

Linking cities

Serbian rail travel much faster now, thanks to Chinese expertise
BELT & ROAD 10 YEARS ON, PAGES 8-9



ROK president's visit to the US aggravates risks

COMMENT, PAGE 11



Production recovering

Profits at major industrial firms are declining at a slower pace
BUSINESS, PAGE 6

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 2023

Millions welcome Ya Ya as panda arrives in Shanghai

By LI HONGYANG
lihongyang@chinadaily.com.cn

After 20 years away, giant panda Ya Ya touched down on home soil on Thursday to a warm welcome and an outpouring of affection from millions of her fans online and some in person.

Ya Ya arrived at Shanghai Pudong International Airport in the afternoon after a 16-hour special FedEx flight from Memphis, Tennessee, in the United States.

Her Chinese fans said they were eager to see Ya Ya in good health and living the rest of her life "at home".

Waving at Ya Ya's aircraft before it landed in Shanghai, local resident Cheng Bei said: "We all hope that either now or in the future, either at home or abroad, giant pandas can receive love and respect from the whole world. I hope that Ya Ya can recover soon and wish her a long life."

The Sina Weibo hashtag "Ya Ya has landed in Shanghai" was viewed 430 million times as of Thursday evening.

Top comments included "After 20 years, our baby finally came back" and "I was moved to tears by her return".

Ya Ya is hugely popular in China, but animal experts said fans had to wait to view the giant panda, as she needs time to adapt to her new living environment.

At age 23, the equivalent of about 80 human years, Ya Ya has entered old age, they said.

Born at the Beijing Zoo, Ya Ya was taken to the Memphis Zoo in Tennessee in 2003 for a joint research

and conservation project, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

Sun Qianhui, a scientist at World Animal Protection, said Ya Ya will have to adapt to a new living environment, which may take time, as she had lived abroad for 20 years. "During the time (of adapting), tourists should minimize her disturbance and breeders need to provide her with nutritious food and a suitable living environment to help her get accustomed to the new environment as soon as possible," he said.

Under China's regulations, Ya Ya needs to be quarantined for 30 days to confirm whether or not she has any unknown diseases or germs, he said.

Shanghai Zoo has set up a special quarantine area for Ya Ya that includes dwellings, sports areas and food-processing rooms. A large amount of bamboo and other food has also been prepared. During the quarantine period, a team of panda experts from Beijing Zoo will be on standby 24 hours a day, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

After Ya Ya completes her quarantine, the panda will be moved to Beijing Zoo where living areas, medical services and food supplies have been prepared.

The Memphis Zoo announced in December that it would return Ya Ya. It hosted a farewell party for the panda on April 8, with hundreds of people attending the event, Xinhua News Agency reported.

See Panda, page 3



Giant panda Ya Ya rests at the Memphis Zoo in Tennessee, the United States, on Tuesday, before being flown back to China. Ya Ya arrived in Shanghai on Thursday after a 16-hour flight. The panda's return marks the end of a 20-year loan agreement with the US for a joint research and conservation project. Netizens earlier expressed concern for Ya Ya's health and commented online about her "emaciated appearance". LIU JIE / XINHUA

Evacuation from Sudan



A Chinese navy official leads evacuees to a registration area at Port Sudan on Wednesday. The People's Liberation Army Navy has sent vessels to Sudan to evacuate Chinese citizens as the security situation in the country worsens. Rescue operations have intensified in recent days after a 72-hour cease-fire took effect in the conflict-hit country on Tuesday. As of Wednesday night, nearly 700 Chinese and foreign nationals had been evacuated. TANG SIYU / FOR CHINA DAILY See story, page 3

Argentina to use renminbi for imports from China

Credibility of currency bolstered in the South American country

By ZHOU LANXU
zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn

Argentina has decided to shift from the US dollar to the renminbi for all settlements of imports from China, a win-win development that will help Argentina strengthen its foreign exchange reserves and boost the renminbi's global profile, experts said on Thursday.

