameter of at least a billion tokens each, according to a report released by the Beijing Municipal Science & Technology Commission. Tokens are chunks of text that AI learns from, while a parameter is used for evaluating numeric data.

Liu Cong, vice-president of iFlytek and head of iFlytek's research institute, said the company's SparkDesk AI large model has had great improvements and is expected to catch up with ChatGPT-4 in Chinese abilities by the middle of this year. More importantly, it is trained on a totally independent computing power platform.

"But we have to note that only when the large model is applied can it become an important engine for new quality productive forces," he said.

"Facing the future, China must get a clear understanding of its gaps with those of international levels and, meanwhile, leverage its joint forces on resources to accelerate the systematic construction of AI."

Liu said that focus should be sharpened on the social risks and ethical challenges that the AI tech may pose, in order to ensure AI becomes a tool to build a better world.

## PBOC head calls for IMF quota reform

By OSWALD CHAN in Hong Kong  
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Asian countries should cooperate with each other to push the reform of the quota system of the International Monetary Fund, in order to better reflect the status of Asian countries in the global economy and give emerging markets and developing nations a greater say in the global financial system, said Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 on Wednesday.

"Asian countries can push all parties to reach a consensus on a new quota share formula as soon as possible, in order to lay the foundation for realizing quota share adjustment. The adjustment can ensure that the IMF is a rules-based institution that truly practices multilateralism," Pan said.

The IMF is a quota-based international financial institution where the size of the quota determines the IMF's crisis relief capabilities, while quota share determines the voting rights of member countries in the IMF and the scale of financing they obtain. The adjustment of quota share is crucial to the IMF's governance, representativeness and legitimacy.

"The quota share adjustment is an inevitable requirement to improve the IMF's governance structure and enhance the IMF's duty performance capabilities," Pan said in his keynote speech.

The central bank governor said the functions of the Chiang Mai Initiative should be further refined to enhance the resilience of the global financial market to withstand external risks. Established in 2000, the initiative introduced local currency investment terms on top of US dollar loans, and provides more financing channels and options.

Pan also emphasized the positive role of bilateral currency swaps in promoting bilateral trade and investment, and in providing the supplement of a global financial safety net. The central banks of major economies have provided emergency liquidity support to alleviate the volatility of the financial markets effectively during turmoil in international financial markets or banking crises in some countries.

"As Asia's economic integration deepens, its demand for local currency settlement increases, and the scale of bilateral currency swap cooperation continues to expand. At present, the scale of bilateral currency swaps between the 10 countries of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asia Nations) and China, Japan and South Korea in the region has exceeded \$380 billion," Pan noted.

The PBOC currently has bilateral local currency swap agreements with the central banks or monetary authorities of 29 countries and regions, with a total swap scale of more than 4 trillion yuan (\$553.4 billion), Pan said.

He also pledged that China will improve the construction of domestic financial safety nets so as to provide an important guarantee for improving economic resilience and prosperity of Asian economies.

Eddie Yue Wai-man, chief executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, highlighted that the Asian region is promoting the development of central bank digital currencies.

"The mBridge will conduct trial trade settlements next month with the participation of 20 central banks that could reduce transaction costs and time, and would be the smoothest cross-border central bank digital currency settlement system, setting a precedent in the world," Yue said.

Yue hoped that through such pilot programs, liquidity and various types of infrastructure can be further improved and the framework further expanded. "I believe that a very effective network will be established in the future, and local currency can be used for instant settlement when conducting cross-border settlements."



A view of the booth of Micron Technology during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Briefly

### Mengniu's operating profit up in 2023

China Mengniu Dairy Co Ltd posted an operating profit of 6.17 billion yuan (\$870 million) in 2023, up 13.8 percent year-on-year, the company said in its annual report. Revenue totaled 98.62 billion yuan last year, marking a year-on-year increase of 6.5 percent, according to the report. Its liquid milk business contributed 82.07 billion yuan in revenue, followed by contributions from the ice cream, cheese

and milk powder businesses.

### PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 250 billion yuan (\$35.24 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Wednesday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system stable at the end of the quarter, the People's Bank of China said in a statement.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

By XU WEIWEI in Boao, Hainan  
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Australia and China can improve relations through regular dialogue and increased exchanges — especially in areas of business and culture, said David Olsson, national president and chairman of the Australia China Business Council.

And there have been opportunities for the two countries to work collaboratively in numerous areas, particularly on green economy projects, he said during an interview with China Daily at the Boao Forum for Asia.

Australia has access to abundant quantities of renewable energy, which can then be applied with Chinese technology and know-how to develop the industries of the future, Olsson said.

This kind of collaboration can help "to decarbonize our iron ore and other sectors, and to create green hydrogen to help the transport industry. There are many areas where we can work together."

Australia and China have had a very long trade and investment relationship. Although over the last few years investment by China in Australia has declined, as has Chinese investment generally in many other parts of the world, "there are some significant opportunities for the two to work together now," as they have "stabilized the relationship and are looking forward to a productive future", Olsson added.

Geopolitics has been a major issue over the past few years. "But

importantly, we've now got to a stage where our political leaders are talking to each other again. And we are now starting to look at the opportunities where we can collaborate more closely together."

Olsson said he believes the most important thing for bilateral relations is to meet and talk more regularly.

"We've had the last three or four years when we've not been able to travel because of the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions," he recalled. "Now we're starting to travel more frequently, and there are far more opportunities for regular, sustained, outcome-focused dialogues."

"So we are working very hard on reestablishing constructive dialogue between Australia and China at a high political level," he said, adding that businesses in both Australia and China are now working very hard to try and find opportunities that they can work together on.

The warming of the Australia-China trade relations is positive for growth, Olsson said, adding that both the Chinese and Australian economies need each other.

"Our trade is largely complementary. Despite talk about economic decoupling, the evidence of it taking place is scant. The challenge ahead will be to manage the political and technological challenges that arise in such a way that preserves the mutual benefit that China's economic rise has brought to both China and the rest of the world."

# BUSINESS

## Consumer expo to display more new items

Key national event to be held in Haikou highlighted for boosting consumption

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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The upcoming China International Consumer Products Expo is expected to see a greater number of international brands debut their new products, fueled by the vitality of China's consumer market, the Ministry of Commerce said.

The expo will be held from April 13 to 18 in Haikou, Hainan province.

The event will be China's first significant international expo this year, as the country continues to promote consumption growth, according to the ministry.

In January and February, total

retail sales of consumer goods in the country reached 8.13 trillion yuan (\$1.12 trillion), up 5.5 percent year-on-year, indicating the resilience of China's consumer market, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Since Feb 9, citizens from 59 countries have been allowed to enter Hainan visa-free for up to 30 days for various purposes, and the policy has attracted more global companies to participate in the consumer expo.

This year, the expo's indoor exhibition area is expected to reach 128,000 square meters, and highlight new types of consumption, digital consumption and green consumption displays.

The expo is forecast to attract over 3,000 brands from 59 countries and regions, and 84 domestic and foreign brands will participate in the expo for the first time.

Ireland will serve as guest of honor this year, while the United Kingdom, Mongolia and Malaysia will showcase their products in the form of national exhibition groups for the first time.

"Taking advantage of its geographical and ecological advantages, in addition to the main venue, three new sub-venues have been added for the first time in cities such as Haikou and Qionghai, including sub-venues that focus on sailing and yachting, duty-free shopping, and health consumption," said Sheng Qiuping, vice-minister of commerce, at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

Hainan Free Trade Port is a pioneer in China's opening-up efforts.

In 2023, Hainan's total import and export value reached 230 billion yuan, up 15.3 percent year-on-year, maintaining double-digit growth for three consecutive years. In the past five years, the total amount of foreign investment in Hainan has exceeded that of the previous three decades, according to the local government.

