

WORLD USA

Yellen: US not seeking economic 'decoupling'

PAGE 7



Ministry: Schools must do background checks on their staff

CHINA, PAGE 4



Digital transformation

Tech giant Huawei focuses on connectivity, computing, cloud

BUSINESS, PAGE 8

CHINA DAILY

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Dozens die at charity event



Above: People trapped in a crowd attempt to free themselves during a stampede in Sanaa, Yemen, on Wednesday, as seen in this video image. At least 76 people were killed and dozens injured in the stampede at a Ramadan charity event at a school.

Right: Yemen's Houthi Health Minister Taha al-Mutawakel visits a survivor on Thursday at Al Thawra Hospital, as seen in a video image.



Solid steps to ramp up technology self-reliance

China to boost strategic emerging sectors amid 'external uncertainties'

By MA SI masi@chinadaily.com.cn

China will ratchet up efforts to nurture strategic emerging industries such as artificial intelligence and smart cars, in its latest push to hone its tech and industrial prowess amid challenges and external uncertainties, the country's top industry regulator said on Thursday.

Such moves will help China better pursue self-reliance in crucial technologies and deal with mounting tech restrictions from Washington, which reportedly will unveil "unprecedented" measures later this month to limit United States investments in Chinese tech companies, experts said.

Zhao Zhiguo, spokesman for the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said at a news conference that China will take solid steps to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies such as 6G, optical communication and quantum communication.

More efforts will be made to beef up research and development in tech frontiers such as AI and blockchain, Zhao said, while highlighting the need to end bottlenecks in key components and systems and safeguard the stability of global industrial and supply chains.

The measures are part of China's broader push to grow its technological capabilities.

President Xi Jinping said during a four-day inspection trip to Guangdong province earlier this

month that high-level self-reliance and strength in science and technology are the keys to Chinese modernization.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, also called in January for quicker steps to ensure self-reliance in science and technology, amid containment by foreign countries. He made the comment while presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the 20th CPC Central Committee.

This week, the US news website Politico reported that unprecedented rules limiting US investments in China are expected later this month. They are expected to require US companies to notify the US government of new investments in Chinese tech firms and prohibit some deals in critical sectors like microchips, Politico reported.

Jeffrey Sachs, a renowned economist and professor at Columbia University, told China Daily that there is a lot of tension between the US and China and, "I believe a lot of that tension arises from the US side."

Washington's restrictions are driven by its fear of China's rise, which is "misplaced and should be reduced", Sachs said.

"This is the US' mistake, because some Americans think that if China is rising, the US must be losing. But this is false. Economics is a win-win cooperative game, not a zero-sum game," he added.

He Guangxi, a researcher at the

Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development, said the reported new rules indicate that Washington is tightening its containment of China's tech industry, from sanctions on selected companies to sweeping restrictions on US investments in Chinese tech companies.

The US Department of Commerce said on Wednesday that a \$300 million penalty has been imposed on US tech company Seagate for shipping over \$1.1 billion worth of hard disk drives to China's Huawei in alleged violation of US export control laws.

"This is a typical long-arm jurisdiction from the US government," said Bai Ming, deputy director of international market research at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

"Washington is doing whatever it can to obstruct normal businesses between US and Chinese companies at the heavy cost of US companies, including slapping a huge fine on its own company," Bai said.

"The moves highlight that Washington's top priority is to contain China, and it no longer considers the interests of US companies," he added.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a news conference on Thursday that China firmly opposes the US' overgeneralization of national security concepts, abuse of national power, and unjustified suppression of Chinese enterprises.

Tourism sees big surge ahead of May Day holiday

By CHENG SI chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

The tourism industry will see a boom "off the scale" during the approaching May Day holiday, as bookings for both domestic and overseas trips have been increasing in the run up to the five-day break, which starts on April 29, according to travel agencies.

They said the bookings for the May Day holiday began soaring around late March and began nearing the peak in mid-April, much earlier compared with previous years, as the brief Qing Ming Festival break did not allow most people to plan long trips outside their hometowns.

Lvmama.com, a travel portal, said that as of Saturday, bookings for domestic trips on the platform pulled even with the pre-COVID number in 2019. Long-distance and overseas trips are usually favored by its users, Lvmama said.

Chinese online travel agency Tuniu said that roughly 40 percent of its users have booked long-distance trips for the five-day holiday and 25 percent selected trips lasting more than five days by adding the weekend.

In addition to popular domestic destinations, such as Hainan and Yunnan provinces, many people are booking trips to lesser-known places, it added.

Zibo, a city in the eastern province of Shandong, has attracted millions of travelers for its delicious barbecue. Homestay bookings in Zibo have increased twelvefold compared with 2019, according to Tujia, an online homestay operator.

As of Monday, the total homestay bookings on Tujia for the May Day holiday saw a twofold growth compared with the same period in 2019, the online operator said.

"Last month, my wife and I first saw videos on Douyin about Zibo's

barbecue, which uses griddle cakes to wrap grilled meat. We are curious and plan to travel to Zibo after our two-day visit to Qingdao, which is a beautiful coastal city in Shandong province," said Wang Lijian, 29, a Beijing resident.

"We will start our trip a day before the holiday starts to avoid the travel rush. ... I didn't have a long break since the Spring Festival holiday and I'm looking forward to this trip, and so is my wife," Wang added.

According to online travel services provider Qunar.com, as of Monday, bookings for flight tickets for the May Day holiday exceeded the number for the same period in 2019, and the average price has gone up by 50 percent compared with 2019.

Flight tickets from Beijing to Dali, a popular destination in the southwestern province of Yunnan, are sold out, it added.

Industry insiders said that out-

bound tourism will also see robust growth during the holiday, as it is the first long break after group tours resumed in early February following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

Figures from Trip.com show that during the first 10 days of this month, the bookings for overseas travel increased eightfold year-on-year, and searches for flight tickets for the upcoming holiday rose ninefold on the platform compared with the previous year.

It said the five most popular overseas destinations searched on the platform are Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia.

"Outbound tourism has already registered growth, which will help improve the resumption of flight services to overseas destinations," said Sun Jie, CEO of the group. "The May Day holiday is a big test for these overseas destinations, and their services might affect the choices of Chinese travelers in the future."

RETIREES RELISHING A RETURN TO WORK

New doors open as life of leisure fast loses its appeal

By YANG FEIYUE yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn



Retirees in China are increasingly forsaking a life of leisure to pursue second careers close to their hearts.

They are discovering new interests — in particular, passing on their skills to young people — and also escaping boredom after finding it hard to remain idle.

It did not take long for Beijing resident Li Zhijie, who is in his 60s, to realize that life in retirement, which is envied by many, was not for him.

He had few domestic matters to attend to, and little interest in engaging in casual conversation with other retirees at his residential community.

"I felt as if a piece of my life was missing and that I needed a reason to get out of bed in the morning," Li said.

Before retiring about two years ago, he worked as a private tutor at local gyms for 10 years.

"I thought I needed to make a living to support my family back then," Li said.

However, when his retirement benefits eventually came through and he no longer had to worry too much about money, he found that he missed the workplace.

See Retirees, page 2

Global Security Initiative delivers on promises

On April 21 last year, President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Security Initiative, whose four pillars are common, comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable security, at the Boao Forum for Asia.

The main characteristic that makes the initiative different from others is that it looks at security in the light of human development, not weapons, conflict or hegemonic aspirations. It negates the mentality of alliance building or "my security first" and sees cooperation as a basic tool to



construct a community with a shared future. Thus, we need to build on cooperation to deliver a prosperous and peaceful world to future generations.

Since the launch of the Global Security Initiative, China under the leadership of President Xi has been working tirelessly to deliver

on the vision. China has taken multiple steps, which shows that it is serious about global peace and sustainable development. It started the campaign to secure world peace by adhering to the principles of dialogue and development, and by keeping common interests at the heart of all actions. It has adopted the tools of comprehensive and coordinated philosophy to ensure transparency and win-win outcomes.

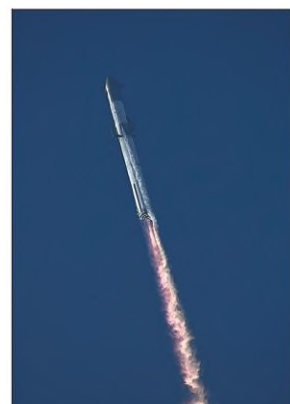
First, China initiated the campaign to make development acces-

sible to everyone, which is a fundamental requirement to build a peaceful society. President Xi has urged everyone to become part of global development and work for common prosperity.

Simultaneously, China is strengthening bilateral cooperation for economic growth and development. It is helping Africa, Asia and Latin America to realize the dream of development and is investing to create decent livelihoods.

See Initiative, page 3

SpaceX Starship explodes



The SpaceX Starship lifts off during a flight test from Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas, on Thursday. The gigantic rocket, the most powerful ever built, lifted off successfully for its first test flight but exploded shortly afterward. PATRICK T. FALLON / AFP. ERIC GAY / AP

INSIDE Central banks are at forefront of advancing green transition Global Views, page 13

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PAGE TWO

From page 1

"Many people my age may feel that they have finally arrived at the point where they no longer have to work and that they have sufficient time and money to chill out, but I took this as a sign of leaving society. I just didn't want it," he said.

As Li became increasingly bored in the months after retirement, he was convinced that he needed to find work he could enjoy.

"I figured it didn't have to be something too challenging. As long as I could do the work, I would no longer have that empty feeling, and every day would be meaningful," he said.

Although his wife disagreed with his decision, Li opted to return to an occupation with which he had become fully accustomed over the years. In 2020, he became a group class trainer at Hilefit, a sports technology company.

"This is what I can do and is what I am good at," he said.

A decade of experience enabled him to land the job quickly.

"The company saw that I am in good physical condition and that I can design courses and give exercise instructions, so I got the trainer position," he said.

The job opened a new chapter in his life. Li resumed his highly disciplined routine by working out regularly at parks and gyms, while acquiring the skills needed for Body Combat, a high-energy workout inspired by martial arts.

"Every day, I arrive at the gym on time, prepare the sound system, change into my workout clothes, set up the equipment, and then begin instruction," he said.

Those taking the group class are mostly young people, and Li enjoys interacting with them after the workout sessions.

Some of the students have become friends with Li, affectionately referring to him as "Uncle Jie". "It feels fulfilling and rewarding when we finish a class and take a group photo together, all of us drenched in sweat. The students say 'thank you, coach' while they applaud me. At moments like these, I realize my life is truly worthwhile," Li said.

He also takes special pride in the fact that some of his new students are amazed to learn his age and find that he has better stamina than them.

He currently takes two to four classes a day, each lasting one hour.

"I am very happy with my life now and feel fortunate that I can still do something worthwhile that I truly love," he said.

Li believes this is the peak time of his life, even when compared to his younger days.

"My latest dream is to instruct young students — those born after 2010. If I can do this, it will be really cool and impressive," Li said.

Coffee culture

Like Li, a man in Xianyang, Shaanxi province, who wanted to be named only as Shen, has been enjoying a new life since retiring about three years ago.

Shen, who is in his 60s, now takes on a number of roles at the cafe he owns in the city, which he opened one year before retirement.

"I enjoy hosting various small events, serving the customers and making coffee for them," he said, adding that the job is not just about making money, but has given him a new interest after retirement.

Shen said he cannot stay idle, as he has been active in various fields, including home renovation, advertising and the electronic products trade.

In 2008, he launched out on his own — traveling to countries such as Thailand and Myanmar to sell light industrial products produced in coastal areas of China, such as Guangdong and Fujian provinces.

During his time in Southeast Asia, Shen became acquainted with coffee culture.

He said that when he was in Yangoon and Mandalay in Myanmar, people spoke to him about working in coffee shops.

"At first, I didn't like the bitter taste of coffee, but with the idea of doing business with others, I slowly began to accept it, and after a while, it grew on me," he said.

Going to coffee shops also gave him the chance to relax and overcome his homesickness.

"Visiting a cafe in the afternoon allowed me to recharge my batteries at a time when I was alone and far from home. Somehow, the bitterness of the coffee, along with the cafe atmosphere, helped comfort me," he said.

After returning to China in 2011, Shen missed the coffee culture of Southeast Asia, so he decided to buy



Left: Shen and his wife pose in front of the cafe he owns in Xianyang, Shaanxi province. Right: Li Zhijie (center) and his students pose for Body Combat, a high-energy workout inspired by martial arts. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Retirees: Fresh interests discovered, new jobs found



Left: Shen explains his coffee-making process to judges at a national coffee brewing competition in Xi'an, Shaanxi, last year. Right: Li Zhijie (front) poses with his students after a class. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: Shen makes coffee at his cafe. Right: Li Zhijie builds his muscles at a gym in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“I now love coffee, and I finally have plenty of time after retirement, so why not make a go of it?”

Shen, retiree who owns a cafe in Xianyang, Shaanxi province

“I am very happy with my life now and feel fortunate that I can still do something worthwhile that I truly love.”

Li Zhijie, Beijing retiree who works as a gym coach

numerous coffee-making utensils and use his free time learning to make the beverage.

It was not long before he opened a small "coffee corner" on his balcony to entertain friends. To Shen's surprise, everyone spoke highly of his efforts and gave his coffee positive reviews.

He then thought about opening a

coffee shop, but didn't act on his idea immediately.

"I was afraid of losing money. My home city is not like Beijing and Shanghai, and I didn't know the local coffee market, or if young people like the drink," Shen said, adding that he still had to make a living to support his family.

He decided on something "more

reliable" by running a copy and printing shop outside a local school for several years.

As the family finances improved, especially when his retirement benefits plan started, Shen became more determined to open a cafe.

In 2019, with the support of his wife and daughter, he put his plan into action and started the cafe on

Zhongshan Street, Xianyang.

"It was not an easy decision, as I was worried about having no customers, failing to make a profit, and ultimately sustaining the business. Yet, I knew I had to do it, otherwise it would be a big regret," he said.

The decision proved to be one of the best he has ever made.

Shen said the greatest reward the

cafe has brought him is the chance to meet young people. "In a sense, it has given me the opportunity to rejoin society after retirement," he said.

He added that he and his wife enjoy listening to young customers discussing work and life over coffee at his cafe.

"They make me feel younger and forget my age," Shen said, adding that it is good to see how some of his customers meet and get to know each other, before falling in love and getting married. Sometimes, he even helps arrange marriage proposals at his cafe.

Interacting with his customers has enabled Shen to gain a better understanding of young people's lifestyles.

"I can now see things from their perspective, and this has stopped me intervening with my daughter's life by imposing my views on her, as I used to do," he said.

When friends his age advised Shen to stop working and enjoy retirement by taking up activities such as walking, playing chess and mahjong, he politely declined.

"Isn't life about doing something, and if you're lucky, it's something that brings you pleasure," he said.

"I now love coffee, and I finally have plenty of time after retirement, so why not make a go of it?"

Young seniors

As the numbers of China's aging population continue to grow, the ranks of young seniors (those aged 60-69) are also rising.

Data from the seventh national census taken in May 2021 show the number of people who were 60 or older in China in 2020 stood at 264.02 million, of which 147.39 million were in the 60-69 age bracket, accounting for 55.83 percent of the elderly population.

A recent report by the recruitment portal 51job said 68 percent of surveyed retirees have expressed a stronger willingness to continue working.

The portal also conducted a survey among retirees returning to the job market. Nearly 47 percent said they wanted to return to work to realize their personal and social value, while 19 percent looked forward to pursuing better career development by using their skills. Some 34 percent of the respondents said that they wanted to work to continue supporting their family or to meet higher-level consumption needs.

Boss Zhipin, another Chinese jobs platform, reported that last year the number of applicants it received from people older than 55 rose by 27 percent year-on-year, and the number of job offerings open to retirees rose by 33 percent.

In 2021, the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council proposed improving policies and measures, such as employment, volunteer services, and community governance, to fully tap the role of young seniors. In fields such as schools, hospitals, community household services and public service management, efforts should be made to explore flexible employment models suitable for the elderly, according to opinions gathered by the two bodies.

In addition, local governments are being encouraged to establish talent information databases for the elderly, and to provide job referrals, vocational skills training and innovation and entrepreneurship guidance services for seniors who are willing to work.

Dang Junwu, deputy director of the China Research Center on Aging, said it is necessary to rebuild a labor and employment system that meets the requirements of an aging society, so that both the young and the elderly can find development opportunities.

He believes that while ensuring that young people have more job opportunities, it is important to create conditions for healthy young seniors to play their roles. Specific measures should also be introduced, including providing more job opportunities, improving the employment environment, and perfecting legal guarantees for employing seniors again, Dang said.

Shen, from Xianyang, believes there are many advantages to starting a business after retirement.

"For example, the elderly are less impulsive and they consider problems more comprehensively. They also have a stronger focus," he said.

Shen thinks that entrepreneurship is not exclusively for young people, and that being 60 does not necessarily mean "being over the hill".

"There is still a future after 60, and we still have plenty of time before we reach 70 and 80," he said.

TOP NEWS

Inspections launched across China in wake of Beijing hospital fire

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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Safety inspection campaigns have been launched across China to identify and eliminate potential fire risks in medical institutions and places where people congregate.

The inspections follow a deadly fire on Tuesday at Beijing Changfeng Hospital that claimed 29 lives. The fire in the private hospital in Fengtai district was believed to have been caused by welding sparks during renovation work in one of the hospital's buildings, Beijing authorities said on Wednesday.

The Ministry of Emergency Management has directed all regions nationwide to promptly carry out fire safety inspections, giving top priority to crowded places, including hospitals, nursing homes, schools, entertainment venues and high-rise buildings.

Hospitals are public places with a high concentration of people, according to information on fire protection at hospitals and nursing homes posted on the website of the National Fire and Rescue Administration. Once a fire breaks out, accidents such as falls, stampedes, burns and even deaths can occur easily.

There are many combustible materials inside hospitals, such as quilts and mattresses in wards, as well as flammable chemical reagents in operating rooms and pharmacies, according to an article by Liu Tao, an official of the fire and rescue corps in Baoding, Hebei province, reported by Jiemian.com news website on Wednesday.

"The objects easily cause fires and explosions if not properly managed," Liu said in the article.