Starting from May, Argentina's imports from China will all be settled in renminbi, instead of the US dollar, said a statement published on Thursday by the official WeChat account of China's embassy in Argentina.

This will help Argentina bolster its foreign exchange reserves, maintain its scale of imports and facilitate

bilateral trade with China, the statement said, quoting Argentina's Economy Minister Sergio Massa.

Around \$790 million of monthly imports is expected to be paid in renminbi, which will help reduce the demand for US dollar payments and have a positive impact on the country's foreign exchange reserves, according to an Argentine government statement.

The move came as Argentina is suffering from currency depreciation amid strikingly high inflation. The International Monetary Fund forecasts that Argentina's inflation rate will reach 98.6 percent this year.

Using the renminbi in trade settlements with China will help Argentina stabilize its economy by not only

saving US dollar reserves but also reducing the currency exchange risks facing foreign trade companies and boosting the country's trade growth, experts said.

"For Argentina, whose currency has been plagued by strong volatility, switching to the renminbi to settle its trade with China — its second-biggest trading partner — is obviously making the (currency exchange) process more cost-effective and shortening the trade cycle," said Hong Hao, chief economist at GROW Investment Group.

The move also marks further progress in the internationalization of the renminbi, whose share of China's cross-border payments and receipts has surpassed the US dollar

to reach 48 percent in March based on Bloomberg's calculation, Hong said.

Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor of international trade at the Central University of Finance and Economics, said the renminbi's expanding use in Argentina will help strengthen the credibility of the Chinese currency, which may encourage further global use of the renminbi.

International use of the renminbi has gained traction this year, as the currency registered a record-high share in Russia's currency trading in March, while China and Brazil have agreed to strengthen trade in local currencies.

Underpinning this trend is the renminbi's value stability and the improved infrastructure for cross-border renminbi usage, Liu said, adding that drastic changes in US monetary policy have made more countries accelerate reducing their reliance on the greenback. "The renminbi neither intends to nor is positioned to challenge the dollar's dominance. Yet the world indeed needs a more diversified payment and settlement system to reduce risks given the current complex, unstable global environment."

OFFICIALS CARRY OUT EXTENSIVE RESEARCH MISSIONS

Work will help nation make good start to new modernization drive, experts say

By ZHANG YI
zhangyi1@chinadaily.com.cn



Chinese officials at different levels, including top leaders and ministers, have been engaged in extensive research and studies of various fields this year, which experts said will help the nation secure a good start to its new modernization drive.

The officials' research tours included visits to shops, business areas and factories. They talked with domestic and foreign entrepreneurs to understand their difficulties, checked sewage discharge levels in rivers, and visited campuses, nursing homes and communities to hear people's concerns.

The fact-finding drive, launched by the Communist Party of China leadership last month, requires officials to get out of their offices to better understand situations on the ground, and to find solutions to pressing problems.

Experts said that carrying out research and studies in a down-to-earth manner — a long-cherished work method for the century-old

CPC — will help the Party identify and solve problems hampering high-quality development in the new era.

President Xi Jinping conducted a four-day inspection trip to Guangdong province, long considered a pace setter for the country's reform and opening-up, from April 10 to 13.

On this trip, Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, set a new goal for the province — to be a trailblazer for the Chinese path to modernization.

Xi's itinerary in the cities of Zhanjiang, Maoming and Guangzhou, the provincial capital, included visits to a port, a company manufacturing new energy vehicles, and a village where lychees are grown, among other destinations.

For the focus of his research, he

chose the western part of Guangdong, which is less developed than the Pearl River Delta, which is home to numerous manufacturers and high-tech companies.

"Chinese modernization is aimed at promoting common prosperity and addressing unbalanced development among regions," he said, calling for adherence to the mass line and for people's problems to be solved.