Hainan has made offshore duty-free shopping a golden signboard of the province. Currently, there are some 150,000 types of duty-free products on sale in Hainan, and in the past six years, total sales of duty-free products have exceeded 180 billion yuan, the local government said.

"Next, we will attract a group of major international enterprises to settle in Hainan, and build the

province into a new highland of high-standard opening-up to the outside world," Chen Huaiyu, vice-governor of Hainan, said during the news conference.

Meanwhile, 11 member countries of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership will participate in the expo this year to explore business growth opportunities in China.

The agreement, which took effect in January 2022, has helped boost regional economic growth.

In 2023, the global trade value of goods between Hainan and RCEP members exceeded 80 billion yuan, up 37.9 percent compared to the 2021 levels.

The business exchanges mainly concentrated on areas such as travel, transportation, commerce, and insurance services, the local government said.

## US-based fund to up investment, client focus

By ZHOU LANXU  
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US-based global investment firm Wellington Management will expand its investment and client coverage in China, a senior executive said, betting on the numerous opportunities in the Chinese market.

"As we navigate through a potential new norm of higher inflation and slower growth globally, we see an expansive canvas of opportunities painted across the Chinese market," said Cary Zhang, managing director and general manager of Wellington Private Fund Management (Shanghai) Ltd, a subsidiary of Wellington Management in China.

China appears to be one of the few economies in the world free from inflation pressure while maintaining a relatively high GDP growth rate, thanks to its unique economic characteristics and independent business cycle, Zhang told China Daily in an exclusive interview.

"With the new norm of higher inflation and lower growth as a backdrop, we expect global allocators will recognize the diversification benefit and value in China."

In the short term, Zhang said China's domestic economic cycle may be nearing its bottom, providing hope for long-term outperformance, while in the longer term, the country has strategically planted seeds for economic success in crucial industries, like green technology, healthcare and information technology.

Wellington Management, therefore, views China as an area of opportunity with an attractive risk-reward profile based on current valuations, he said. "We believe the China market provides great alpha potential for active managers like us."

Alpha potential refers to the ability of an investment to outperform the market or its benchmark due to unique advantages or strategies.

Among the large, deep and diverse opportunity sets offered by the Chinese market, Zhang said Wellington Management is particularly focused on areas such as renewable energy — including the sub-segments of clean technologies, green technologies and electric vehicles — as well as healthcare and the application of artificial intelligence.

Echoing Zhang's confidence in Chinese financial assets, Meng Lei, China equity strategist at UBS Securities, said recently that he expects an 8 percent growth in earnings per share performance for the CSI 300 Index this year.

The CSI 300 Index closed about 1.2 percent lower at 3,502.79 points on Wednesday, but has risen over 2 percent since the beginning of the year.

Foreign capital registered a net inflow of 65.89 billion yuan (\$9.12 billion) into A shares this year as of Wednesday via northbound trading of the stock connect programs between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong exchanges, outnumbering 43.7 billion yuan for the whole year of 2023, according to market tracker Wind Info.

Looking ahead, Zhang said foreign asset management institutions like Wellington Management will see more opportunities and possibilities, as the pace of reform and opening-up of China's capital market continues to accelerate.

"China is an important market, with long-term potential for the firm — and is an integral part of our Asia strategy," he said.

Wellington Management opened up its first office in the Chinese mainland in 2008 and set up a wholly foreign-owned enterprise, Wellington Private Fund Management (Shanghai) Ltd, in Shanghai in 2019.

In 2022, the Shanghai-based company secured registration as a private fund manager of the Qualified Domestic Limited Partner (QDLP) program and has since launched two onshore private funds.

QDLP refers to an investment program that allows foreign fund managers to set up entities in China to raise money from mainland investors toward privately offered funds that invest overseas within an approved quota.

"We look forward to continuing to participate in the new journey of the two-way opening of China's financial market," Zhang said.