Moreover, due to the large amount of medical equipment with

high loads of electrical applications in hospitals, aging electrical lines and unbalanced power loads will also increase the risk of fire disasters, Chen Liuyi, a former senior engineer with the fire and rescue corps in Shiyuan, Hubei province, was quoted as saying by Jiemian.com.

"Fire drills should be strengthened in hospitals. In case of fire, emergency evacuation and fire extinguishing plans should be started immediately, and related working groups should take charge of their responsibilities," Chen said.

In Jingzhou, Hubei province, teams of firefighters carried out inspections on Wednesday night at local medical institutions. They mainly checked the operation and maintenance of fire safety facilities.

Of the 31 medical institutions inspected, more than 100 violations of fire safety rules were discovered. Seventy-six places with fire risks were ordered to make corrections, according to a firefighting team in Jingzhou.

In Fuyang, Anhui province, an urgent notice was released by authorities on Wednesday requiring related government departments to carry out thorough checks on places where people congregate, such as inpatient buildings at hospitals, accommodations for the elderly and college dormitories.

The checks were focused on multiple fire risks, including the use of combustible materials in decor, the storage of flammable and explosive materials and blocked escape routes.

The notice also required related departments to enhance the promotion of fire safety knowledge to the public, with the aim of improving preparedness to escape or how to best survive an accident.

Infrastructure boost



A crowd gathers on Tuesday on a Chinese-built overpass in Conakry, the capital of Guinea. The 504.59-meter overpass, connecting the city and its suburbs, opened on Tuesday and is expected to help reduce the traffic pressure in Conakry. XINHUA

US intends to 'turn Taiwan into battlefield' for proxy war

Ex-chairman of island's New Party says reunification only way forward

By ZHANG YI
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People in Taiwan will be the ultimate victims if the United States turns the island region into a battlefield for a proxy war with China, according to Yok Mu-ming, former chairman of the island's pro-reunification New Party.

US interference in the Taiwan question is a major factor hindering the reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, Yok said in an exclusive interview with China Daily. "Many people in Taiwan hope to see reunification if the US stops meddling in the situation."

Yok said that the US doesn't want to see the two sides of the Strait reunite, as it intends to use the island as a pawn to contain the Chinese mainland in the same way as it is using Ukraine to suppress Russia, and it has been adopting two-faced tactics on the Taiwan question.

"US President Joe Biden has long harbored the intention of exploiting Taiwan to fight a proxy

war with China and using Taiwan to weaken the mainland," he said.

Media reports alleged that the US has been considering plans to destroy the island in the event of a military conflict across the Taiwan Strait, which prompted Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin to ask at a news conference in February about what's in store for Taiwan as a result of the US plans.

Yok said it is a malicious intention of the US to turn Taiwan into a battlefield as the Biden administration has said that it would help train Taiwan's armed forces to fight a guerrilla war on the island.

"Taiwan compatriots will become the ultimate victims of such a conflict and it will be the island that will be destroyed," he said. "The result of the US' plan to exploit Taiwan is the destruction of Taiwan."

Leaving his hometown of Shanghai for Taiwan in 1948 at the age of 8 and being unable to return to the mainland until 1990 due to the cross-Strait situation, Yok said that he has always looked

forward to seeing the realization of China's reunification and national rejuvenation.

Serving as the chairman of the New Party from 2003 to 2020, Yok has been devoted to opposing "Taiwan independence", as well as promoting cross-Strait exchanges and national reunification.

Yok said Taiwan will benefit greatly from the country's reunification, noting that the large amount of money the island spends on US weaponry every year could instead be used to improve people's livelihoods on the island.

After reunification, tourism revenue generated from mainland travelers to Taiwan and their spending while on the island will also help boost the island's economy, he said.

Taiwan compatriots are unsatisfied with the Democratic Progressive Party authorities, and people on the island support resuming exchanges with the mainland, he said.

However, the DPP authorities are restricting such exchanges as they are afraid that young people on the island will learn about the reality on the mainland and find that it's different from what they

have been told by the island's authorities, he added.

As long as the two sides of the Strait resume communication, it's easier to resolve the Taiwan question, he said.

"We are one family and we should take care of each other," he said.

Yok said that he agrees with the proposal of the mainland to consult with parties and individuals from Taiwan on the basis of the 1992 Consensus to make arrangements for reunification.

Yok, 83, said that he believed the mainland's system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, in which the CPC exercises State power and the eight non-CPC parties participate fully in the administration of State affairs, is more democratic than the island's electoral system.

Even though the New Party once won about 14 percent of the votes in Taiwan in the 1990s, the third-largest share of the vote, the party still had no right to participate in the island's public affairs, he said.



Online
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Students practice Chinese calligraphy on Wednesday during an event celebrating the upcoming UN Chinese Language Day, which was on Thursday, at the Confucius Institute at the University of Johannesburg in Johannesburg, South Africa. ZHANG YUDONG / XINHUA

UN Chinese Language Day celebrated

By WANG QINGYUN
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China hopes to further international cooperation over the Chinese language and enhance exchanges with other countries and civilizations, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Thursday, the 14th United Nations Chinese Language Day.

Chinese is one of the most spoken languages in the world and one of the six official languages of the UN.

The UN first celebrated Chinese Language Day on Nov 12, 2010, and then decided to select *ganyu* — one of the 24 solar terms of the traditional Chinese calendar that starts around April 20 — as the date of the Chinese Language Day, which has since been celebrated by the UN headquarters, its offices and many countries.

The Center for Language Education and Cooperation, a nonprofit organization under the Ministry of Education aiming to facilitate foreigners' learning of Chinese, launched worldwide celebrations with its partners on Thursday.

The Chinese language has helped convey the UN's voice and

proposals to the world, maintain the smooth operation of the UN and communications between countries, and promote the development of multilateralism, Wang said at a daily news conference.

"We are glad to see that more and more foreign friends are getting to know a diverse, multifaceted and amicable China by learning Chinese," Wang said, adding that many foreign journalists attending the ministry's daily news conferences are able to ask questions in fluent Chinese.

More than 180 countries and regions have launched Chinese language education programs, and 82 countries have included the language in their national curriculum, he said.

Also, the number of people learning the language overseas now exceeds 30 million, Wang said.

President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Civilization Initiative in March, calling for respect for the diversity of civilizations and upholding equality, mutual learning, dialogue and inclusiveness among civilizations.

Taking note of the initiative, Wang said on Thursday that China stands ready to continue to enhance exchanges and cooperation over the Chinese language.

The country hopes to use the language "as a bridge" to promote people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and deepen communications between the Chinese civilization and other civilizations, he said.

Initiative: Social models of host countries respected

From page 1

However, it is pertinent to mention that China is extending economic cooperation without attaching any strings of governance, human rights or so-called democracy. It also respects the social and development models of host countries.

Second, President Xi traveled to Saudi Arabia to attend summit meetings with Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council countries, in addition to bilateral meetings with the Saudi leadership. China offered to enhance multifaceted cooperation based on the formula of win-win cooperation, and Arab countries warmly welcomed Xi's proposals.

Third, China is putting efforts into resolving conflicts and disputes peacefully, with the Saudi-Iranian agreement to resume diplomatic ties among the success stories. It is an excellent demonstration of the philosophy of the Global Security Initiative, by which

China is putting efforts into resolving conflicts and disputes peacefully, with the Saudi-Iranian agreement to resume diplomatic ties among the success stories. It is an excellent demonstration of the philosophy of the Global Security Initiative, by which China encourages dialogue and supports the process by extending development cooperation.

China encourages dialogue and supports the process by extending development cooperation. It is

expected that Iran and Saudi Arabia will devise a formula for peaceful coexistence, which can help to pursue the dream of peace and prosperity for their people.

Moreover, Arab states' relations with Syria are warming, while Turkey and Egypt have reopened high-level visits.

Fourth, China is applying a similar formula to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict. China's 12-point peace position is a comprehensive proposal that covers all important areas. It asks both parties to respect each other's security needs and work for the betterment of people's lives. It also emphasizes building a security framework that is representative of the needs of all concerned parties.

Fifth, China truly supports lasting security and peace in Afghanistan, pushing for multilateral coordination, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance while countering terrorism. Its 11-point position paper released on April 12 could usher in a new chapter

of governance and growth for the war-torn country.

Practical and successful approaches have also been followed with ASEAN nations that have marine disputes.

It can be seen that the Global Security Initiative is delivering on the promises of common, comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable security, which is a good omen for the currently fractured global system.

Therefore, the world is pinning high hopes on the initiative and expects that it will pave the way for sustainable peace and development and contribute to realizing the dream of a shared future for mankind.

The author, a political economist, is CEO of the Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research and Development in Pakistan, and author of Understanding China for Future Cooperation. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Balanced education



Students participate in a novelty race during a sports day at a primary school in Huai'an, Jiangsu province, on Thursday. More students are enjoying the results of the national policy to cut their academic burden and learn more about team spirit, mutual cooperation and hard work. ZHAO QIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Schools must do background checks on staff, ministry says

Loopholes tightened to ensure safety of students on campuses from predators

By ZOU SHUO
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The Ministry of Education has asked schools and universities to conduct mandatory background checks on candidates who work on campuses for sexual crimes before they are hired.

For primary and secondary schools, when they plan to hire staff, they need to submit an application to the local education authorities to check the national teacher management information system whether the candidates have committed sex crimes, said a notice issued by the ministry on Thursday.

They also need to check whether the candidates have been included on the blacklist for teachers and whether their teaching credentials are valid or not, the notice said.

Higher education institutions should conduct the checks themselves.

If the candidates are found to have

previous sexual crimes or other crimes making them unfit to work on campuses, the schools should notify them in writing and the candidates will be eligible to ask that checks be done again. Education authorities and universities should not violate the privacy of the candidates when checking the information, the notice added.

A guideline issued by the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Ministry of Education in November said that people who have committed crimes such as sexual assault, abuse, abduction and violence against children should be banned for life from working in the education sector.

Those who have served prison sentences and are deprived of their political rights are also banned for life from working in the sector, the guideline said.

The guideline has asked the courts to inform education authorities of such verdicts within 30 days

of the ruling. In China, the Criminal Law, the Law on the Protection of Minors, the Teachers Law and the Regulation on Teachers' Qualifications all stipulate that people with specific criminal records cannot work as teachers and staff in educational institutions.

Qu Yifan, a researcher at the Institute of Education and Economy Research at the University of International Business and Economics, said the new measures can help enforce previous laws and regulations and prevent people with certain criminal records from becoming teachers or from working on campuses.

While the laws have been clear, in reality, some education authorities had difficulties in obtaining the criminal records of people, especially if they were from a different region, and there were also cases where authorities deliberately turned a blind eye to people with criminal records and let them enter campuses, she said.

The teaching ban for people with certain crimes is for life, which is a deterrence for people before they

commit the crimes, Qu said, adding that teachers should have higher ethical and moral standards than other professions.

Also on Thursday, the Ministry of Education published on its website the name of seven teachers who have violated work ethics. It is the 12th time the ministry has publicly released the names of teachers for misconduct.

Among them, a teacher, surnamed Zhang, from Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Hubei province, has been stripped of his teaching credentials and put on a blacklist for teaching after he sexually harassed female students by sending them obscene texts, pictures, videos and touched them inappropriately.

Another middle school teacher in Zhuzhou, Hunan province, surnamed Zhou, was sentenced by a court to eight years in prison in November for sexual assault and molesting underage female students multiple times. The teacher was fired, his teaching credentials were revoked and he has been banned from teaching for life.

Legal support, reduced costs promised for IPR

By CAO YIN
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While pledging to give stronger legal support to well-known works, Chinese courts are also determined to maintain the order of registered trademarks, so as to reduce the protection costs for IP rights' owners, an official from China's top court said.

"We'll make greater efforts to protect the legitimate rights and interests of names and characters in popular works, so as to improve the quality and effectiveness of IP protection," Lin Guanghai, chief judge of No 3 Civil Adjudication Tribunal, a division that specializes in handling IP cases with the Supreme People's Court, said on Thursday.

He said that the move is to implement an IP cooperative protection guideline jointly issued by the top court and the China National Intellectual Property Administration in February, calling for all courts to strictly abide by the Trademark Law and the Anti-Unfair Competition Law to help innovators reduce their costs in protecting IP rights.

Two days before the judge made the remark, the country's prolific fairytale writer Zheng Yuanjie announced that he will no longer claim the intellectual property rights of the 673 trademarks that he considered have been used without his authorization.

"I'll keep writing, but I'll no longer publish new works, because it's difficult to protect the IP rights," the 68-year-old author said in a "farewell letter" posted on his account on microblogging site Sina Weibo.

He claimed that his characters' names were improperly registered by companies for trademarks, and in the past 21 years, he's only won a few cases.

The letter quickly went viral online, arousing a heated discussion on IP protection among the public. As of press time, a topic with the hashtag "Zheng Yuanjie Farewell Letter" on Weibo had been viewed more than 16.5 million times.

To help reduce the cost of protecting IP rights and improve the efficiency of handling IP-related cases, Beijing courts have taken action.

"We've worked with IP government agencies, industrial associations and professionals since last year to jointly deal with IP disputes through mediation, in a bid to strengthen IP protection and focus on solving complicated problems in this regard," said Kou Fang, president of the Beijing High People's Court.

A total of 56,803 IP-related disputes were successfully resolved last year under the joint mediation working pattern, he added.

Data released on Thursday by the country's top court showed that Chinese courts accepted more than 520,000 IP-related lawsuits last year.

Also last year, courts nationwide took the initiative to serve the country's strategies and promote innovation-driven development, with stronger IP protection given to major sectors and emerging industries, including new technologies, according to Tao Kaiyuan, vice-president of the top court.

Lunar soil



A visitor experiences augmented reality technology at an exhibition on moon soil in Hefei, Anhui province, on Wednesday. The show at the University of Science and Technology of China displayed micrographs of the lunar soil brought back by the Chang'e 5 mission in 2020. HUANG BOHAN / XINHUA

Vulnerable urged to get vaccinated for COVID

By WANG XIAOYU
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Health experts have urged people who have not been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 to get vaccinated, especially the elderly and those with weakened immune systems, so as to protect themselves and maintain herd immunity levels.

Zheng Hui, a researcher at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention's national immunization program, said that following the wave of COVID-19 that peaked in late December and subsided in late February, China's population has accumulated "good hybrid immunity", that is, immunity provided by a combination of infection and vaccination.

"How will the virus mutate in the future, and with the hybrid immunity in place, when will the next wave of epidemic arrive and peak remain uncertain," she said. "But currently and in the short term, our vaccination strategy is to close up immunity gaps across the population."

Two categories of people are deemed as harboring less potent immunity against the virus, according to Zheng — those who have not been infected and have not completed recommended inoculation procedures, as well as recovered COVID-19 patients who had not been fully vaccinated before infection.

"Even though getting infected will induce a certain level of antibodies, human bodies will need antigenic stimulation at least three times to generate a relatively high level of protective effects," she said. Antigenic stimulation can be achieved either through infection or vaccination.

During an interview with state broadcaster China Central Television, Yin Zundong, head of the China CDC's national immunization program, said that people who have not received sufficient antigenic stimulation are highly suggested to obtain vaccines. The policy is also outlined in a notice released by the State Council's Joint Prevention and Mechanism earlier this month.

Yin added that hybrid immunity has been shown to be more potent and long-lasting than immunity solely induced by infection or vaccination.

"The risk of a second infection in the short term, especially within three months, is very low," he said. "So for vaccinated people who have recovered from a recent infection, there is no need to get a new dose in the short term."

Yin added that COVID-19 immunity will wane in the long term, but the decrease mainly means protection against getting infected or developing mild symptoms will drop, rather than efficacy against severe diseases or deaths.

Smooth spring plowing yields bumper harvest

By LI LEI
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Spring plowing has gone ahead smoothly and the supply of farm produce has been ample in the first quarter of this year, official data released on Thursday by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs showed.

Rural economic data showed the potential for a bumper harvest this summer, an agricultural official said on Thursday, this year's Grain Rain, the last solar term in spring.

"Grain Rain is a critical juncture for spring plowing," said Zeng Yande, director of the ministry's development and planning department.

Underperforming winter wheat crops accounted for less than 10 percent of the harvest this year, lower than last year, he told a news conference held by the State Council Information Office in Beijing.

The intended food growing area — an indicator of farmers' confidence in farming profits — was about 118 million hectares and increased for the fourth consecutive year, he said.

By the end of March, there were 43 million fertile swine, higher than the 41 million benchmark for maintaining adequate supply, and the pork output was 15.9 million metric tons during the first quarter, up 1.9 percent year-on-year, Zeng said, citing figures from the National Bureau of Statistics.

"The market supply is abundant,

and pork production is developing with stability," he said.

The output for beef and mutton, milk and aquatic products increased 3.6 percent, 8.5 percent and 4.4 percent, respectively, in the first three months of this year. The growing areas for vegetables in April was up more than 73,000 hectares year-on-year, Zeng said.

By the end of March, 21.5 billion yuan (\$3.12 billion) in small-sum loans were given to 485,000 people who had recently escaped absolute poverty, and more than 30 million such rural residents have departed for towns and cities for jobs, he said.

The purchasing managers' index for major agricultural companies was 55.4 percent. A PMI above 50 represents an expansion when compared with the previous month.

The average disposable income for rural residents in the first quarter was 6,131 yuan, up 4.8 percent from last quarter. That is 2.1 percentage points higher than the increase for the average urban disposable income, Zeng said.

The total volume of imports and exports of farm produce was \$83.3 billion, up 11.6 percent year-on-year. The export and import volume were \$23.5 billion and \$59.8 billion, respectively.

While speaking at the event, Pan Wenbo, director of the ministry's planting administration department, said the smooth start of the year matters for food security for the whole year.

"Grain and oil crops planted in spring account for more than half of a year," Pang said.

He said efforts aimed at raising the self-sufficiency rate for soybean is an important part of securing food supply, and the ministry will strive to expand the growing area for soybean and other oil crops by more than 666,700 hectares this year.

A separate report released on Thursday at the 2023 China Agricultural Outlook Conference said that the growth of grain output is projected to outpace that of consumer demand over the coming decade.

The event was held by the Agricultural Information Institute of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Beijing.

The grain-growing area and the output per hectare are set to increase by an annual rate of 0.3 percent and 0.9 percent, respectively, according to the China Agricultural Outlook 2023-32, which is compiled by the Market Early Warning Expert Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

It said grain output per hectare is expected to reach 6.34 tons by 2032, and the total output will top 767 million tons by then.

The increased productivity is the major contributor to more food yield, it said.

In comparison, the country's food demand will grow by 0.6 percent annually due to a structural upgrade of consumption behavior

and other factors, and reach a total of 867 million tons in a decade, the report said.

"The tight but balanced supply of food will become a long-term phenomenon, but the balance pressure will be eased," it said.

The report forecast that China's annual rice yield will stabilize at 210 million tons and be more competitive in the global market.

The wheat output will rise 0.5 percent annually and hit 143.9 million tons by 2032, higher than the demand of 141.3 million tons. China will import 4.3 percent less wheat every year over the next decade, and the imported wheat will decrease to 6.02 million tons, the report said.

With an expected annual output of 328 million tons in a decade, the self-sufficiency rate of corn will reach 96.9 percent by 2032, and meanwhile, imports are expected to decline to 6.85 million tons a year, it said.

The self-sufficiency rate for soybean and other oil crops will also see a notable increase.

The report said that by 2032, the growing area for soybean will reach 13.39 million hectares, a 40.7 percent increase from the 2020-22 period. Output per hectare will increase 3.4 percent annually while the gross yield will grow 7 percent annually, reaching 36.75 million tons.

The output of other oil crops will reach 46.68 million tons in 2032, a 29 percent increase from a decade earlier.

CHINA



A Fuxing high-speed train arrives at Xiong'an Railway Station in Xiong'an New Area in Hebei province on Dec 22, 2020. PHOTOS BY SUN LIJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Xiong'an rail line smartest in country

Plethora of technologies used in construction set national benchmark

By SUN LIJUN
For China Daily

On April 1, Xiong'an New Area in Hebei province celebrated its sixth anniversary. Visitors from all over the country took the Fuxing high-speed train to the city to see for themselves the rapid development of China's "city of the future". The quickest trip from Xiong'an Railway Station to Beijing West takes 50 minutes, and the capital's Daxing airport is just 19 minutes away.

As the first major infrastructure project to start construction in Xiong'an New Area, the Beijing-Xiong'an Intercity Railway, which runs for 91 kilometers and has six stations, entered operation on Dec 27, 2020, creating a new high-speed corridor for rail traffic in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. The

line will make Xiong'an an important transportation hub in North China in the future.

Seventy-one intelligent technologies have been used along the line, setting a new benchmark for high-speed rail in China.

It is the first in the country to make use of Building Information Modeling throughout its design, and it also incorporated 3D digital intelligent management from design and construction to operation.

Xiong'an Railway Station also boasts intelligent services, including precise passenger positioning and path planning, and integration of the station with urban space.

The Xiong'an-Shijiazhuang High-speed Railway and the Xiong'an-Xinzhou High-speed Railway are also under construction.



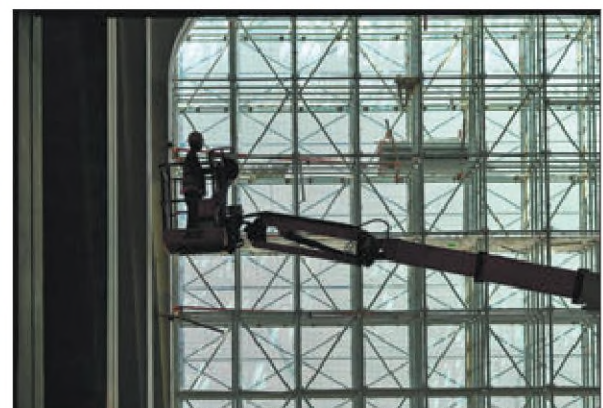
An aerial photo shows high-speed trains parked at the Xiong'an Railway Station train yard on Dec 27, 2021.



Passengers and conductors celebrate the sixth anniversary of Xiong'an New Area on a train running along the Beijing-Xiong'an Intercity Railway on April 1.



A Fuxing high-speed train passes through a noise tunnel on a railway bridge along the Beijing-Xiong'an Intercity Railway on April 30, 2021.



From left: Technicians monitor operations of Xiong'an Railway Station in a control center in Xiong'an on March 17, 2021. A maintenance worker checks a high-speed train in the train yard at the station on April 30, 2021. A construction worker stands on a crane to work on the steel structure of the station's roof on July 13, 2020.

WORLD

78 killed in stampede at Yemen charity event

ADEN/SANAA, Yemen — At least 78 people were killed in a stampede in the Yemeni capital Sanaa as hundreds gathered in a school to receive aid, Reuters quoted the witnesses and Houthi media as saying on Thursday.

Motaher al-Marouni, a senior health official, said 78 people were killed, according to the Houthi militia's Al-Masirah satellite TV channel. At least 73 others were injured and taken to the Al-Thawra Hospital in Sanaa, according to hospital deputy director Hamdan Bagheri.

The crush took place in the Old City in the center of Sanaa, where hundreds of poor people had gathered for a charity event organized by merchants, according to the Houthi-run Interior Ministry. The tragedy came ahead of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan later this week.

The people crowded into a school to receive the donations, which amounted to 5,000 Yemeni riyals, or about \$9 per person, two witnesses involved in the rescue effort told Reuters.

"It was a huge crowd. They fell on me, and I got hurt," an injured child told Al-Masirah from his hospital bed.

Footage from one hospital showed survivors recovering in a ward, some with visible wounds on their limbs and heads.

A video posted by Houthi television on the Telegram messaging app showed a crowd of people jammed together, some screaming and shouting and reaching out to be pulled to safety. Security staff fought to push people back and control the crowd.

Another video after the stampede showed scores of discarded shoes, a crutch and clothing on the steps of the building, and forensic investigators in protective white suits sorting through personal belongings.

The two merchants responsible for organizing the donation event had been detained and a probe was underway, the Interior Ministry said.

"We are experiencing a great tragedy, a large number of our citizens have died during this stampede," said Abdulaziz Bin Habtour, the prime minister of the Houthi movement.

In remarks published by the group's media center, he said measures would be taken to "find a serious solution so it does not happen again." The president of the Supreme Judicial Council said that necessary legal measures would be taken.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdel-Khaleq al-Aghri blamed the crush on the "random distribution" of funds without coordination with the local authorities.

The Houthis said they would pay some \$2,000 in compensation to each family that has lost a relative, while the injured would get around \$400.

Mohamed Ali al-Houthi, head of the Houthi supreme revolutionary committee, said the stampede was the result of the Yemeni people suffering "the worst global humanitarian crisis" after eight years of fighting.

Many Yemenis, impoverished by years of conflict, flocked to charity centers for basic needs.

Yemen has been mired in a civil war since late 2014 when the Iran-backed Houthi militia stormed several northern cities and forced the Saudi-backed Yemeni government out of Sanaa. A Saudi-led military coalition intervened in the conflict in 2015 to support the Yemeni government.

The war has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced 4 million and pushed Yemen to the brink of starvation.

AGENCIES — XINHUA

Swathes of Asia swelter under 'hotter' heat wave

BANGKOK — Sweltering under a blistering sun, people across South and Southeast Asia have been taking cover beneath any shelter they can find, as they pray for cooling rains with record temperatures hitting the region.

Bangladesh saw its highest temperature in almost 60 years in the past week, while in India at least 13 people died from heatstroke at an awards event along with two in Thailand, according to local media.

"It's hotter and hotter every year," said Mikako Nicholls, shielding herself with an umbrella from the blazing rays near Bangkok's central Lumpini Park on Wednesday.

Nicholls said Bangkok's warmer spell was the hottest she had experienced in five years in the capital, and she was trying to stay indoors or in the shade.

Scientists said global warming is exacerbating adverse weather, with a recent report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warning that "every increment of global warming will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards".

Thailand's Meteorological Department said on Wednesday that temperatures hit a record-equaling 44.6 C in the western province of Tak on April 15, warning that the baking weather would continue into next week.

"It's possible that this year's heat might have been exacerbated due

to human actions," the department's Deputy Director-General Thanasit Iamananchai said.

The kingdom typically endures a spell of hotter weather preceding the rainy season, but the sun has shown extra intensity this time around.

"This year's record heat in Thailand, China and South Asia is a clear climate trend and will cause public health challenges for years to come," scientist Fahad Saeed, regional lead for climate policy institute Climate Analytics, said.

He warned that soaring temperatures were a result of climate change and that the impact on vulnerable populations would be dire.

"The extreme heat that we've witnessed over the last few days will hit the poor the hardest," Saeed said.

"It may even be life-threatening for those without access to cooling or adequate shelter."

A similar story played out in Myanmar where Ko Thet Aung, a taxi driver in Yangon, said the heat was worse than in previous years.

"I can't drive if the temperature is too hot during the day," the 42-year-old said.

In Bangladesh, hundreds gathered in the capital Dhaka this week to pray for rain after temperatures hit 40.6 C — the highest recorded since the 1960s.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



A man reads at a booth displaying China-themed books at the London Book Fair on Tuesday. The fair, one of the largest in the world, kicked off on Tuesday. LI YING / XINHUA

China presence speaks volumes at book fair

Nation's 40 publishing houses display 2,300 titles at prestigious London event

By XING YI in London
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More than 2,300 titles from over 40 Chinese publishing houses have come to this year's London Book Fair, which ended on Thursday.

It is the first time since the pandemic that Chinese publishing delegations have come to the world's premier publishing event, which saw participation from more than 1,700 publishing companies and agencies from 60 countries in the exhibition hall of Olympia London this year.

Chinese publishing companies, including China Publishing Group, China International Communications Group, and Jiangsu Phoenix Publishing & Media Group, held some 30 activities during the three-day fair.

The Chinese version of British scholar Martin Albrow's *China and the Shared Human Future: Exploring Common Values and Goals* was launched at the fair. The English version of the book, which was first published last year, now has a revised edition.

Albrow is a renowned globalization theorist and a fellow of the British Academy of Social Sciences.

The book is a compilation of Albrow's academic papers and writings, lectures, and speeches at academic and public conferences and media for over a decade since he started to pay much attention to the issue of global governance and China.

It is an extension of his 2018 book, *China's Role in the Shared*

Common Future: Towards Theory for Global Leadership, which focuses on globalization as well as his explorations on China's readiness to play a bigger role in global affairs.

It offers insights into how China is trying to shape a global society, enabling readers to grasp the author's thoughts and opinions in the context of China in a global setting, both in theory and on practical themes, such as fighting COVID-19, the Belt and Road Initiative and China's poverty alleviation measures, according to the book's publisher Global Century Press.

Rising stature

With China's rising stature, the demand from foreign readers for books on contemporary China is growing, leading to several cooperation agreements having been signed between Chinese and foreign publishers at the fair.

The Foreign Languages Press, under the China International Communications Group, has signed pacts with Turkey's Canut International Publishers and Lebanon's Arab Scientific Publishers to publish a series of China-themed books, including the book, *An Open China: Creating a New Dynamic in the New Era and China, Land of Ceremony and Propriety*.

Deniz Kizilcec, editor-in-chief of Canut International Publishers, said: "All peoples of the world, no matter their different histories, cultures, and systems, are required to understand and learn from each other's wisdom, and build consensus and mutual trust."

On the titles on China's constructive approach to global issues, Kizilcec said they have published several academic titles on the concept of a shared future for mankind and the Belt and Road Initiative, which have all received good responses from the readers.

The Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, based in Beijing, signed an agreement with Springer Nature Group to publish a series of 20-30-minute videos titled *The Uniqueness of Chinese Civilization in World History*, based on a book written by renowned Sinologist Guy Salvatore Alitto.

The cooperation was a pioneering initiative in the field of social sciences and humanities, which would help to present scholars' concepts in multimedia in the digital era, so as to enhance the understanding of Chinese culture for overseas readers, according to the publishers.

Several literary works by Chinese authors, which were recently translated into English, made their debut at the fair.

Xue Mo, a writer from Gansu province, said he got his latest book, *Into the Desert*, translated into English by Howard Goldblatt, a renowned translator of Chinese literary works. "As a Chinese writer, it is important to understand how far the world's publishing industry, books, and literature have come in order to enhance our own understanding," he said.

Nicky Harman, a Chinese-English literary translator, said she was pleased to see young translators establishing contact with more Chinese publishers again as business gets back to normal. "This could be the beginning of a lot of publishing projects," said Harman.

Cease-fire fails to hold in Sudan as toll mounts

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya
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The vicious battle between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces for control over the country entered the sixth day on Thursday as the death toll rose to more than 300.

While making a statement on the situation in Sudan, World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that over 3,000 people have been injured in the fighting. He condemned the loss of life, especially attacks on civilians and healthcare facilities.

"Reports of forces occupying health facilities in Sudan are deeply concerning. Attacks on healthcare are a flagrant violation of international law and the right to health. The lack of safe access to electricity, food, water, personnel and the diminishing medical supplies are making it nearly impossible for health facilities to function at a time when there are thousands injured and in need of urgent care," Tedros said.

On Wednesday, both Sudan's military as well as the RSF separately announced a new 24-hour cease-fire starting at 6 pm local time but fighting continued past the deadline.

The International Committee of the Red Cross also called for unimpeded access in Sudan, warning that the fighting was taking a disastrous toll. Patrick Youssef, Africa regional director for the ICRC, said on Wednesday that it is highly distressing to hear reports of civilian casualties and bodies lying in the streets of Sudan's capital Khartoum.

Top priority

"Our urgent priority is to get medical assistance to hospitals and try to make repairs to their water and power lines so they can treat the wounded. But without the necessary security guarantees required to move around safely, we are still unable to deliver aid and to fully assess the humanitarian needs," Youssef said in a statement.

Osama Abubakar Osman, communication and dissemination director of the Sudanese Red Crescent Society, said the ongoing conflict may cause Sudan's health system to collapse, resulting in catastrophic consequences.

Earlier, China's embassy in Khartoum issued an urgent message, advising Chinese citizens and companies to stay on high alert and avoid going outdoors.

The fighting, which broke out on Saturday, came after weeks of tension between the army and the RSF. The two sides seized power as allies in 2021 but tensions persisted over the proposed integration of the RSF into the military.

China's development initiatives praised at UN

By MINLUZHANG at the United Nations
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The success of Global Development Initiatives (GDI) proposed by China for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development drew praise at the United Nations.

The GDI is a global public good provided by China, said Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN, on Wednesday. Based on China's own development experience, the initiative is aimed at promoting common development and building a shared future.

"I hope more like-minded friends and partners will join the Group of Friends of the GDI and participate in the policy exchanges and practical cooperation under the GDI framework. Let's work together to turn the vision of the 2030 Agenda into reality," Zhang said in his opening remarks at a briefing of the Group of Friends of GDI.

The briefing was held at UN Headquarters in New York with the theme "New Progress of the Global Development Initiative, New Actions to Support the 2030 Agenda".

It was co-hosted by the Permanent

Mission of China to the UN and the UN in China.

"China will continue to play its role as an engine of the world economy. China will continue to share its development experience with other countries. China will continue to provide more public goods to the international community," Zhang said.

"We believe China's new progress in its modernization will provide new development opportunities for other countries and promote the building of a community with a shared future for humankind," he said.

Luo Zhaohui, chairman of the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), delivered a keynote speech.

China is promoting a Chinese path to modernization, committed to high-quality development and high-level opening-up, accumulating valuable experience for the realization of SDGs, and providing feasible and replicable action plans, said Luo.

He said China will continue to practice the concept of a community with a shared future for humankind, build a global development partnership, and promote common development.

During the briefing, all parties present agreed that the world economic

recovery is sluggish, and multiple crises are intertwined. The practical significance and long-term impact of the GDI have become increasingly prominent.

Chimed Khurelbaatar, Mongolia's deputy prime minister and minister of economy and development, on Wednesday said at the meeting that the GDI "is a timely, pragmatic and efficient initiative that will play an important role in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for all countries".

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Pankin said that regarding current global geopolitical tensions and the weakening role of the UN, the GDI insists on being people-centered and focuses on key areas such as poverty reduction, food security, and technological innovation, which is "very significant".

Permanent representatives of Singapore, Cuba, Zimbabwe and other countries in the UN said that the initiative to put development issues at the top of the UN agenda will become an "accelerator" for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and a "catalyst" for multilateralism.

Other permanent representatives, of Pakistan, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and

other countries in the UN said that in less than two years after the GDI was proposed, the 32 implementation measures announced by China already have been steadily advancing and achieved positive results.

The Group of Friends of the GDI should work together to create more cooperation results, they said.

Ministerial officials from Guinea, Cuba, Tajikistan, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and other countries, and permanent representatives or deputy permanent representatives of more than 80 members of the Group of the Friends of the GDI also joined the meeting.

Representatives from nearly 20 UN agencies, including the UN Development Programme and Food and Agriculture Organization joined the meeting. In total, more than 200 representatives attended the high-level meeting.

The panel at the meeting was moderated by Siddharth Chatterjee, the UN resident coordinator in China.

Yang Ying, the director of the Global Development Promotion Center of the CIDCA, introduced important progress in the construction and financing of the global development project database.

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WORLD US

Tornado hits home

Kylie Smith embraces a friend outside of her father's home that was destroyed during overnight tornadoes in Cole, Oklahoma, on Thursday. At least two people were killed, the police said.
NICK OXFORD / REUTERS



Yellen opposes China 'decoupling'

By HENG WEILI in New York
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The US treasury secretary delivered a speech on Thursday that appeared to update the US-China relationship, opposing economic "decoupling" but also maintaining an aggressive approach on various issues.

The speech by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in Washington DC followed months of acrimony between the two nations over issues such as Taiwan, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and a stray balloon over US skies.

"The US will assert ourselves when our vital interests are at stake," Yellen said. "But we do not seek to 'decouple' our economy from China's. A full separation of our economies would be disastrous for both countries. It would be destabilizing for the rest of the world."

Yellen said that she and President Joe Biden do not see the bilateral relationship as a zero-sum contest "where one must fall for the other to rise."

"We believe that the world is big enough for both of us," she said.