## Upside seen to Alibaba's scrapped Cainiao IPO

By FAN FEIFEI  
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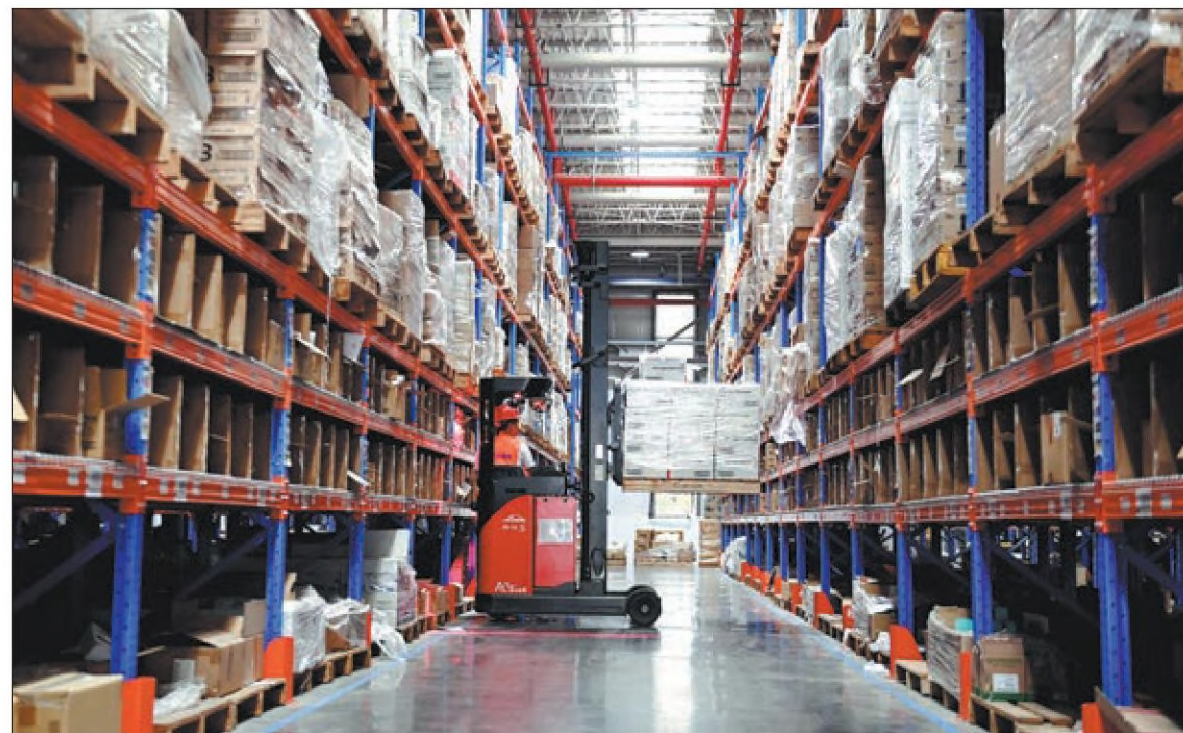
Alibaba Group Holding Ltd's latest move to scrap a planned initial public offering for its unit Cainiao Smart Logistics Network will help strengthen synergy between its logistics services and e-commerce businesses and expand its presence in overseas markets by increasing investment in global logistics networks, industry experts said.

The tech heavyweight said late Tuesday that Cainiao had withdrawn its IPO plans and listing application on the Hong Kong stock exchange. Alibaba, which holds a 64 percent stake in Cainiao, said it intends to invest up to \$3.75 billion into acquiring the remaining interest from minority investors and employees with vested equity.

"Given the strategic importance of Cainiao to Alibaba and the significant long-term opportunities we see in building out a global logistics network, we believe this is an appropriate time to double down on Alibaba's investment in Cainiao," Joe Tsai, chairman of Alibaba, said in a statement.

Alibaba said it plans to align part of Cainiao's business to better realize strategic synergies with its online marketplaces Taobao and Tmall as well as Alibaba International Digital Commerce Group, so as to support Cainiao in executing a long-term strategic expansion of its global logistics network.

The offer, which values Cainiao at \$10.3 billion, underscored Alibaba's commitment to investing in and strengthening its e-commerce



An employee arranges packages at a Cainiao storage facility in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, in July. HUANG ZONGZHI / XINHUA

operations to regain market share and drive growth, it added. Founded in 2013, Cainiao delivers tailored logistics services to Alibaba's domestic and international e-commerce businesses.

Alibaba initially announced in May 2023 a comprehensive asset restructuring plan that included a Cainiao IPO. At the time, the company believed a separate listing would better reflect the intrinsic value of its subsidiary businesses. Cainiao officially filed its application for an IPO on the Hong Kong bourse in September.

"However, given the market conditions, Cainiao's IPO at this juncture would unlikely garner a valuation that reflects its strategic value to Alibaba's business nor achieve the original purpose of

unlocking value for its shareholders," the company said.

The scrapped IPO comes as Alibaba has set its focus on growing its core e-commerce and cloud computing businesses. Alibaba's e-commerce business has come under pressure from rivals such as PDD Holdings, which often offers products at lower prices.

Jiang Han, a senior analyst at market consultancy Pangoal, said the move will be conducive to further integrating Cainiao's logistics services with Alibaba's e-commerce business, enhancing delivery efficiency and improving user experience, so as to strengthen Alibaba's competitiveness in the whole e-commerce ecosystem.

The withdrawal of Cainiao's listing plan and increased investment

in the logistics sector will not only speed up the expansion of Cainiao's global logistics network and enhance its influence on the global stage, but also help Alibaba gain an upper hand in the fiercely competitive e-commerce and logistics industries, Jiang said.

Chen Hudong, a special researcher at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy, said Alibaba is paying more attention to the coordinated development of different business segments, while Cainiao is an integral part of Alibaba's core business and an important infrastructure entity for the development of e-commerce.

The cancellation of the planned Hong Kong IPO for Cainiao also suggests that the market environ-

ment facing Alibaba is undergoing significant changes, and it is reasonable for the company to make some changes to its strategy, Chen said.

Alibaba announced plans last March to split its business into six main units, with each separate unit having the flexibility to raise outside capital and seek its own IPOs — the most significant organizational change to the company in its 24-year history.

The company said in November it will not proceed with the full spinoff of its cloud unit due to uncertainties caused by the recent expansion of US export controls on advanced computing chips. It has also "put on hold" plans to list Freshippo, its grocery and fresh goods retail chain.

## High-standard technical skills urged among industrial workers

By ZHUANG QIANGE  
and PANG BO

As the world's largest manufacturing country with the most complete industrial chains, China now employs some 402 million workers in various sectors, with some 60 percent in the industrial sector.

Among the 200 million plus industrial workers, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) said 77.6 percent are concentrated in manufacturing and construction spheres, with their education levels and technical skills improving significantly.

In the county-level city of Laizhou in East China's Shandong province, Shan Shaoyong is a shining example of a successful industrial worker after being recognized by the ACFTU as a national example, earning a May 1st Labor Medal and becoming a model worker as well as a master craftsman in the province.

"In addition to these honors, I have made 16 scientific and technological achievements, acquired nine patents and trained seven newcomers, so I feel extremely satisfied," Shan said.

The ACFTU has called for more industrial workers to upgrade themselves, and actively participate in labor and skill competitions with themes such as "being a good master, making contributions in the new era," "making contributions to the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and forging ahead in a new journey".

Laizhou has established a "golden seed" talent training mechanism, guiding frontline workers to master work skills, practice unique procedures and do unique jobs — attributes which have led to nearly 200 patents of various types.

The workers' innovative achievements, such as creating and utilizing metal cluster formaldehyde-removing materials, have filled some technical gaps in the country, said Gao Kerong, director of the Trade Union Work Department at the Laizhou Federation of Trade Unions.