She said that the Biden administration's economic strategy is centered around investing in infrastructure, clean energy and technology

manufacturing, "not suppressing or containing any other economy."

But US instituted controls on exports of semiconductors to China for chips used in artificial intelligence, supercomputers and for other purposes. A license would be required for such exports.

The CHIPS Act passed by the US Congress in August subsidizes new manufacturing of semiconductors, clean cars and solar panels in the US. The act includes \$39 billion worth of subsidies for semiconductor manufacturing on US soil.

"When we think about these kinds of tensions between the United States and China and all these restrictive measures, we tend to think about punishing or hurting China or slowing down its progress," said Yukon Huang, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former World Bank country director for China.

"We don't actually realize it also has a significantly negative effect on the United States, and it has very significant effects globally in a negative way," he said at a recent webinar examining US-China economic relations.

Yellen urged China to work with the United States on challenges such as helping indebted countries and addressing climate change.

But China has refuted criticism that it is burdening developing countries with debt. It is not the source of "debt traps" for African countries, but a partner that helps those nations get out of poverty traps, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on April 10.

He rejected the accusations as groundless, saying that they were a "narrative trap" fabricated by Western politicians in an attempt to disrupt cooperation between China and developing countries.

Scott Kennedy, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Yellen's speech countered "the general atmosphere in Washington and Beijing that the US and China are destined to decouple and fight a war," The New York Times reported.

He said the administration "has now clearly differentiated itself from the Trump administration in its approach to China."

The speech also contained some lecturing.

Yellen warned China not to provide material support for Russia in its conflict with Ukraine, threatening that the consequences of violating US sanctions on Russia "will be severe."

The US, in turn, has sent tens of billions of dollars to Ukraine in military

and other aid.

The sanctions against Russia also have been questioned by several countries around the world, particularly those in the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) who have discussed creating their own currency to counter the brunt of US economic sanctions.

Liu Pengyu, a spokesman for the Chinese embassy in Washington, said earlier: "China does not shy away or flinch from competition. However, we oppose defining the entire China-US relations by competition, oppose the generalization of the concept of national security, oppose decoupling even at the expense of global industrial and supply chains."

Ling Chen, an assistant professor in political economy at the School of Advanced International Studies, told The New York Times that "the potential problem (of restricting sales of technology) is we live in a world where security issues and economic issues are increasingly intertwined. It's very hard to separate."

But she called Yellen's comments about cooperation welcome.

"Nobody wants a war," she said.

Yellen said she planned to travel to China "at the appropriate time" to engage in a "substantive dialogue on economic issues."

SpaceX's first Starship launch: successful failure

By MAYZHOU in Houston
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The first launch of SpaceX's Starship failed at stage one separation and exploded close to four minutes after it was launched from Boca Chica, Texas, on Thursday morning. Even though the two-stage rocket ship made it less than halfway to the edge of space, climbing to just under 25 miles (40 km), the flight achieved a primary objective of getting the new vehicle off the ground at liftoff despite some of its engines failing.

The plan was for Starship to soar into space at least 90 miles above Earth before it would re-enter the atmosphere and plunge into the Pacific Ocean near Hawaii.

Seconds before the explosion when the massive rocket appeared to be spinning and didn't separate at the scheduled time, SpaceX's principal integration engineer John Insprucker said during the broadcast: "Obviously this does not appear to be a nominal situation."

"It does appear to be spinning, but I do want to remind everyone that everything after clearing the tower was icing on the cake," said Kate Tice, SpaceX's quality system engineer, over the broadcast. The rocket exploded when the word "icing" was uttered. Cheers from the control room followed after the explosion.

"There as we saw, as we promised, the exciting end to the Starship's inaugural integrated test flight," said Tice of the explosion.

SpaceX's official Twitter account said that "with a test like this, success comes from what we learn, and today's test will help us improve Starship's reliability as SpaceX seeks to make life multi-planetary" and "teams will continue to review data and work toward our next flight test."

The company also cheerfully tweeted about the explosion, "As if the flight test was not exciting enough, Starship experienced a rapid unscheduled disassembly before stage separation."

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk took to

Twitter, where he also is CEO, to congratulate the team on "an exciting test launch", adding that they "learned a lot for next test launch in a few months".

Starship is the most powerful rocket ever built. At almost 400 feet tall, it is designed to carry up to 100 people on long-duration and interplanetary flights.

The explosive first launch is considered a successful failure because the rocket didn't blow up the launch pad — a concern of Musk's prior to the launch. The rocket didn't tear up under maximum aerodynamic forces during its ascent. The speed of the rockets surpassed 1,305 mph (2,100 km/h).

The Federal Aviation Administration will oversee an investigation into what happened during the test flight before issuing a permit for another launch.

The explosion confirmed environmental concerns of the American Bird Conservancy, which opposed SpaceX's operation in Boca Chica, The Washington Post reported.

Photos showed that the launch itself had sent debris flying across the launch site and appeared to have damaged SpaceX's facilities.

More than 380 species of birds have been found at Padre Island National Seashore near which SpaceX's launch pad is located, according to information from the National Park Service.

The national seashore is located on the Central Flyway, a major migration route on which birds travel during their migration to and from North, Central, and South America.

"From our point of view, it's good news it didn't blow up at the pad site, but future launches could," Michael Parr, president of the American Bird Conservancy, told the Post.

He said the organization isn't opposed to SpaceX or space exploration but is pushing for operations to be moved elsewhere, like Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Agencies contributed to this story.



Photo by Wang Jing

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HIGHER GROUND

Monetary policy to back real economy

PBOC official says inflation will normalize on demand recovery

By OUYANG SHIJIA and ZHOU LANXU

China will continue to implement a prudent monetary policy to support the real economy, and there is no basis for long-term deflation or inflation in China, an official from the country's central bank said at a news conference on Thursday.

Zou Lan, head of the monetary policy department at the People's Bank of China, said consumer demand is expected to further recover with the financial support, and consumer price inflation will gradually return to the average level of the previous years with a U-shaped full-year growth.

Zou also said the PBOC will pay attention to factors that may impact prices, such as imported inflation.

Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities, said his team believes that the current downtrend in price growth is not deflation but due to a drop in vegetable and fuel prices as well as relatively sluggish durable goods consumption.

"Currently, China's economic recovery is on track, with indicators such as the purchasing managers index readings and social financing reflecting a positive economic recovery trend," Luo said.

Agreed Chen Chuanglian, deputy director of the Southern China Institute of Finance at Jinan University in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. China's economy, Chen said, picked up in the first quarter and is stabilizing — and a consumer-driven recovery is on track.

During the news conference, Zou said the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in the United States has highlighted the need for paying heed to risks related to interest rates, adding that China has refrained

from making drastic changes to interest rates and thus created favorable conditions for financial institutions to manage interest rate risks.

The PBOC will continue to implement a stable monetary policy, maintain interest rates at an appropriate level and further leverage structural monetary tools to support the economy, Zou said.

Some small and medium-sized banks have recently reduced their deposit rates as they did not cut the rates in September last year, when large banks cut their deposit rates in line with the market-oriented mechanism of deposit rate adjustments, he recalled, to give the right context to his observations.

Experts said Zou's remarks have strengthened their view that the recent deposit rate cuts by some smaller banks are unlikely to be a harbinger of a new round of deposit rate cuts among most banks.

Instead, Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank, said the country's interest rate level is expected to stay overall stable as the need to reduce interest rates has decreased given the growing momentum of economic recovery.

Rather than cutting benchmark interest rates, the PBOC is more likely to make use of structural policy tools to reduce the financing costs of specific sectors, Wen said.

Pointing to a condition of stable interest rate levels, China's one-year loan prime rate, a market-based benchmark lending rate, came in at 3.65 percent on Thursday, remaining unchanged for the eighth consecutive month.

The over-five-year LPR, on which lenders base their mortgage rates, also remained unchanged at 4.3 percent on Thursday, according to the PBOC.

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The booth of Huawei Technologies Co during a digital expo in Beijing. ZHANG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Huawei keeps focus on connectivity, computing

By MA SI and CHENG YU

Huawei Technologies Co expects global spending on digital transformation will reach \$3.41 trillion in 2026, and a wider range of industries, such as manufacturing, retail and healthcare, will embrace digital technologies to upgrade their operations.

Amid the trend, Huawei said it will keep investing in domains like connectivity, computing, storage and cloud services to help accelerate the transition.

The moves come as Huawei adjusts its strategies in a business-as-usual approach amid prolonged US government restrictions, and focuses on creating new growth opportunities for the next few years.

Meng Wanzhou, rotating chairwoman and chief financial officer of Huawei, said digitalization is an opportunity for the whole industry.

"Huawei will keep investing in domains like connectivity, computing, storage and cloud," Meng said at Huawei's 20th annual Global Analyst Summit, which ended in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Thursday.

"We aim to provide our customers with digital infrastructure that has the simplest possible architecture with the highest possible quality — that delivers the best possible experience at the lowest possible costs," said Meng, who is now on her first on-duty period as rotating chairwoman from April 1 to Sept 30.

She said Huawei's goal is to help organizations go digital in four stages: digitalizing operations, building digital platforms, enabling platform-based intelligence and putting intelligence to use.

"The time is ripe to thrive together in this new and exciting digital future," Meng added.

US market research company International Data Corp forecast that by 2024, 51 percent of global IT budgets will go to digital innovation and digital transformation, while the ratio in China is expected to be above 70 percent.

Wang Zhiqin, vice-president of the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, said that China's digital economy was chiefly driven by consumer-oriented internet applications like e-commerce, but now business-oriented applications like industrial internet are playing a significantly bigger role. This shows that improvements have been made in the digital economic structure.

The accelerated digital transformation will create abundant opportunities for companies such as Huawei, Wang said.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said that more than 4,000 5G+industrial internet projects are currently under construction in China, as the country beefs up its industrial upgrade drive in an attempt to facilitate the marriage between digital technologies and traditional sectors.

Zhang Yunming, vice-minister of industry and information technology, recently called on telecom companies to beef up the construction and application of new infrastructure, deepen efforts to promote an innovation-driven development strategy, and advance the integration of the digital and real economies.

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The Belt and Road Initiative

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The Belt and Road Initiative, reflecting common ideals and the pursuit of fairer, more connected human societies, endeavors to seek new models of international cooperation and inject a new sense of positivity into efforts aimed at promoting world peace and development.

BUSINESSFOCUS



New legislation to boost private business

Guangzhou among local governments set to ensure protection of rights, high-quality development

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
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Authorities in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, are planning legislative changes to boost private businesses in order to ensure the high-quality development of the local private economy.

Citing shifts in the private economy from rapid growth to high-quality development, Ye Huadong, director of the Guangzhou Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Bureau, said the changes will address key issues to boost the confidence of local private companies.

The new rules are expected to be approved by local legislators by the year's end, Ye said.

"The 42-article document, covering general principles, innovative development and the rights and interests of the private economy, aims to protect the legitimate rights and interests and optimize the development environment of private firms," Ye said.

Specific measures are included in a draft saying that government departments should not in an arbitrary way terminate the legitimate use of production and business premises of private companies.

Additionally, banking and financial institutions should not stop issuing loans to private enterprises or terminate loans before they are due, according to a draft that was open to the public for comments from March 17 to April 1.

In Guangzhou, the private economy contributes 95 percent of market players, over 80 percent of new jobs and more than 40 percent of the GDP, fixed assets, investment and tax revenue, according to the province's industry and information technology bureau.

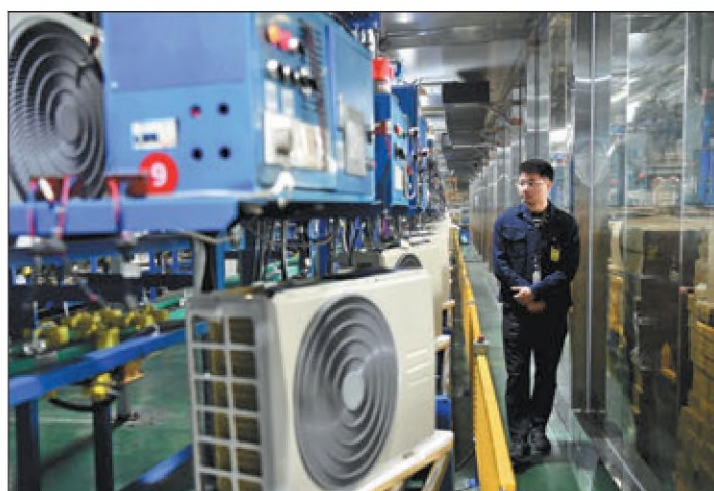
In the case of land use for private enterprises, the draft will require government departments to make reasonable use of existing land stocks, unused State-owned factories, professional markets and other places to provide adequate space for the operation of the private economy.

Land for private projects that comply with land planning and industrial policies may be provided through industrial land supply methods such as lease-purchase agreements and flexible annual leasing to reduce land costs, said the draft document. Besides, small and medium-sized private companies that jointly participate in the bidding and auction of industrial land are allowed to divide the land according to regulations.

To protect the rights and interests of private enterprises, the draft regulation requires a unified negative list system for market access in accordance with national regulations. Such a negative list ensures that no discriminatory conditions are to be imposed on private companies that enter industries and fields that are not explicitly prohibited by laws and administrative regulations.

"The draft document not only addresses the protection of rights and interests of private enterprises, but also attaches great importance to innovative development, which will be a new trend for growth," said Shao Jianming, vice-chairman of the Guangzhou Federation of Industry and Commerce.

Similar steps are also being taken



Top: Workers pack goji berry juice products at a factory in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, in January.

WANG PENG / XINHUA

Above: An employee of Chinese home appliance maker Midea Group inspects air conditioners at a workshop in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in March.

DENG HUA / XINHUA

“The draft document not only addresses protection of rights and interests of private enterprises, but also attaches great importance to innovative development, which will be a new trend for growth.”

Shao Jianming, vice-chairman of the Guangzhou Federation of Industry and Commerce

60 percent

proportion of private companies' contribution to China's GDP in 2022

80 percent

proportion of private companies' contribution to the country's urban employment in 2022

elsewhere in China.

On March 24, authorities in Yinchuan, capital of the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, announced several measures to improve the business environment and ensure high-quality development in the private economy.

Shaanxi and Hainan provinces have also recently announced measures to address key common issues that local enterprises are facing in improving the business environment and boosting innovative development by the private economy.

Such local government regulations are in line with the country's determination to enable private entrepreneurs to grow and thrive.

China's private enterprises will have a better environment and broader development space, Premier Li Qiang said at his first news conference as premier, following the conclusion of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, in mid-March.

The nation will continue to foster a market-oriented, law-based business environment in keeping with international standards, treat companies of all types of ownership as equals and protect the property rights of enterprises as well as the rights and interests of entrepreneurs in accordance with the law, according to Li.

At the national level, there have been growing calls for legislation for the development of the private economy. During this year's annual NPC session, the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce proposed the formulation of a law on the promotion of the private economy and encouraging private enterprises to compete fairly with other business units.

According to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, private companies contributed about 50 percent of the country's tax revenue, 60 percent of GDP and 70 percent of technological innovation and accounted for 80 percent of urban employment in 2022.

The All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, which serves the private sector, said that the number of private enterprises in the country had risen from 10.86 million in 2012 to more than 50 million last year.

Companies encouraged to participate in national projects

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

With private companies increasingly playing a more important role in China's economy, a pressing issue for local governments has been finding ways to encourage those companies to take part in and benefit from national development projects.

In Chongqing, an industrial park jointly built by three private companies three years ago is now a demonstration project for such cooperation for Chongqing and Sichuan province.

The Chongqing Electronic Circuit Industrial Park was built by Chongqing Yuhuan Electronic Technology Co Ltd, Sichuan Lvran Technology Group and Rongchang High-tech Industrial Development Zone.

Fifty-one companies engaged in the electronic circuit sector in China's coastal areas have signed investment agreements to locate in the park, officials said.

Over 400 private companies from Chongqing and Sichuan recently attended the first summit on high-quality development and cooperation in the private economy in the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle. The summit began in Chongqing's Rongchang district on March 31.

In January 2020, the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle was designated a fourth national key region after the Yangtze River Delta region, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

At the summit, the companies were informed about policies and developments regarding national projects, officials said. They looked for investment opportunities, exchanged ideas and signed deals for 23 projects with a total value of 31.81 billion yuan (\$4.61 billion), including new energy, electronic information, equipment manufacturing and new materials.

"Sichuan has listed medicine and health as one of its six major industries, and there is great demand in the elderly care market in the two locations," said Lu Zhuangwen, chairman of Sichuan Xingrui Health Industry Group Co Ltd. Lu said he is a Chongqing native who runs the business in Sichuan. The company has invested in many traditional Chinese medicine centers and nursing homes in Sichuan and Tongnan district in Chongqing.

"In Rongchang district, enterprises are also looking for opportunities for cooperation," Lu said. Sichuan and Chongqing have built more and more platforms for private entrepreneurs to exchange information and cooperate, and policy support has also increased, giving enterprises more confidence in investment, he said.

Last October, China issued a plan to build the Chengdu-Chongqing region into an economic center with greater impact, a key hub for scientific and technological innovation, a new area for reform and opening-up and a place with high-quality living standards.

Construction of the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle got off to a good start and achieved concrete progress in the past two years as the two jurisdictions have been integrating resources to promote the high-quality development of

western China, said Luo Lin, secretary-general of the CPC Chongqing Municipal Committee, at a news conference in Beijing during the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which opened in October.

Luo said the two sides have drawn up some 20 development plans for regional integration, transportation infrastructure construction and coordinated industrial and science development.

A report to the 20th CPC National Congress cited the importance of boosting the private economy and optimizing the business environment.

Guided by local governments, more private companies have been looking for business opportunities that can be found in national plans.

Rongchang, known as China's animal husbandry science and technology base and a major connecting point in the Chengdu-Chongqing circle, has shown a strong edge in boosting the private economy, which accounts for 80 percent of the district's GDP, officials said.

Last year, Sichuan's private economy accounted for 53.7 percent of the province's GDP, while in Chongqing, the figure was 59.7 percent, according to the local government reports.