Earlier this month, the LFTU held a training course in the city on modernizing healthcare management concerning traditional Chinese medicine, striving to boost employment and encouraging entrepreneurship.

"This professional skills training came at a good time for me as it not only helped upgrade my skills and enrich my knowledge of health management, but also let me have a clearer direction for my next work plan," said attendee Wang Xiaojuan.

Shan noted that as an industrial worker, he is very willing to participate in skills training and skills competitions organized by the city's trade unions, which explore new pathways to success amid the deep integration of industrial development and worker training.

Gao said the city's trade unions have helped cultivate 2,875 skilled workers and launched 199 themed professional competitions with the participation of over 70,000 employees, providing nearly 12 million yuan (\$1.67 million) as cash awards for competition winners.

On March 18, an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) skills training course launched by Gao's federation and administered by the local branch of State Grid Corp was launched in the city.

Yuan Weimin, vice-chairman of the Laizhou Power Supply Co trade union under State Grid Shandong



State Grid employees check railway power supply equipment in Yantai, Shandong province. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Electric Power Co, said, "We began this program with an aim to bolster the cultivation of more talent with better skills, and support high-quality development of State Grid, which is the world's largest utility shouldering a dual task of safeguarding the nation's energy security and providing an economic lifeline."

Yuan said: "Previously, by focusing on our central tasks and key work areas, we organized multilevel vocational skills training and job skills upgrading training for our State Grid employees, expanding available channels for them to grow

into valuable talent, and building a team of high-quality industrial workers to provide solid talent support for our enterprise."

Gao added: "In the future, we will continue to expand the training mechanism for workers' skills upgrading, and optimize the structure of industrial workers, constantly stimulating newer and greater innovations by offering more incentives to enhance their creativity through various kinds of activities and competitions."

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## BUSINESSFOCUS

## CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Cradle of titanium goes from strength to strength

Shaanxi province's Baoji tops worldwide in size of industrial cluster for all major products derived from super-strong metal

By ZHENG YIRAN in Beijing  
and QIN FENG in Xi'an

From spacecraft and submarines to tableware and badminton rackets, most products made from titanium and titanium alloys come from one place in China — Baoji in Shaanxi province, a city also known as the "cradle of the titanium industry".

Titanium production and processing volumes account for about 65 percent of the national and 33 percent of the global total, respectively, in this city in Northwest China.

It is also ranked first in the world in terms of the size of its titanium industrial cluster.

According to Handi Research Institute, there are around 900 titanium and titanium alloy manufacturing enterprises in China, and the top three provinces in terms of the number of such enterprises are Shaanxi, Guangdong and Jiangsu.

Driven by industrial chain leader Baoti Group, there are over 600 titanium and titanium alloy processing and trading enterprises in Baoji, producing more than 300 varieties and over 5,000 specifications of titanium products, which are widely used in aviation, aerospace, navigation, new energy, chemicals and healthcare, and exported to more than 70 countries and regions around the world.

The titanium and new materials industry cluster in Baoji has been included in the national strategic emerging industry cluster development project, and has also been selected as a national characteristic industry cluster for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The reason for the high-quality development of the titanium industry in the city can be attributed to leading enterprises, complementary advantages of SMEs, and the government's favorable policies.

As the largest titanium company in Baoji, Baoti Group has led in setting up over 110 industry standards, accounting for over 90 percent of the standards in total. The company has the most complete titanium production industrial chain, responsible for more than 8,000 national-level new material trial production tasks.

"We have built a complete industrial chain integrating sponge titanium preparation, smelting, processing, deep processing and equipment manufacturing, making China the fourth country in the world to have a complete titanium industry system," said Chen Zhanqian, deputy general manager of Baoti Group.

To further develop the titanium industry in Baoji, the city has been encouraging private enterprises to actively participate in the mixed ownership reform of State-owned enterprises, integrate advantageous resources, and expand enterprise scale.

In July 2023 alone, Baoti Preci-



A view of Baoti Group's titanium and titanium alloy production line in Baoji, Shaanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

sion Forging, funded by a listed company under Baoti Group and a private enterprise, completed a titanium forging processing volume of 2,384 metric tons, achieving a processing output value of 19.42 million yuan (\$2.69 million), setting a record.

Titanium is an important structural metal with abundant reserves in the earth's crust. It has excellent properties, high specific strength, low density, excellent biocompatibility, and is corrosion resistant. It is known as a "strategic metal", "third metal", and "marine metal", and is a highly promising structural material.

Titanium alloy has high strength, good corrosion resistance and high heat resistance, and is widely used in the aerospace, automotive, nuclear, chemical and petrochemical industries, as well as in dentistry and medical restoration.

#### Small, but effective

In Baoji, SMEs are also giving full play to their advantages in this sector.

For example, Baoji High Tech Xinglong Co Ltd has supplied special titanium material for 300 C919 aircraft, Baoji Kehui Titanium Co Ltd has successfully developed the largest titanium alloy forging in Asia, and Baoji Xinnuo New Metal has become the largest medical-use titanium alloy material manufacturing company in China.

Currently, there are over 600 enterprises alongside the titanium industrial chain in Baoji, including 12 national-level "little giant" enter-



Baoti Group's titanium products are displayed at its factory in Baoji. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

prises, three provincial-level chain owners, four provincial-level manufacturing champion enterprises, and 10 provincial-level listed reserve enterprises.

There are more than 100 smelting furnaces for titanium and titanium alloys, more than 20 sets of fast forging machines with a capacity of 1,000 to 10,000 tons, and more than 10 large plate and strip machines with widths ranging between 1 and 3.3 meters.

The city's rolling and processing equipment for pipes, rods and wires, production and processing capabilities for titanium metal composites, research and development innovation capabilities, inspection and testing methods, and brand awareness.

"Currently, there are over 1,000 R&D employees in the titanium industry in Baoji, and the city has several scientific research institutions including Baoti Research

industry in Baoji has outstanding advantages in production equipment, process technology, research and development innovation capabilities, inspection and testing methods, and brand awareness.

"Currently, there are over 1,000 R&D employees in the titanium industry in Baoji, and the city has several scientific research institutions including Baoti Research

Institute, and Northwest Institute for Nonferrous Metal Research. We have a strong industrial foundation, effective policy measures, an excellent business environment, great gathering of industrial talent, and precise investment attraction."

She noted that Baoji has placed the titanium and titanium alloy industrial chain at the top of the city's 13 major industrial chains, with key leaders of the government serving as supervisors of the industrial chain.

The city has issued a series of guiding policies, set up an industry development fund of 10 billion yuan, and established titanium trading centers and research institutes, to promote the clustered, high-quality development of the industry.

In 2022, the Baoji municipal government issued an action plan to promote the high-quality development of the titanium and titanium alloy industry in the city.

According to the action plan, by the end of 2025, Baoji should be capable of producing 100,000 tons of titanium a year, and the annual production value of the industry cluster should surpass 100 billion yuan. There should be at least five listed titanium companies, and 100 high-level talented people introduced to the city.

Currently, among the major titanium projects in Baoji, the technical renovation and expansion project of the Baoti industrial park, which is worth 1.76 billion yuan, as well as the group's precision machining project, with an investment of 520 million yuan, are all progressing smoothly.

Qu Fang, an investment consultant at Wanlian Securities, said: "Although there is a complete titanium industrial chain in China, there is a lack of high-end products; the downstream of the industrial chain has not been fully tapped into, and the participation of the capital market is insufficient."

Zheng Lei, chief economist at cloud services provider Smydigtech, said that the future development of the titanium industry will be more diversified, innovative and high-end. Major application fields include aerospace, national defense and military, new energy, medical and health, ocean engineering and shipbuilding, and new material research and development.