Chongqing, on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, is also the headquarters of the China-Singapore (Chongqing) Demonstration Initiative on Strategic Connectivity, which was launched in 2016. That initiated the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor project in a bid to speed up the opening-up and development of China's western region, officials said. It connects Europe with Southeast Asia, with Chongqing as a key rail hub, and now reaches 393 ports in 119 countries and regions.

In the past, goods from China's landlocked western regions endured a round-about trip to reach outside areas. The situation began to change five years ago, when the trade corridor was launched, cutting previous journey time to a large extent, officials said.

One of the beneficiaries of the change was Chongqing Shangcheng Apparel Group, according to its CEO, Li Bin. Li's company, established in Rongchang in 2018, was a small enterprise that mainly manufactured and exported clothing.

Thanks to national development plans and a sound business environment, Shangcheng now exports about 30 million articles of clothing each year to dozens of countries in Europe, the Americas, Southeast Asia and Africa. It provides over 2,000 jobs and its annual sales have reached some 1 billion yuan.

Last year, companies in Rongchang district, including Shangcheng, Chongqing Qiaqia Food Co, Chongqing Zhaohong Agricultural Development Co and Huida Sanitary Ware Co Ltd, exported more than 1,500 containers of goods abroad via the China-Europe express rail, the land-sea trade corridor and the Yangtze River, a 30 percent increase year-on-year, according to the deputy director of Rongchang's commission of commerce, Hu Zhongkun.

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Top: Workers arrange silk reels at a textile factory in Chongqing in September 2020. YANG MIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Above: A bank clerk (left) introduces supportive loan products to small and micro business owners in Chongqing in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

NEV, home appliance firms to see limited impact from US

Reported tech investment ban may jeopardize global market, expert says

By FAN FEIFEI
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Washington's reported plan to take unprecedented action limiting US investments in China's technology sector will only have a narrow impact on Chinese home appliance and new energy vehicle companies, which are doubling down on homegrown innovation and ramping up efforts to achieve breakthroughs in key technologies, experts said.

They also said the move will undermine the stability and security of the global industrial supply chain, hurting the interests of multinationals around the world.

The comments came after a report from US news portal Politico said that "unprecedented rules limiting American investments in China are expected later this month". The action will come in the form of an executive order signed by US President Joe Biden that requires US companies to notify the government of new investments in Chinese tech firms, according to the report. It will also prohibit some deals in critical sectors like microchips.

"Currently, the chips used in home appliances and NEVs are mainly concentrated in low-end to mid-range segments. Chinese companies have accelerated their push to bolster independent research and development and production of vital electronic components, and fuel wider use of domestically designed chips," said Bai Ming, deputy director of international market research at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

He noted that the reported US government's intensified measures to contain the rise of the Chinese tech sector will jeopardize the global semiconductor industry and hinder international tech exchanges and economic cooperation, adding that US companies will suffer greatly from Washington's unprecedented restrictions on investment in China.

"Against the backdrop of an increasingly complicated international situation, Chinese household appliance manufacturers have attached greater importance to the security of supply chains and expanded their footprint in the self-developed chips sector," said Chen Hui, general manager of AVC Revo, a unit of Beijing-based market consultancy firm AVC.

Chen said their layout in the strategically important chip segment will help solve bottlenecks in core components and technologies, and achieve greater self-reli-

ance and strength in science and technology.

"The chip industry requires a great deal of investment and the introduction of cutting-edge technologies, which sets a high threshold for home appliance enterprises aspiring to jump onto the chip bandwagon."

She added that domestic home appliance enterprises should increase their R&D input in chips and crucial components, and strengthen independent innovation to establish a relatively complete supply chain system to buffer against shocks from external uncertainties.

Home appliance giant Midea Group has entered the chip sector by establishing the subsidiary Shanghai Meiren Semiconductor Co Ltd, which is engaged in the R&D, design and sales of micro control unit, or MCU, chips used for electrical control systems, and intelligent power module chips.

Gree Electric Appliances, another Chinese home appliance maker, said the revenue of its wholly owned subsidiary Zhuhai Edgeless Integrated Circuit Co Ltd increased more than 50 percent year-on-year in 2021, with its chip shipments exceeding 70 million units.

Chinese carmakers have also made forays into the AI chip sector. In 2021, Great Wall Motors became an investor in Beijing-based auto chip company Horizon Robotics, which has unveiled its automotive-grade AI processor Journey 5, designed for L4 autonomous driving, with up to 128 tera operations per second of AI computing power on a single chip.

Li Xianjun, an associate researcher at the Institute of Industrial Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the reported US government restrictions are expected to have a short-term influence on China's imports of crucial equipment and products, given China's role as the world's largest chip market and its growing presence in semiconductor manufacturing.

Li said its impact on Chinese home appliance and NEV companies is limited, as these restrictions are mainly aimed at the high-end tech segment, covering high-performance chips, smart cockpits and autonomous driving.

"In the long run, the move will push Chinese enterprises to step up indigenous innovation efforts, ensure the security of industrial and supply chains, and promote technological innovation and industrial upgrade," he added.



Visitors check out a flight simulator at Honeywell's booth during the fifth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November.
TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Honeywell to expand ties in China for decarbon biz

By ZHENG XIN
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Honeywell is positioned to continuously expand its business in the sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) sector in China to further tap market potential, as the country's low-carbon transition goals breed massive opportunities for the chemical and aviation sectors, which produce high greenhouse gas emissions, said a top company official.

"We are optimistic about the SAF industry prospects in the country, which are expected to further facilitate China's green transition," said Henry Liu, vice-president and general manager of Honeywell Performance Materials and Technologies Asia-Pacific.

"Honeywell will further tap the massive potential of the SAF market in China and cooperate more with local partners to support carbon reduction in the aviation industry, as we believe its green ambitions will only accelerate development in the country," he said.

The US-based industrial conglomerate launched its new SAF process technology in China and signed cooperation agreements with several local partners on Thursday during a summit in Tianjin, aiming to support carbon reduction in the aviation industry and

accelerate the deployment of ready-to-use SAF solutions.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between Honeywell and the Zhejiang Jiaao Enprotech Stock Co Ltd on a second SAF production facility in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province based on prior cooperation. The company also signed an MOU with Inner Mongolia Jiutai New Material Co Ltd to cooperate in SAF and plastic recycling, in addition to MOU agreements with Qingdao Haier Air-condition Electronic Co Ltd and Shanghai Hanbell Precise Machinery Co Ltd to cooperate on the application of the company's refrigerants, it said.

It also signed an MOU with Tianjin Free Trade Zone during the summit to explore cooperation opportunities to build a SAF production base in the city to help meet growing demand in China.

"While China's low-carbon transition goals pose emissions reduction challenges for industries with high greenhouse gas emissions including the aviation industry, it brings along opportunities for innovation and application of sustainable technologies as well," said Liu.

"As a long-time practitioner and enabler of sustainability, Honeywell is pleased to join hands with Chinese partners to help drive a sustainable future."

"Honeywell will further tap the massive potential of the SAF market in China and cooperate more with local partners ..."

Henry Liu, vice-president and general manager of Honeywell Performance Materials and Technologies Asia-Pacific

The International Air Transport Association estimates that SAF could contribute around 65 percent of the reduction in emissions needed by the aviation industry to reach net zero in 2050, while the Civil Aviation Administration of China also pointed out that it is necessary to vigorously promote the decarbonization of the industry and the development of SAF.

An analyst said China's green transition has become the strategic focus for more international companies and aligning these focuses will create a level playing field to compete in the Chinese market.

China's carbon neutrality pledge

highlights the importance of decarbonization in China's aviation and chemical industries and will create great growth potential for multinational corporations, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Liu said Honeywell's technology was applied in China's SAF field as early as 2011 with China's first airplane demonstration test using sustainable aviation biofuel at Beijing Capital International Airport.

"China is one of the world's most important aviation markets, with its overall aviation sector together with the carbon emissions generated by the industry, growing constantly," said Xu Jun, president of Honeywell Aerospace, Asia-Pacific.

"Carbon reduction in the aviation industry becomes an essential step toward achieving China's decarbonization goals and SAF, together with improving operational and infrastructural efficiency for aircraft, are key pathways to achieve net zero emissions in the aviation industry," he said.

"We look forward to collaborating with more local partners to support the low-carbon transition of China's aviation industry toward a sustainable future."

Road extension seen boosting Sichuan city cluster

By ZHUANG QIANG
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Tianfu Avenue, spanning 150 kilometers across three Sichuan province cities — Chengdu, Deyang and Meishan — became even longer after an extension on the north end was recently completed.

"Our project progressed way faster since the beginning of the year, and we managed to complete the extension project on schedule," said Yi Chunhong, a project manager with China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd, adding that with the optimization of COVID-19 control measures and timely and effective government support, the project team now has more construction workers and technicians on site.

Yi's team worked on the extension project, which spans 6,060 meters between Changjiang Road and the intersection with the Baocheng railway line. On Monday, the new section opened to the public.

"There are many locals like me 'onboard,' and we know the history of this avenue. And for those who don't know, a simple way to learn is to check how Chengdu has grown into such a metropolis," Yi said.

Originally named Renmin Road that began at Tianfu Square in the provincial capital Chengdu, Tianfu Ave is now able to facilitate intercity road trips for citizens from three cities, bringing opportunities for integrated development of the urban cluster.

According to a report by the paper.cn, there are more than 300 Fortune 500 enterprises with branches in Chengdu, among which 70 per-



An employee of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd works on the Tianfu Avenue's northward road extension project in Deyang, Sichuan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

cent are located along Tianfu Ave.

Speaking of future development opportunities brought by the extension project, Yi said, "Now with the avenue reaching here, we do hope the new section brings the same prosperous future to Deyang as it did to Chengdu."

CR24, a unit of China Railway Construction Corp, said the project was managed with priority given to safety, with various measures in place to avoid accidents and disruptions to nearby normal traffic operations.

With new workers continuously recruited to the team, the project manager said they routinely held safety and technical training for on-site construction personnel and construction team leaders — for

both existing workers and new arrivals — to ensure that on-site construction quality and safety met established standards.

Construction work on the road extension not only involved the main thoroughfare itself, but workers also needed to undertake preparatory work for many follow-up construction projects down the road, such as those for illumination and rainwater drainage systems.

"When it comes to urban road projects, what most teams deem as most troublesome are the challenges brought by existing road networks. Relocating poles and pipelines in difficult areas along the project route took tremendous effort," Yi said.

The team jointly developed a sci-

entific plan of action involving multiple government units and adopted a semi-closed road construction status to minimize disruptions to local commercial activity and public transportation while maintaining progress.

"In the future, along this new road section of 6.06 km, new parks, business districts, shopping areas and communities will also arise, which will be quite an inspiring view to see actually," Yi said, adding that the development plan for the area along the section has been in the pipeline for some time.

As a significant pillar stabilizing the nation's socioeconomic development, especially amid the headwinds over the past few years ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, infrastructure is still highlighted by many key meetings as a pivotal driver in supporting economic growth this year, considering its role in improving livelihoods, stimulating domestic demand and boosting consumption.

This year, the infrastructure sector is expected to continue to be a major driving force. The sector is expected to support the nation's high-quality development strategies over the long term, and boost domestic demand and employment in the near term, said Chi Guangsheng, an analyst with Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based Essence Securities Co Ltd.

"The sector will still be given priority, especially by local governments nationwide, this year despite a relatively high base last year, and also given strong investment support from various financial tools," Chi said.

Briefly

China's shipbuilding sector remains in lead

China's shipbuilding industry continued to lead globally in the first quarter of this year, boasting the biggest international market share in terms of output, as well as new and existing orders, official data showed. The country's shipbuilding output hit 9.17 million deadweight tons (DWT) during the period, accounting for 43.5 percent of the world's total, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed. New orders, another major indicator of the shipbuilding industry, rose 53 percent year-on-year to 15.18 million DWT, with a global market share of 62.9 percent. The sector's existing orders totaled 114.52 million DWT at the end of March, expanding

15.6 percent year-on-year.

Nation has over 2.64m 5G base stations

The number of China's 5G base stations exceeded 2.64 million by the end of March, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said on Thursday. The number of 5G cellphone users in the country had reached 620 million by the end of March, and 5G signals had covered all counties in the country, according to the MIIT. The 5G technologies are widely applied in the Chinese economy, according to the MIIT. China plans to add around 600,000 5G base stations this year to increase such stations to 2.9 million by the end of 2023.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Editorials

Biden administration's high-tech ban on China will corner American businesses, consumers

The Joe Biden administration is reportedly intensifying its lobbying of the US business community for its support on an executive order to restrict US investment in China. The move aimed at curtailing Beijing's technological development and military modernization was originally expected to be finalized last year but it has been delayed.

Although the United States' investment in China only accounts for about 5 percent of its investment around the world, not only is it rapidly increasing but also the returns remain promising. No wonder about 75 percent of US enterprises operating in China said in a recent survey conducted by the American Chamber of Commerce in South China that they plan to increase their investment in the country.

That explains why the business community has given a cold shoulder to the draft rules the Biden administration has tried to foist on them for more than a year for their approval, which, if implemented, would directly affect their profit prospects.

Even the security and the economic departments of the Biden administration remain divided on the rules proposed by some China hawks early last year when the US economy was strong, and confrontation and decoupling were high on the administration's China policy agenda.

Pushing through such an executive order will deal a heavy blow to the US economy at a time when it is already under pressure.

China, as one of the most important investment destinations in the world, has always been popular with foreign investors who are eager to tap its huge market, and innovation and manufacturing potential. Despite the extremes Washington has gone to in a bid to bring US investment and enterprises out of China and back home or to other countries such as Vietnam since it unilaterally started a trade war with its largest trade partner, the US' investment in China has increased from \$107.56 billion in 2018 to \$189.1 billion last year.

It is only wishful thinking that the Biden administration thinks it can casually carry out surgical strikes on Chinese industries and companies. That China's exports still grew 8.4 percent in the first quarter, despite the 17-percent decline in exports to the US, shows the space China has explored, spurred by the US moves, to diversify its overseas markets.

All the executive order will do is harm the two countries' common interests, with the US bearing the brunt of it. The mounting resistance the Biden administration has met to the proposed executive order should prompt it to stop turning a blind eye to the contradictory nature of its China policy, which will ultimately corner the US itself.

To push through the executive order, which is nothing but a whim of some China-bashing politicians, will deal a heavy blow to the US economy, consumers and enterprises at a time when they are already reeling.

EU risks leaving itself at mercy of White House

In an apparent attempt at crisis control, EU officials are going to great lengths to present an image of unity after cracks appeared in the façade following French President Emmanuel Macron's remarks on his China trip.

In his opening remarks at a European Parliament plenary session on Tuesday, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell urged nations to "align positions" and to speak "as a well-tuned choir" on the same wavelength with regard to relations with China.

Speaking immediately after Borrell at the same event, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called on the European Union to maintain a common position toward China.

In fact, the theme of that European Parliament gathering was the need for the EU to have a coherent China strategy.

To their audiences in China, however, what really matters is the fact that while struggling to achieve unity, they do not simply look at ties through an ideological prism. Official Chinese media have focused on the EU officials' recent comments showing that they are against decoupling from China. Their reference to the script of the speech Borrell prepared for his canceled China trip, for instance, highlights his words on the need for EU-China collaboration.

No matter how some critics of friendly China-EU relations lament European "dependence" on China and are eager to reduce it, the benefits of close economic engagement are obvious to all. And the goodwill from China has never been limited to just

the economy and trade. Abandoning it for ideological differences, which had hardly been an issue between the two sides over decades, would be a typical lose-lose scenario that will ultimately work against European interests. That is why the EU has so far avoided Washington's prescription of decoupling with China, and come up with its own formula of "de-risking".

Whatever they have said about "diversifying" away from China, people such as Von der Leyen and Borrell have not yet lost sight of the beneficial aspects of the EU's relations with China. In his prepared address to a Chinese think tank, Borrell wrote, "there is a multilateral space in which the European Union and China can manage to work together for the common good", which he said includes protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, the debt issues of the least developed nations, international pandemic control cooperation and climate change.

The New York Times, for one, has noticed the resilience of China-EU economic ties — as Washington seeks to cut off economic connections with Beijing. The German business giants Volkswagen and BASF are significantly expanding their China presences. Each of them is putting billions of dollars of new investment into its China operations. And there is a simple reason why — revenues from China are too important for them to forgo.

Some may be reluctant to recognize it. But the country remains a land of opportunities and, for those willing to recognize the fact, a friendly cooperative partner.

ROK should think twice before going all in with US

Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol said in an interview with Reuters on Wednesday that the ROK may provide weapons to Ukraine, after last year ruling out the possibility of providing lethal aid to the country.

The ROK, a growing arms exporter, has a policy of not supplying weapons to countries at war. It has not provided arms to Ukraine, although it has shipped humanitarian aid and joined the US-led economic sanctions against Russia.

Despite mounting pressure from Western countries for it to supply weapons to Ukraine, the ROK, a key ally of the United States and major producer of artillery ammunition, has so far tried to avoid antagonizing Russia due to its companies operating there and Moscow's friendly ties with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The ROK has been long weighing the pros and cons of extending military aid to Ukraine.

Why did ROK President Yoon suggest a major shift in its national policy on arms exports at this time? The timing is everything. It came just days before his visit to the US next week for a summit with US President Joe Biden.

What President Yoon said on this question is not so much publicizing the ROK's policy shift as letting his US counterpart Joe Biden know that the ROK might consider providing ammunition to Ukraine if it gets

something substantial in return as an outcome of the coming summit between the two leaders.

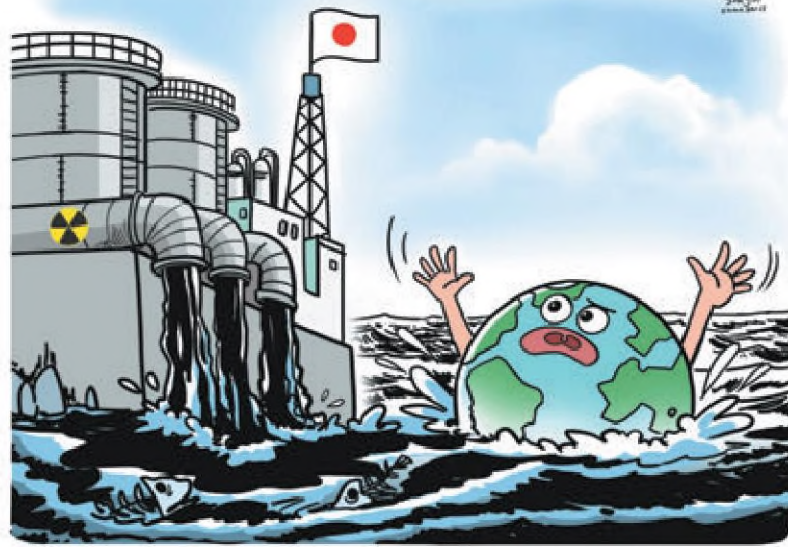
US intelligence documents which were leaked days ago indicated that Washington was spying on the ROK, which has put the ROK president in a difficult situation and made his visit to the US very delicate. It is important for Yoon to get something substantial from his meeting with his US counterpart to show to the opposition party that the eavesdropping by the US is not ill-intended and will not cause damage to bilateral relations.

However, it is important for the ROK to know where and when to toe the line in its relations with the US. To directly provide military aid to Ukraine would tell the world that the ROK does this under the pressure of the US and it has lost its foreign policy independence. That the US spies on the ROK and its other allies only proves that Washington wants leverage over them.

Considering the concessions the ROK made to Japan on the compensation of slave labor and other historical issues and the possibility of it providing direct military aid for Ukraine, it is not difficult to conclude that the ROK is ready to jump on the bandwagon of the US' geopolitical game.

This will do no good to the interests of the ROK and neither is it conducive to regional peace and development. The ROK needs to err on the side of caution in its ties with the US.

Shi Yu



Opinion Line

Washington the creator of most man-made humanitarian crises

Not long ago, the White House released an investigative report on the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, admitting there were "massive intelligence failures" in the process and blaming the previous administration for the hasty withdrawal.

The United States should know that military withdrawal does not mean it can wash its hands of responsibility. The world knows that the 20-year war launched by the US is to blame for all the difficulties Afghanistan is facing, and has been calling on the US to lift all the unilateral sanctions on Afghanistan and to stop creating new humanitarian crises in the war-torn country.

As American scholar John Mearsheimer says, the US is increasing conflicts in the international system and creating instability. The US' military conquest of Afghanistan did not bring it

peace, instead it brought it endless conflict and turmoil. The number of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan has increased from single digits 20 years ago to more than 20 today. The US promised to help Afghanistan build a "democratic and prosperous" country, but all it left behind was instability and poverty.

The US has acted as a "backstage manipulator", provoking wars in other countries and regions. Between 2017 and 2020, the Pentagon launched 23 "proxy wars" in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific. Apart from destroying global peace and development, the US is also proving to be a stumbling block to human rights.

In recent years, the US has increasingly imposed sanctions on other countries, greatly weakening human rights protection in those countries. As of the end of fiscal 2021, the US had more than 9,400

sanctions in effect, making it the world's only "sanctions-imposing superpower". A Brookings Institution analysis says 13,000 more people may have died in Iran at the height of the pandemic because of the continuing US sanctions.

The US' arbitrary imposition of sanctions has invited strong condemnation from the international community. In November, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution for the 30th time, supported by 185 countries, condemning the US embargo on Cuba.

Although the US keeps pointing a finger at human rights in other countries, it is the biggest destroyer of human rights internationally. The US should stop bullying other countries under the guise of human rights and do something that is conducive to its development.

—PEOPLE'S DAILY

Shifting burden on students unfair

Reportedly, the Taiwan authorities have asked primary and secondary schools to add pineapple to students' diet on campus. The directive was issued because Japan, which Taiwan relies on for its pineapple exports, refused to increase the fruit's import quota in an attempt to bring down its price.

It seems that the students can help pay for the miscalculation of the authorities. It is the secessionist cause they pursue that has poi-

soned the island's normal economic and trade relations with the Chinese mainland.

The Democratic Progressive Party has fully shown its true colors as a pawn of the United States, creating troubles to not only cross-strait trade but also people-to-people exchanges.

By doing this, the island authorities have sacrificed the interests of the Taiwan patriots for their own narrow ends.

The DPP authorities are doing

nothing but turning a deaf ear to the complaints of the farmers, who are actually paying for their misjudgment of the trend of history.

Every wrong they commit will remove one stone from the foundation of their rule, which will ultimately collapse and hasten national reunification.

It is a pity that the island, as a major producer of good pineapples, finds its strengths a headache maker.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Bullwhip effects broader horizons for exporters

China's exports to the United States fell 17 percent in the first quarter. Some attribute that to the decoupling of the world's two largest economies, as well as manufacturing enterprises moving from China to Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam.

But that is a wrong interpretation.

The decline in China's exports to the US is mainly due to the slump in US demand and the bullwhip effect, which refers to the distortion of demand and increased volatility that occurs as forecasts and orders move from the retailer up to the manufacturer. Basically, when a spike in demand occurs, each party in the supply chain adds additional products to their orders to act as a buffer, which necessarily weakens the demand when they enter a destocking stage.

Statistics show that in the first quarter of this year, US container imports dropped by nearly 23 percent year-on-year, and bilateral trade between Vietnam and the US dropped by 19 percent year-on-year. Thanks to its robust trade with

Southeast Asia and other emerging market economies, China's exports in the first quarter still increased by 8.4 percent year-on-year. China has found more baskets to put its eggs in even as the US pushes to decouple.

After the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in 2020, the requirements for working at home and the policy of monthly subsidies for residents in the US led to a surge in the consumption of household appliances, furniture and other daily necessities. That's why China, the major manufacturer of these products, saw a remarkable increase in its exports to the US over the past three years, despite the US administration's attempts to rid the US of its heavy reliance on imports from China.

In the first quarter of last year, when the US adjusted its epidemic control policy, people rushed outdoors, and the government's financial subsidies to households also came to an end, leading to a sharp drop in demand for such goods. This has been followed by over-

heating inflation in the country, rising interest rates and this year's financial turmoil, which have continued to weigh on people's economic expectations and their willingness and ability to spend. Wholesalers and retailers meanwhile still have a huge stock of these products due to the large amounts of orders they had made before the end of the pandemic.

Since the beginning of last year, the US has entered a destocking phase, resulting in a significant reduction in orders. The current round of active destocking by the US is likely to last through 2023.

Moreover, some retailers and brands in the US have used bankruptcy and the reorganization of some US banks as an excuse to delay their payments to factories in China, and some have even long defaulted on a large number of factory payments, resulting in some new orders being rejected by the Chinese enterprises, prompting them to look for new markets other than the US.

—21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China's Global Security Initiative

Editor's note: The Global Security Initiative aims to eliminate the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance, and encourage joint international efforts to bring more stability. The initiative has helped Saudi Arabia and Iran open a path for peace and stability in the Middle East. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Deborah Lehr

China a growing player in Middle East

That China has brokered a historic diplomatic deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran — the two countries have decided to resume diplomatic ties after seven years — may come as a surprise to many, especially because China was not seen as a major player in the Middle East. But the fact is that for more than a decade, China has steadily expanded its influence across the Middle East.

China has not only increased investments in the Middle East through its Belt and Road Initiative and grown to become the region's largest trading partner, but also avoided, in most cases, entangling itself in the messy politics and sectarian rivalries in the region. This reflects China's new diplomatic strategy, characterized by a more active foreign policy that suits its own interests and creates more space for it to play a bigger role on the global stage.

This raises two questions: Does China hope to supplant the United States' role as the diplomatic heavyweight in the region? And what is driving China's evolving interests?

The short answer to the first question is "no". China plays, and will continue to play, a fundamentally different role in the Middle East than the US. It has no will to be the primary security guarantor for the region, nor can it offer the military resources provided by the US. The arms trade between China and the Arab region, for example, is a small fraction of what is traded with the US.

But China's interests in the region are indeed shifting. The country's relationship with the Arab world has long been based on trade and economy. Increasingly, it is likely to be animated by geopolitical and strategic concerns. And while it may not seek to supplant or replicate the US' role in the region, China may use its growing political and strategic clout in ways that are likely to aggravate tensions with the US.

China's new diplomatic strategy is less about a seismic shift in the world order than a shift in its own vision of its international role.

In the 1980s, the Arab order was challenged by the Iran-Iraq War. Plus, the geopolitical order was overturned by the end of the Cold War in 1991. And between 1984 and 1990, China established diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

The global order is shifting again, creating new dynamics between the Arab world and the two major global powers. While the US is widely perceived to be retreating from the Middle East with its new focus on the "Indo-Pacific", China is rapidly strengthening its ties with Arab nations. In 1990, China's bilateral trade with Saudi Arabia amounted to only \$417 million. In 2022, it had grown to more than \$116 billion. China's trade with Saudi Arabia in 2020 was more than three times that of US-Saudi Arabia trade.

The growing economic ties between the countries, however, are underpinned by strategic imperatives. China's economy relies heavily on imported oil and gas. And China sees the energy-rich Arab region as a crucial energy supplier at a time when demand for oil is expected to bounce back after nearly three years of COVID-19-related restrictions. China also sees significant potential to export more of its technologies and invest in critical infrastructure.

For China, the Middle East is an attractive market, one without the regulatory and political restrictions that Chinese technology firms face in Europe and the US.



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At the same time, China has been expanding its political relations with the region. A 2019 report by the Atlantic Council says that China has signed comprehensive strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Egypt and Algeria. This level of partnership maintains "full pursuit of cooperation and development on regional and international affairs". China also maintains "lower-level" partnerships with eight other countries in the Middle East.

China's expansive foreign policy goes well beyond the Middle East. In addition to its recent efforts to play a significant diplomatic role in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, China has engaged in a more activist foreign policy, concluding security and defense agreements with Djibouti and pledging \$100 million in military aid to the African Union.

On the other hand, the Joe Biden administration's ties with traditional allies and partners — Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia — are strained. When Washington pushed for sanctions to punish Moscow for the Russia-Ukraine conflict,

not one of these three countries supported it.

China's transition from foreign policy observer to active diplomatic player should not come as a surprise. As China's economic interests have grown significantly overseas, it has used this economic might to promote its own diplomatic agenda. This new Chinese strategy is less about a seismic shift in the world and more about a shift in China's vision of its international role.

What does this mean for China's future in the Middle East? Beijing has much to gain, economically and geopolitically, especially if the US continues to deprioritize the region. The Middle East countries have gained an important economic partner, but increasingly they are becoming the competitive playing field for growing US-China competition. How the region balances its economic interests with its foreign policy and national security priorities will remain a challenge in the foreseeable future.

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

Adnan Akfirat

GSI raises hopes by bearing fruit in Islamic world

The reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, mediated by China, reflects a change not only in the Middle East but also across the globe. And it is a vivid example to manifest China's Global Security Initiative. The disputes between the two influential states of the Islamic world because of "sectarianism" were the most important policy used by the Atlantic forces to keep the Middle East countries under their control.

That the rapprochement between Riyadh and Teheran happened on the anniversary of the Global Security Initiative shows that China is serious about strengthening global and regional security so countries can focus on development and build a better future. The Global Security Initiative is part of China's policy to help build a community with a shared future for mankind.

The Iran-Saudi Arabia disputes are an apt example of imperialism's classic "divide and rule" strategy. They not only allowed the transatlantic powers to control the energy resources of the West Asian countries but also paralyzed the Islamic world, the most organized power in the Global South.

A joint statement issued by the heads of the security departments of Iran and Saudi Arabia with China's senior diplomat Wang Yi in Beijing on March 10, 2023, ushered in a new era. The first result was a cease-fire in Yemen, which is embroiled in a devastating sectarian conflict that the world pretty much has watched in silence. The bloody offensive in Yemen instigated and supported by the United States, has been halted, and Saudi Arabia has re-established relations with Syria.

Saudi Arabia's decision to better safeguard its national interests, overriding the dictates of the US-led West, has led to a "tectonic shift" in international relations. The US strategy of isolating and destroying Iran has failed. Middle East countries are waking up, and their desire to become independent and unite is growing.

The reconciliation between these two West Asian powers, thanks to China's mediation, has more than geostrategic implications. The perception of China fabricated by the West in the Muslim world is radically changing, because China's approach to Islamic countries is unique and based on peace, respect and equality.

The Islamic world has found a friendly country that does not despise it, respects its values, does not interfere in its internal affairs, and does not impose its policy on it. China, led by Xi Jinping, is committed to helping build a more just world. China and the Islamic world seem prepared to build a world that puts the people first.

About 100 years ago, under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, a very vocal discourse on "Pan-Asianism" or "Orientalism" became widespread, based on the argument that Asia was morally and spiritually superior to the destructive and materialistic West.

Having defeated Japanese imperialism and then US imperialism, China, under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong, supported the liberation struggle of the oppressed nations. And developing countries, including many Muslim countries, played a key role in restoring the lawful seat of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the United Nations in 1971.

After Xi Jinping's election as general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee in 2012, a new era began between China and the Islamic world. As a matter of fact, many of the countries that have joined the Belt and Road Initiative are Muslim-majority states.

In fact, on March 22 last year, then Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi was invited for the first time to the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It was an important move on the part of the Islamic world, which has been suffering from US bullying, to make China a development partner. China's newly-proposed Global Civilization Initiative also further promotes dialogues between civilizations.

Just as Chinese diplomats explained, China's policy towards Islamic countries include mutual respect and mutual trust, mutual benefit, common security, mutual learning and common progress.

This historic dialogue and cooperation between China and the Islamic world is valuable. Of course, Turkey will also receive an important share of this vital support.

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



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Kacee Ting Wong

Beijing's diplomacy deserves real peace prize

Former US president Donald Trump had complained that his predecessor Barack Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize for "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between people," even though he had only just become president.

It's time to consider what achievements deserve real peace prizes. By the end of the 20th century, China's exclusion from international affairs and reluctance to become involved in settling outstanding global issues had not escaped the attention of Middle East countries. According to Yitzhak Shichor, China was unwilling to get involved in regional conflicts in the Middle East for a long time.

Shichor highlighted the passive measures taken by Beijing to influence Middle East politics, including the use of veto at the United Nations Security Council. In 2011, the United States, the United Kingdom and France supported a draft UNSC resolution to bomb Syria on the pretext of humanitarian intervention. China and Russia vetoed it. But unlike the US and Russia, China was only marginally involved in the Syrian crisis.

But China's recent success in getting Saudi Arabia and Iran to resume diplo-

matic ties signals its determination to play a more active role in delivering international public goods and improving global governance. As a result of the Saudi-Iranian peace deal, the sudden increase in China's soft power has shocked many Western countries.

The launch of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Security Initiative, the pursuit of an independent foreign policy of peace, and the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind provide the necessary context without which China's mediating role in helping settle the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran cannot be fully understood.

Multiple deep-seated disputes had poisoned Riyadh-Teheran relations for a long time. These disputes are said to be the alleged engagement in proxy wars in the Middle East, aspirations for regional leadership, conflicts of religious doctrines, competition for leadership in the



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Islamic world, oil export policies, and relations with the US and other Western powers.

That's why, despite the resumption of diplomatic ties, both Saudi Arabia and Iran understand that it is difficult to get their rocky relationship back on a sound footing. Yet Iran is advancing its nuclear program after two years of failed attempts by the Joe Biden administration to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that was aimed at preventing Teheran from developing a nuclear bomb. No wonder Saudi Arabia has warned that all bets would be off if Iran develops a nuclear bomb.

Of equal concern is the protracted civil war in Yemen, which in essence is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is hoped that the normalization of diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Teheran will have positive effects on the peaceful initiatives to end the civil war in Yemen.

On the other hand, any escalation of proxy wars in Syria and Lebanon will deal the fragile Riyadh-Teheran rapprochement a crushing blow. In all this, however, China is expected to continue playing a positive role in sustaining the peace deal, by helping defuse tensions in the Middle East.

China remains, and is still perceived to

be, a responsible and credible peace-broker, as its role in brokering the peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran shows. It has also showcased its global leadership by helping deliver peace, an invaluable international public good, to the region.

Indeed, China is ready to play a more active role in promoting peace. The Saudi-Iranian deal also proves wrong the malicious allegation that China is a "trigger-happy aggressor".

Under President Xi Jinping, China has made strenuous efforts to build a community with a shared future for mankind and pursue an independent foreign policy. It has recently succeeded in brokering a peace deal between two long-term rivals in the Middle East. Though there is a gnashing of teeth in some Western countries, China will continue to play a more constructive role in settling international disputes.

China is what it upholds. An ascending China understands that global leadership means shouldering more global responsibilities. Instead of asking what the international community can do for China, China has been asking what it can do for the international community.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

SHEN MINGHUI AND LI TIANGUO

Unleashing RCEP

Although the pact has greatly bolstered regional economic integration and strengthened value chain cooperation, there is still room for further improvement

The global economic recovery lacks momentum and trade protectionism is prevalent globally. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is currently the largest free trade agreement in the world, having come into effect in all its 15 member states. The implementation of this agreement can further deepen the economic bonds between Asian economies, enhance the resilience of industry and supply chains within the RCEP region, effectively boost the confidence about trade and investment in Asia, stimulate the vitality of regional economic cooperation, and inject strong momentum into

the region's economic growth in the post-pandemic era.



Shen Minghui

The significance of the RCEP lies in the integration of 27 trade arrangements and 44 investment treaties signed and implemented among the 15 member countries, in the context of wide diversity in the development stage, scale and



Li Tianguo

volume of these countries' economies. From an institutional perspective, the RCEP mitigates the "spaghetti bowl effect" by simplifying and harmonizing the rules of origin and different preferential treatment under preferential trade agreements, promoting trade and investment activities for intermediate products within the region, and helping further develop the regional value chain and industry chains. In the past year, intra-regional trade relations have further deepened, and the vast majority of the RCEP members have shown a high-growth trend in intra-regional trade. Statistics from China's customs authorities show the country's trade with other RCEP signatory countries grew by 7.5 percent year-on-year to hit 12.95 trillion yuan (\$1.88 trillion) in 2022.