"In the future, based on scientific innovation, the titanium industry in Baoji aims to accelerate the collaborative development of industry, academia, research and application, promoting digitalization and industrial standardization, and expanding toward the mid to high-end value chain," Han from the bureau of economic cooperation in Baoji said.

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## Elevator manufacturers in Guizhou embrace high-quality development

By ZHENG YIRAN in Beijing  
and YANG JUN in Zunyi, Guizhou

The elevator manufacturing industry in Southwest China's Guizhou province has gone all out to achieve high-quality development, by taking advantage of big data and smart manufacturing.

Inside China Aviation Guizhou Elevator Co Ltd's smart manufacturing workshop in Zunyi, Guizhou, nearly 100 technicians are busy operating equipment to produce elevator components at full capacity.

At the workshop, 26 smart robots are capable of processing the components of one elevator each minute, and producing 500 sets of elevator doors daily.

"This year, we have already completed the production of over 100 units of elevators. It is estimated that we will complete over 300 units in the first quarter," said Xiong Changbo, director of the smart manufacturing workshop of China Aviation Guizhou Elevator Co Ltd.

Advanced technology is aiding the whole manufacturing process. In the smart manufacturing

workshop, the front end of every production line is equipped with a display screen, which shows information about the production lines, including daily tasks, the number of completed orders and work progress. Workers scan a QR code to track orders. Compared with handwritten work orders previously, this not only saves time, but also helps in achieving 100 percent accuracy.

"We need to fill out 30 sheets of work orders at most per day. In the past, handwritten work orders easily resulted in omissions or filling errors. There is no such thing now. Digitalization greatly helps to improve our work quality and efficiency," said Zhou Jian, a technician at the production line.

"Through the empowerment of 5G, QR codes are assigned to each link in the production line. During every link, technicians only need to scan the code to start work, making production management efficient and convenient. This not only eliminates missed or incorrect orders, but also immediately detects errors. If the code cannot be scanned, the problem is spotted, checked and traced immediately, greatly reduc-

ing the rework rate," Xiong said.

In 2023, the company produced over 2,000 units of elevators, with a production value of over 500 million yuan (\$69.3 million). Driven by the Belt and Road Initiative, it has signed contracts with elevator enterprises from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other countries and regions, and is planning to export around 300 units of escalators this year.

Zhan Junhao, founder of Fujian Huace Brand Positioning Consulting, said: "Guizhou has a strong industrial foundation and rich manufacturing experience, which gives it a solid foundation in the field of elevator manufacturing. At the same time, the Guizhou government has been vigorously promoting the development of industrial cloud big data and intelligent manufacturing, providing strong policy and technical support for the industry."

He said that in the field of elevator manufacturing, the national pattern is characterized by diversification and fierce competition.

Due to the acceleration of urbanization and better quality of life, the

demand for elevators continues to grow. Major elevator companies are increasing investments in research and development to improve product quality and service levels, in order to compete for market share.

Data from the 2023 World Elevator & Escalator Expo held in Shanghai in July showed that China remains the world's largest elevator market. It is also the most dynamic and promising market in the world. Over 80 percent of new elevators globally are produced in China each year. As of the end of 2022, the elevator inventory in the Chinese market was close to 10 million. With rapid urbanization, the number is estimated to grow.

In the first half of 2023, the cumulative production of elevators and escalators in China totaled 745,000 units, a year-on-year increase of 12.9 percent.

Apart from enterprises in Guizhou, elevator manufacturers from Liaoning, Jiangsu, Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces have also taken a leading role in the industry.

"In the future, the elevator manufacturing industry will become



Workers operate high-end equipment at China Aviation Guizhou Elevator Co Ltd's smart manufacturing workshop in Zunyi, Guizhou province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

intelligent, green, and service-oriented. With the continuous development and application of technologies such as the internet of things, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence, the industry will have more efficient and intelligent production and service models," Zhan said.

"At the same time, with the improvement in environmental awareness and the deepening of sustainable development concepts, the elevator manufacturing industry will also pay more attention to green production and the research and application of environmental protection technologies," he added.