The Republic of Korea, Vietnam, New Zealand, Japan, and Thailand saw their trade with other RCEP members grow by 10.4 percent, 10.1 percent, 8.4 percent, 7.1 percent and 6.0 percent, respectively. This is faster than the growth rate of their trade with other parts of the world, indicating that the regional economic integration of the RCEP has given an effective boost to trade growth within the region.

The RCEP has effectively boosted trade and investment between China and other member economies, becoming an important platform for China to further open up its economy in the new era. In 2022, the total volume of imports and exports between China and other RCEP members reached 12.95 trillion yuan (\$1.89 trillion), accounting for 30.8 percent of its total foreign trade. In 2022, China witnessed double-digit year-on-year growth of trade with eight RCEP member countries, while its trade

with Indonesia, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos grew by over 20 percent on a yearly basis. At the same time, China's non-financial direct investment in other RCEP members in 2022 increased by 18.9 percent year-on-year to reach \$17.96 billion, and it attracted direct investment of \$23.53 billion, up 23.1 percent, from other RCEP members.

After the RCEP came into effect, Chinese enterprises actively utilized platforms such as the Silk Road International Exposition, the China International Import Expo and the China-ASEAN Expo to promote economic and trade cooperation with enterprises in the RCEP members. The regional rules of origin in the RCEP region allow enterprises to optimize their supply chain, make flexible industrial layout, reduce the production cost of end products, and promote deep integration of regional value chains. In 2022, a total of 673,000 certificates of origin and statements of origin were applied by and issued to Chinese exporters under the RCEP agreement, benefiting 235.3 billion yuan-worth of exports through FTA preferential tariff and exempting 1.58 billion yuan in tariff concessions from importing countries. The value of imported goods of Chinese enterprises enjoying preferential tariff rates reached 65.3 billion yuan, and the tariff exemption was 1.55 billion yuan.

Although the RCEP has greatly bolstered regional economic integration and strengthened regional value chain cooperation, there is still room for further upgrading and improvement.

First of all, there is still room to improve trade and investment rules. Given the diversity of the region, the RCEP agreement has not set up separate chapters on the environment, regulatory coherence, transparency, and other aspects as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership has done, and the chapter on government procurement has not yet explicitly addressed the commitments of market access. The e-commerce chapter does not mention rules related to e-commerce such as source code, cross-border data flow in financial services, and online dispute resolution. With the implementation of the RCEP and the development of the regional value chain, it is necessary for the RCEP members to timely consider upgrading the RCEP on the above behind-the-border issues to better promote the development of the global value chain.

Second, the agreement stipulates a relatively long transition period for some important rules. For example, in terms of service trade, member countries such as New Zealand, China, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar are committed to opening up their market through a positive list approach. However, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar need to submit their negative list commitments within 12 years and shift their positive list commitments to negative lists within 15 years after the agreement

coming into force.

Third, it is necessary to further enhance enterprises' utilization of free trade agreement. Currently, the utilization rate of preferential tariffs in FTAs implemented in the Asian region is generally lower compared to other FTAs in developed countries, indicating that FTAs of the Asian region have not given full play to their due effectiveness. According to a 2018 report by the Japan External Trade Organization, Philippine enterprises' utilization rate on imports under the FTA between Japan and the Philippines was only 16.6 percent, while the utilization rate of imports under the ROK-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement was only 31.2 percent. Therefore, the region still needs to continuously optimize the procedures of handling certificate of origin and improve efficiency, help enterprises reduce the cost on it, provide enterprises with information on relevant free trade rules in a timely manner, and constantly improve the utilization of FTA.

In the future, the RCEP members should further strengthen their capacity building and achieve connectivity of data of origin within and among the 15 RCEP member countries as soon as possible. Relevant upgrading negotiations shall be launched in time to explore new rules for international trade and economic cooperation. It is also necessary for the RCEP to expand its members while maintaining ASEAN's "centrality" under the framework of the regional FTA.

As a key RCEP member, China should steadily expand institutional openness in terms of rules, regulations, management, and standards, implement the agreement with high standards, and fully unleash the benefits from the RCEP. A sound and comprehensive service system should be launched to better utilize the free trade agreement. In the meantime, by relying on the pilot free trade zones, China should take the lead in exploring more high-standard economic and trade rules, and guide its central and western regions to combine the RCEP with their economic development strategies and construction plans. It should also speed up the pace of adjusting its regional industry chain layout, promote the integration of manufacturing industry chain and innovation chain, implement the 701 binding obligations with high quality, and actively explore the implementation of 170 non-binding commitments, further improve the trade and investment environment and stimulate enterprises' vitality.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

GYÖRGY H. MATOLCSY

Times call for action

Central banks are by necessity and choice at the forefront of advancing the green and digital transition through cooperation and collaborations

Environmental sustainability is clearly one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. The conclusion of extensive research and dialogue is that the necessary actions need to be taken both on national and global levels, in a coordinated and timely manner to fulfill climate policy goals. As part of these actions, central banks must address the issue of the green transition which has clear implications for their core mandates, i.e., meeting inflation targets and safeguarding financial stability. And when central banks embrace the concept of sustainability, the digital revolution must also be taken into account. Digital solutions are inevitable for a sustainability turnaround. They not only provide smart tools for the circular economy, but they can also change the very form of money itself. It is thus obvious that central banks must actively shape the green and digital agenda.

This mission requires a comprehensive policy framework going beyond the traditional interpretation of central banking (that is, a narrow focus on price levels). Inflation continues to be the number one priority; however, central bankers cannot avoid considering a wide variety of factors to tame inflation. These factors include the ongoing green and digital transition of the economy, as well as supply-side shocks, pressures in energy markets and similar structural issues, which are also strongly related to geopolitics.

Recent proof of the very complex environment that central banks operate in has come from the energy sector. Many monetary authorities are now seeing that an unsustainable energy mix can have a serious impact on prices and inflation. In the long run, a decrease in fossil energy intensity and a reliance on renewable energy sources can be the solution for our current problems. But such a transition must be carried out through strengthening domestic innovation capabilities and nurturing effective cooperation in the field of cutting-edge technologies. We must correct the mistakes of the past when excessive reliance on conventional external energy sources and the lack of well-embedded know-how left many countries over-exposed to exogenous shocks.

International collaboration must deliver major developments in this respect. Sharing knowledge and best practices could be the primary channel to developing win-win investments and a robust global network of the 21st century. This is equally true for manufacturing and hard infrastructure, as well as less tangible elements of the economy: services and the digital infrastructure. The distinction between "tangible" and "intangible" is becoming less meaningful nowadays.

No wonder that financial cooperation is also heading toward higher levels of joint added value. Central banks are pioneers of this new collaborative approach. It has been the People's Bank of China (PBOC) which ventured to create a central bank digital currency (CBDC), with wide-scale real-payment pilots having already been underway for three years. The PBOC has also been supporting international cooperation in this respect, which is essential because this new form of central bank money might have the most revolutionary impact on cross-border transactions. Such payments still lag behind domestic transactions in terms of speed and cost efficiency. While many countries have already introduced instant payments at home, international bank transfers usually still need time to be settled. Of course, this lags behind the pace of the "turbo charged" world.

Central banks are acting quickly and forming international partnerships to revamp the foundations of cross-border finance. They are leveraging groundbreaking technologies such as distributed ledgers, non-fungible tokens, smart contracts and other innovations. Initiatives such as the m-CBDC Bridge (a joint pilot of the People's Bank of China, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, the Bank of Thailand, the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates and the BIS Innovation Hub Hong Kong Centre) and Project Dunbar (also under the auspices of the BIS Innovation Hub) are gaining ground. European central banks are now getting onboard and have begun engineering test transactions with their Asian counterparts. This is good news because there could be no sustainability turnaround without renewing the global financial system and putting it on a sustainable path, too.

The Magyar Nemzeti Bank (MNB, the Central Bank of Hungary) is an institution advocate of multilateral cooperation in the var-

ious fields of the digital and green transition. Our past decade has seen extended partnerships with Eurasian central banks, financial institutions, think tanks and the academia to promote knowledge sharing, best practices and other joint activities. The MNB has announced its Green Program, the Central Bank Renminbi Program and the Budapest Renminbi Initiative, as well as the Budapest Eurasia Forum and an own Technical Assistance Program, which all have direct links to the international community.

In a nutshell, the Green Program aims to reduce the central bank's own carbon footprint, but it goes well beyond that. It is a comprehensive scheme to incentivize green financing for the real economy, i.e., channeling more funds to carbon neutral, sustainable investments and the renewable energy industry. Furthermore, financial institutions are encouraged to detect climate-related risks in their balance sheets and operations with an eye to measuring their environmental (or more generally, ESG) performance.

Green finance and future-oriented macro policies are nowadays at the heart of the MNB's engagement with its international partners. Sustainability is the core concept of our flagship event, the annual Budapest Eurasia Forum, which — in addition to regular staff-level dialogue — is a primary platform for solidifying our professional contributions on an international level. We are especially proud to have the Boao Forum for Asia, as well as the Fudan Development Institute and the Shanghai Forum among the distinguished partners of our event series.

Another similar platform is the MNB's Budapest Renminbi Initiative which provides a more specific opportunity to discuss the international role of the renminbi, its cross-border use and contribution to financing future-proof investments.

All in all, a successful digital and green revolution can only be achieved in a collaborative way. Let us not forget the words of the famous Hungarian poet, Sándor Pet fi: "Time is right, and it decides what is not."

The author is governor of Magyar Nemzeti Bank, the Central Bank of Hungary. 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.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE



Legendary pianist Rudolf Buchbinder with the Staatskapelle Dresden at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing in 2019.

Festival brings return of global talent

May event will highlight attraction of chamber music, diversity of styles, **Chen Nan** reports.

It is just like the ticking of the biological clock, precise and regular," says Lyu Siqing, a renowned violinist and artistic director of the NCPA May Festival, an annual event promoting chamber music.

Every May, Lyu's schedule becomes hectic, during the NCPA May Festival.

"Last year, we had prepared the whole program for the festival, but unfortunately it was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, it returns. What excites all of the team members behind the festival is that international musicians also return," Lyu says.

"The music will be in a diversity of styles, allowing the audience to enjoy the beauty of chamber music."

The festival was initiated by the National Centre for the Performing Arts in 2009.

From May 1 to 27, the festival will stage 27 concerts, gathering solo musicians and chamber music ensembles.

The opening concert will be performed by eight star musicians, including violinists Lyu, Wang Xiaomao and Huang Mengla, and cellist Li-Wei Qin, who will play in ensembles of various sizes. Lyu, Huang and pianist Sun Yingdi will play five pieces composed by Dmitri Shostakovich, which were collected and arranged for violins and piano by Lev Atovmyan, a friend and assistant to Shostakovich. Wang, Qin, violinist Su Zhen and pianist Sun will perform the first movement of Mozart's *Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, K. 478*. Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* will be played by the eight musicians together.

This year marks the 12th anniversary of the Major Trio, which consists of violinist Lyu, cellist Qin and pianist Sun. According to Lyu, the pandemic forced the three musicians to stop performing as an ensemble. Since they live in different countries, their gathering together again this year feels like a reunion.

"Though we all have developed careers as soloists, performing chamber music has always been important for us. Chamber music is our unique way of communication," says Lyu.

Lyu, a junior prizewinner in the inaugural Menuhin competition, was invited by Yehudi Menuhin to study violin in London at the age of 11. In 1987, he became the first Asian violinist to win top prize at the prestigious Paganini International Violin Competition in Italy,



Above: Major Trio, which consists of violinist Lyu Siqing (left), cellist Li-Wei Qin (right), and pianist Sun Yingdi, will perform during the upcoming NCPA May Festival.

Right: Cellist Wang Jian.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“What excites all of the team members behind the festival is that international musicians also return. The music will be in a diversity of styles.”

Lyu Siqing, artistic director of the festival



which propelled him to stardom. On May 5, the trio will play works composed by Sergei Rachmaninoff and Johannes Brahms.

According to Wang Luli, deputy director of the NCPA's Program Management Department, one of the highlights of this year's festival will be Rudolf Buchbinder, the Czechoslovakia-born celebrated pianist, who will give seven con-

certs from May 9 to 17, performing the complete collection of Beethoven piano sonatas.

"Few musicians have engaged with Beethoven's music as deeply and intensively as the legendary pianist Rudolf Buchbinder. He has performed the 32 piano sonatas 60 times in cycles all over the world," says Wang Luli, adding that the pianist has never played solo at the

national center in Beijing, though in 2019, he played there with the Staatskapelle Dresden, both as pianist and conductor. Buchbinder is also known for being the first pianist to perform Beethoven's complete piano sonatas at the Salzburg Festival in 2014.

"I am happy to go back to the NCPA again, which I have long looked forward to. Over the years, we have built a strong and joyful relationship with the NCPA and we have shared many great music moments, which remain in our hearts," said Buchbinder in a video sending his greetings to Chinese audiences. "For a very long time, I have been performing Beethoven's music, which has been a personal journey for me. These works have accompanied and occupied me for years, and are known for their complexity and beauty. They are deeply human."

On May 21, French violinist Renaud Capuçon will give a concert featuring work by French composers, such as Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Cesar Franck.

Cellist Wang Jian, who has been active in the global music scene for decades and returned to his home country this year to teach at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, will play three pieces of Bach's suites for unaccompanied cello on May 27, which will close the festival.

Besides classical music, fusions of traditional Chinese and contemporary music such as jazz will be staged at the festival.

Veteran Chinese musician Zhang Weiliang, who specializes in playing traditional Chinese musical instruments, such as the bamboo flute, *xiao* (a vertical bamboo flute) and *xun* (one of China's oldest wind instruments), will perform with China NCPA Orchestra on May 18.

On May 24, the Beijing Chinese Orchestra will put on a chamber music concert, featuring musicians playing traditional instruments such as the *erhu* (two-stringed bowed instrument), *pipa* (Chinese lute), and drum.

"When we first held the May Festival in 2009, chamber music was not popular among Chinese classical music fans. With more and more people enjoying classical music, they are also becoming more open to chamber music, which provides an intimate atmosphere and experience," says Wang Luli.

Contact the writer at chenan@chinadaily.com.cn

Israeli artist paints vivid pictures of Shanghai

JERUSALEM — People who visited Abraham Hostel in downtown Tel Aviv before Saturday may have found an industrial-style underground gallery, decorated with artistic paintings about China and Israel. But for Israeli artist Sveta Dorosheva, the exhibition served as an opportunity to highlight her love for Shanghai.

The exhibition featured portions devoted to Dorosheva's stay in Shanghai, a personal project carried out over a decade about her experience as an immigrant in Israel, and a series of surreal-looking illustrations.

Although the monthlong exhibition ended on Saturday, Dorosheva says her crush for Shanghai will linger.

Back in the summer of 2018, Dorosheva was invited to Shanghai to participate in an art project, where contemporary artists from around the world gathered together.

Living in one of the most well-known cities in China for three months, she found herself submerged in a sea of overwhelming emotions, which became inspiration for her future realism-style artistic pieces.

Bustling streets, dazzling skyscrapers, and the convenient and comfortable way of life in terms of fast delivery and cashless payment are major draws to those visiting Shanghai for the first time, including Dorosheva.

"In Shanghai, I found that the reality around me was so fantastic that I didn't really want to mix it with anything my feeble imagination could offer. So I just drew the reality of what I have seen in Shanghai as a foreigner," Dorosheva says.

In the Shanghai series of her paintings, there are pieces illustrating old people chatting around a street corner, stylish young pedestrians holding shopping bags, deliverymen in a rush, and women dressed in *hanfu* (a traditional Chinese style of clothing) cosplay costumes. The scenes, commonly seen in Chinese cities, are incorporated with artistic beauty by Dorosheva.

Recalling her first painting created in Shanghai, Dorosheva says that she had planned to use watercolors, but when she went to Fuzhou Road, often considered the "Cultural Street" of Shanghai, the wide variety of Chinese painting tools took her breath away. "I would spend all my money," she says.

The encounter with traditional Chinese painting inspired Dorosheva to embark on a new creative journey. During her stay in Shanghai, she finished a total of 15 paintings and continued to draw another 15 pieces after leaving the city, all on Chinese-style *xuan* paper and done with a brush dipped in black ink and colored pigments, just like traditional Chinese paintings.

Besides the Shanghai series, her Tel Aviv series in watercolors was also shown. Although the two series adopt different tools and techniques, they are both based on the life scenes of ordinary people, seeking to describe the most authentic parts of human beings.

"I just thought I don't have to invent anything, and I don't have to be creative. I can approach it as raw reality," she says, adding that as an immigrant herself, Tel Aviv and Shanghai brought her similar feelings.

Ira Krokmal, the exhibition's curator, says that she had never been to Shanghai, yet was well aware that people always compare Shanghai to Tel Aviv because both are national economic centers full of modern vitality.

Besides painting, Dorosheva published a book featuring her wonderful stay in Shanghai in her mother tongue Russian, so as to make her Shanghai memory more complete and diverse.

"In Shanghai, she grapples with two new realities, not one: that of the flamboyant, unimaginable Shanghai, and the extravagant, impenetrable world of contemporary art," reads the synopsis of the book.

Yana Gorelik, a Russian-Israeli who came to the exhibition after reading the book, said that Shanghai is depicted in the book as modern, prosperous and full of human kindness.

"It is my dream since childhood to go to visit this beautiful country. Now I see how she sees it. I think it's much more than I have imagined, and I would like to go to see China by myself," she says.

XINHUA

LIFESHANGHAI



LIANG LUWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Similar activities are search goal

Young Chinese are seeking out like-minded peers on social media, but their aim is to pursue shared interests rather than develop lasting friendships, **Yu Ran** reports.

For many consumers, Chinese social media and lifestyle platform Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) is one of the top sites for tips on topics like beauty, fashion, travel, food and education.

For others, the platform is a perfect place to post about one's life experiences.

But for a growing number of young people, the platform has evolved into something more — it is a place to look not for friends, but *dazi*, or "activity partner".

The term *dazi* became especially common on the site only earlier this year, with many people posting shout-outs in search of those who share similar interests.

Unlike friendships, the concept of *dazi* is centered on temporary, almost superficial, companionship. The idea is simple — random individuals come together to partake in an activity they all enjoy. The objective is not to get to know one another better. The development of a friendship is a bonus.

The emergence of this trend appears to be in line with the results of the 2021 Generation Z Interest Survey published by news portal DT Finance. According to the report, one of the top three qualities young people look for when making new friends is shared interests.

According to a 2020 survey on "social concepts and relationships of the post-1995 generation", jointly released by dating app Lantan and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, "finding like-minded people" was among the top three reasons young people used social media apps. In addition, 27 percent of respondents then said they found it easier to find companions online than offline. Ninety-three percent of respondents said they were open to meeting people they met online in person.

Those in the *dazi* scene generally agree that the trend is likely linked to two main factors. First, the internet has made it incredibly easy for people to connect with one another. Second, young people, especially those still in school or fresh out of

university, tend to have smaller social circles.

"University students don't have as many friends as those who are older and in the workforce. Their friends are mostly their schoolmates. As such, it can be difficult to find someone who shares a similar interest. Going online to find companions to do something they like is more practical and efficient," says Xu Shijin, an organizer of *dazi* groups on Xiaohongshu.

The 25-year-old started a group in September after starting work at an education institution in Shanghai. The main purpose of the group, he says, was to create a Shanghai university student community where people could share information and find like-minded people to do things with. The group attracted some 2,500 members within just six months.

He later established new groups for those looking to learn English and Japanese, job seekers, and fans of comics and games.

These groups currently have about 4,000 members, most of whom are aged 18 to 30.

Yu Xiaoxiao, who joined *dazi* circles to find companions to enjoy Chinese northeastern barbecue foods with, echoes the sentiment that this new trend is largely down to practicality.

"For people of the older generations, it's about getting friends to do things together. Those from the younger generations are a little different — what they want to do comes first. Whether or not they do it with friends or strangers is irrele-

vant," says the 31-year-old.

"People born after 1990 or 2000 grew up in times of greater uncertainty and fluidity, where maintaining long-term stable friendships might have been challenging," she adds.

For Yu, turning to *dazi* groups was also a necessity as she found it difficult to find new friends after moving to Shanghai from her hometown Qiqihar, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, a few years ago.

"After graduating from university, it became harder to find people to hang out with. All my schoolmates became more distant because they had their own lives to live and dreams to chase. Also, there is this unspoken rule that co-workers should only be co-workers, not friends," she says.

Even people in their mid-30s have jumped on the bandwagon.

Bu Yu, a 35-year-old who lives in Shanghai, decided to form a *dazi* group after discovering that many mothers were eager to have their children play together. After creating the group in late March, she organized a tour of the Shanghai Firefighting Museum early this month with other families that have children of similar ages.

"Overall, the experience was great as we had flexibility with time, efficiency in planning, and it allowed us to meet new people," says Bu. "This approach also allows families to connect with each other, make new friends, and tailor their activities to their individual requirements."

The group currently has around

300 members, and the main focus is on finding partners for activities, such as playing outdoors with children, traveling, dining, singing and learning.

"I don't think looking for companions is unique to young people nowadays as they prefer to do almost everything online. I think this approach is popular because people's lives are too fast-paced and their social circles are small," says Bu.

Yu Hai, a sociology professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, says such a trend should be perceived as a positive one as it shows how young people are more willing to explore their own interests.

"This type of lifestyle represents a courageous attempt by young people to reach out and explore social relationships that please themselves and perceive the beauty of life in a different way. This could be seen as a step forward in social progress," he says.

"As social creatures, we thrive on doing things together. This is behind why young people are enthusiastic about finding *dazi* circles these days."

The trend also suggests that young Chinese are taking steps to become more social. According to a survey by China Youth Daily last year, more than 80 percent of the nearly 5,000 college students polled said that they suffered from mild social anxiety disorder.

Wang Wenda, a psychology lecturer at Ningxia University's Xinhua College in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, attributes this phenomenon to youths lacking social skills as they are more accustomed to interacting with each other online than in person.

"Instant messaging apps are not really 'instant' because people can choose not to respond to messages or can take time to come up with the best response, while in real life, they must react right away and understand different facial expressions and gestures," he says.

Wang says young people with social anxiety disorder could take part in more gatherings to practice their social skills.

Choreographer shows new body of thought

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai
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French choreographer Regine Chopinot addressed Chinese dancers and audiences at Women in Motion, held in Shanghai's West Bund area over the weekend.

The program was launched by the French luxury group Kering at the Festival de Cannes in 2015. Aimed at highlighting women in cinema, it has since expanded to photography, art, design and music.

In 2021, the launch of Women in Motion at West Bund venues further expanded its influence by including choreography and dance for the first time.

This year, the event featured the premiere of dance film *Outre-danse* on April 14, by Chopinot and Chinese choreographer Wen Hui, in which the two artists dance to a live performance by French drummer Vincent Kreyder.

The opening night also saw the presentation of *Skirt*, an iconic dance piece created by Wen in 1996, with new interpretation by the dancers of the Shanghai Jin Xing Dance Theatre.

A young choreographer, Wang Mengfan, also presented her creation named *Narrative Fountain*, an intimate solo piece performed by Qian Min.

In the following two days, a series of activities took place at the West Bund Museum, covering dance performances, film, dialogues and workshops.

Chopinot, 71, is the former director of the National Choreographic Center of La Rochelle, an important choreography center in France.

She went on to carry out research on the moving body in relation to the strength of language in the South Pacific region from 2009 to 2018.

Dancers don't have to move their body with music, Chopinot told China Daily in response to a question about the three dance pieces shown the night before, none of which featured any melodic music accompaniment.

Instead, the body moves to its own rhythm, she says.

"Dancers listen with their skin, their emotion, the intricate feeling of their body hair", she says, while explaining the synchronized movements in *Skirt*, when five dancers performed with no other sound but that of their own breath and the rubbing, sweeping and pulling of the fabric of their costume.

“Dancers listen with their skin, their emotion, the intricate feeling of their body hair.”

Regine Chopinot,
French choreographer

A strong piece about the female existence, filled with frustration, struggles and awakening, Wen's choreography of *Skirt* has "opened a gate to new ideas", Chopinot says.

Decades later "the live performance of her creation is still inspiring ... showing the power of art", Chopinot adds.

Wen was not in Shanghai to participate in the event, but held an online dialogue on Saturday with Chopinot and Chloe Siganos, head of performing arts at Centre Pompidou, Paris, curator of the second edition of Women in Motion at West Bund.

Chopinot began to dance at the age of 5, and after 66 years of experience as a dancer and choreographer, she sees herself as "a crossroads of cultures and ideas", with her mission as an artist being to build new connections among people, and with the world and nature.

"All living beings need beauty," she says.

While the brain is recognized as the organ for thinking, Chopinot says she believes the abdomen is important for intuitive feeling.

Choreographers have to learn to understand and think with their abdomen and their skin, and take in the world like animals and plants.

"Creations of female artists possess unlimited potential that transcends time, culture and generations. We are deeply grateful and proud that Women in Motion at West Bund is making leaps in achievements in this second edition focused on female choreography," Cai Jingqing, president of Kering Greater China, says.

"In the future, we will continue to focus on in-depth cooperation across national and cultural boundaries, making the museum a destination that inspires creativity, artistic collision and dialogues," Chen Anda, executive director of the West Bund Museum, says.



Top: The second edition of Women in Motion at West Bund was launched in Shanghai last week with (from left) Cai Jingqing, president of Kering Greater China, French choreographer Regine Chopinot, Chloe Siganos, head of performing arts at Centre Pompidou in Paris, choreographer Wang Mengfan and Chen Anda, executive director of the West Bund Museum.

Above: Dancers of the Shanghai Jin Xing Dance Theatre performed *Skirt* at the opening night. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

It is hard to summarize the novel *You Sheng* (Hope and Life) by Hu Xuewen, which extends for 938 pages and is narrated in a structure that the writer depicts as “umbrella-shaped”.

Half of the 20 chapters are devoted to the recollection of the past by centenarian midwife Qiao Damei, or the “Great Grandmother”, which constitutes the shaft of the “umbrella”, and the remaining chapters recount the stories of five other characters, which form the canopy. The narration travels back and forth between the present and the past.

“It’s my notion of good novels that they should not be easily summarized, but can provide space for different interpretations,” Hu tells China Daily.

The 56-year-old writer is in London, where the three-volume English version of his novel was just launched at the London Book Fair. Since its publication in 2021, the book’s copyright has been sold in eight languages, including English, German and French.

As the writer says, it is a novel about how to be born, live and overcome hardship. In 550,000 words, Hu paints a picture of people’s lives in Songzhuang village, Zhangjiakou, in what is now Hebei province, from the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) to the present. The whole story was told by the Great Grandmother in one day and one night.

When the novel starts, Qiao, born in 1900, is lying in a bed in the village, a bitterly cold place beyond the Great Wall that used to be where emperors sent criminals into exile.

About 110 years old, she is half dead, confined to bed and losing the ability to speak or move. However, she is still clear-minded, with good hearing and a keen sense of smell.

Having delivered more than 12,000 babies throughout her career, midwife Qiao is famous for her exceptional skills and her pure and noble heart, which has won her the title of “a living Buddha”. She has become a legend, a godlike person that villagers believe wields a superpower and has the ability to help them solve all kinds of problems. She is the “Great Grandmother”, from whom villagers come to ask for blessings.

“Such a godlike character gives the novel great freedom in terms of narration,” Hu says.

Born in a village in Guyuan county, Hebei, in 1967, Hu became a professional writer in 2002. His novella *Cong Zhengwu Dao Huangshun* (From Noon to Dusk) won the Lu Xun Literature Prize in 2014.

About 10 years ago, Hu aspired to write an epic novel that would represent the rural areas he was familiar with, and which took place over the course of 100 years. It took him eight years to finish the novel. Before starting, he had to overcome several problems.

One was that there have already been lots of great novels that seem to have covered every aspect of

A novel tale of life and death in rural China

Centered on a deified midwife, Hu Xuewen’s unique story paints a picture of pastoral problems, proclivities and perseverance, Yang Yang reports.



Above: Writer Hu Xuewen has spent almost eight years working on the 938-page novel, *Hope and Life*, which explores the emotional and spiritual history of people in a rural area of China over the course of a century. **Right:** Li Liyan (left), minister counselor for cultural affairs at the Chinese embassy in London, and Jin Guohua, deputy general manager of Phoenix Publishing and Media Group, unveil the English version of the book at the London Book Fair on Tuesday.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“The novel provides a fresh spiritual temperament and attitude toward life, and the characters, especially the Great Grandmother, are very unique in Chinese literature.”

Wang Binbin, professor of Chinese literature at Nanjing University



rural life in China, so what fresh perspective could he provide?

Speaking at a seminar about the novel in 2021, Gao Yuanbao, professor of Chinese literature at Fudan University, asked: “What is still worth writing regarding China’s rural areas?”

Gao said he saw in the novel various “infatuations” — the Great Grandmother with midwifery, Ruhua with her husband, Luo Bao with making bean curd, and so on. “Infatuation” becomes the center of their lives. He

praised the novel’s focus on the emotional lives of the individuals in the countryside.

According to her review of the book, what particularly drew the attention of literary critic Han Liang from Nanjing University, was how the villagers dispelled their depression and frustration.

For example, Mao Gen, a descendant of hunters, vents his frustrations by hunting wild animals. Luo Bao, an outstanding bean curd maker, needs to smell beans to calm himself down when

life’s pressures grow too great, while Yang Yifan, the head of the town, eats a lot of chillies.

“In this novel, I wanted to talk about how, after conquering poverty in the rural areas, to solve people’s emotional and spiritual issues?” Hu says.

There are villagers who visit the Great Grandmother to complain.

“Complaining cannot really change the reality, while it also seems to be able to change everything. Expressing their sadness, anger, suffering and worries to

the Great Grandmother will give people peace. Fighting hardships and complaining about them can also be an attitude toward life,” literary critic Xie Youshun says.

Commenting on the novel, Wang Binbin, professor of Chinese literature at Nanjing University, says, “The novel provides a fresh spiritual temperament and attitude toward life, and the characters, especially the Great Grandmother, are very unique in Chinese literature.”

For Hu, the Great Grandmother is not only a witness of history, but an individual whose destiny had been profoundly influenced by historical changes. In the character, he injected a perseverant spirit that he observed in people who live in the harsh environment of Zhangjiakou.

“The deaths of her three husbands and nine children are terrible blows. For a while, she wants to commit suicide, but chooses to live on to help women give birth. That’s how she sees life and death,” Hu says.

The Great Grandmother, who has suffered various miseries throughout her life, and has witnessed many births and deaths, becomes especially tough, wise, kind and tolerant. She is a spiritual idol for many people.

Wang says that the writer tries to look for modern spiritual resources, a foundation for modern life, from traditional China.

Another problem that Hu faced before starting the novel was that of characterization. He needed a protagonist from the countryside whose profession involves traveling around and see a broader world, to provide enough space to tell the stories of different people.

He thought of midwives, who traveled around serving people from all walks of life and classes, and who would witness the birth of new lives and sometime deaths of babies and mothers.

“Midwifery is an ancient profession. Even in the 1980s, women in rural areas were still being assisted by traditional midwives to deliver babies. I saw, several times, how they worked in the 1970s, because all my younger brothers and sisters were born with their help,” Hu says.

The third problem that Hu needed to solve was to find a proper structure around which to weave the stories from the past and present.

Han compares the novel’s structure to a cobweb woven around the Great Grandmother.

“Such a structure offers the narrating voice the freedom to travel between the past and present, the real and fictional, and the eternal and transitional, without appearing loose,” she writes.

“Other critics said it’s an open structure, but for me, it’s an umbrella,” Hu says.

“Whichever it is, I’m just happy that it provides a space for people to interpret and discuss.”

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Chinese classic debuts at London Book Fair

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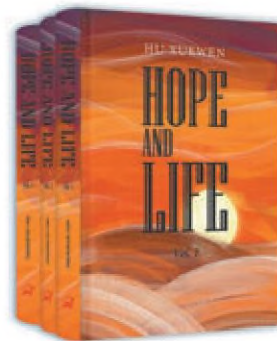
Hope and Life, the English-language version of a Chinese novel, attracting a great deal of attention, made its debut at this year’s London Book Fair, which ran until Thursday and boasted the participation of more than 1,700 companies from 60 countries and regions.

More than 40 Chinese publishers, supported by the National Press and Publication Administration, showcased at least 2,300 China-themed books at the event, held at the Olympia exhibition center in West London.

First published in 2021 in China by Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing, *Hope and Life* took Hu Xuewen, a renowned writer and Lu Xun Literature Prize winner, eight years to finish. It scooped almost all of that year’s major Chinese literary prizes.

The book portrays a great literary figure — *zūnai* (the Great Grandmother) — whose image is believed to last forever in literature. Also portrayed are the characters and different destinies of a vivid group of Chinese people, further exploring what maintains the perpetual life-line of the Chinese people.

The English version of *Hope and Life* was launched on Tuesday, with participation from China’s embassy



The three-volume English version of *Hope and Life* launched at the London Book Fair on Tuesday.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

in the United Kingdom, Phoenix Publishing and Media Group, Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing, the New Classic Press (UK), and the Chinese Literature Reader’s Club (UK).

Speaking at the UK book launch on Tuesday, Li Liyan, minister counselor for cultural affairs at the Chinese embassy, said: “Chinese-English literary exchanges have a long history, and the literature of both countries hold a pivotal position in the world.

“I think one of the better ways to understand China, especially China in the new era, is to read excellent Chinese literature, especially excellent works from contemporary Chinese writers. *Hope and Life* is a precious gift from Chinese writers to readers all over the world. It is our hope that British readers can feel the charm of traditional Chinese culture and understand the values and cultural heritage of contemporary China through this work.”

Li said he hopes there will be more Chinese writers and literary works to tell the world the story of today’s China and deepen the mutual understanding and friendship between China and other countries.

Tony Caplin, general manager of New Classic Press, the publisher of the English version of the book, said: “The novel provides readers with an encyclopedic glimpse into the life of rural China, through the eyes of an aging, bedridden midwife named Qiao Damei.

“The book spans China’s past century of social upheavals, from the end of the imperial era, through the age of republicanism, and into the modern age. Despite the focal story taking place through the span of a single day and night, the midwife Qiao Damei’s experiences throughout her lifetime and the stories she tells are the stuff of epics.”

The book has already received many accolades in China, including the best book of the year in 2021, being ranked No 1 in the 2020 fiction category, and making it onto the 2020 annual “golden list of novels”.

“These awards serve as a testament to the book’s literary excellence and the author’s immense talent,” Caplin said.

Jin Guohua, deputy general manager of Phoenix Publishing and Media Group, one of the biggest publishing companies in China and the parent company of the novel’s Chinese publisher, said: “This masterpiece has made a significant impact on the literature community and gained widespread attention and praise from readers. It is also being translated into several other languages, in addition to English, and will soon be available to a wider audience worldwide.

“We sincerely hope that through the publication of these books in different languages, more readers will immerse themselves in the stories of true China and gain a comprehensive understanding of China and its people today. We also look forward to introducing excellent foreign books, presenting them to the majority of Chinese readers, building bridges for cultural exchanges between China and countries around the world.”



A publisher flips through an introductory book on *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* and the history of ancient Chinese landscape paintings. The book has been published in Chinese, English and French. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHINA YOUTH PRESS INTERNATIONAL

Books such as the *Dictionary of Chinese Cultural Knowledge* and *Business Chinese* have also been exhibited, as has a children’s picture book illustrated by the British Chinese illustrator Yu Rong called *The Visible Sounds*, which made a splash during a panel discussion at the book fair.

A Chinese culture and art book exhibition, entitled *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*, was part of this year’s London Book Fair. The fair, which ran from Tuesday to Thursday, presented more than 100 books on ancient and modern Chi-

nese art, design and paintings and highlighted the use of blue-green hues in depicting landscapes.

A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains is one of the most famous paintings in Chinese history for its sweeping scale, rich colors and vivid details. Measuring 51.5 centimeters by 11.9 meters, the masterpiece was the only extant piece by prodigy artist Wang Ximeng who created it at age 17 during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). That period of time witnessed the flowering of literature and art and has left many poems and paintings as a legacy.