Xu Ping, a professor at the CPC Central Committee's Party School, said that in embarking on a new journey of building modernization and realizing high-quality development, China faces many new challenges, risks and various long-standing problems.

By advancing the Party-wide campaign of in-depth research and studies in a solid and practical manner, officials can carry out further research in light of new situations to better understand a changing China and a changing world, thus benefiting the nation's development, Xu said.

See Research, page 2

TO OUR READERS

Due to the May Day holiday, China Daily will publish special holiday editions on May 1, 2 and 3, and will resume normal publication on Thursday, May 4.

www.chinadailyglobal.com

Member of ANN Asia News Network

Newsstand prices: US \$1 Canada C\$1 UK £1.50 EU €1.50 Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

Sino-African cooperation on health more vital than ever

WORLD WATCH
By Dennis Munene

Sino-African healthcare diplomacy in the past six decades has been remarkably inspiring. Africa, through China's support, has defied the doom and gloom that have characterized its healthcare system as the globe's weakest link in the fight against communicable and noncommunicable diseases.

With no conditions attached, China's bilateral and multilateral healthcare assistance to Africa has been established on the principle of equality and mutual benefit. This open and inclusive attitude from China has supported African countries in responding effectively to various epidemics including Ebola and COVID-19.

The strategic diplomacy and policy approaches in providing shared prosperity in the China-Africa community of health for the past six decades are anchored on several factors.

The first is Chinese medical teams. After the attainment of self-rule for most African countries, Africa needed to develop its ravaged healthcare system. When the French medical team withdrew its services in Algeria in 1962, the

government requested that the international community offer medical aid to its citizens. China responded immediately in 1963 by sending its first medical team to the North African country, marking the genesis of it providing medical aid to other countries.

As Chinese and African diplomatic relations continued to flourish, more medical teams were sent to provide additional personnel to understaffed hospitals and clinics in Africa.

Consequently, when the Ebola outbreak struck West Africa in 2014, Chinese medical teams were instrumental in the fight against the disease. Similarly, in boosting its COVID-19 aid efforts in Africa, China sent medical teams to various African countries to help fight the pandemic. Since 1963, various reports indicate that China has

See Cooperation, page 3

PAGE TWO

Research: Efforts help Party solve problems

From page 1

Over the past 100 years, Chinese Communists have formulated a basic ideological line of seeking truth from facts, Xu added.

Carrying out fact-driven research and studies is a cherished tradition for the Party, helping it achieve "successive victories in different circumstances", he said.

History shows that by adhering to the ideological line and adopting the work method, the causes of the Party and nation proceed smoothly; otherwise, it is easy to encounter problems, Xu added.

Every generation of Chinese leaders has attached great importance to investigation and research, which was promoted by late Chairman Mao Zedong, the founding father of New China.

An expert and master of this method, Mao once said: "No investigation, no right to speak. Those who do leadership work must rely on their own personal investigation and research to solve problems. Today, we need to investigate, and in the future, our sons and grandsons will also need to conduct investigations in order to continually gain new knowledge and understanding of new things."

Mao conducted or organized numerous in-depth investigations during China's arduous revolutionary and construction period. He left behind a wealth of classic reports that he wrote himself, ranging from 2,000 words to tens of thousands.

One well-known piece is "Report from Xunwu", which comprises about 80,000 words, his longest such work. The report was based on a survey Mao carried out in 1930 of the people, economy, society and history of rural Xunwu county, Jiangxi province.

As a leader of the Red Army, Mao asked its publicity team, "Did you do an investigation in Xunwu?" The team replied, "Yes, we did." Mao then asked, "Tell me, which type of business is the most popular in Xunwu?" Several replies said, "Probably the tofu business!"

Mao next asked, "Which families in Xunwu make the best tofu?" This stumped everyone. He then provided the answers and the team later came up with the same result after carrying out an investigation.

Through his investigations, Mao gained a clear understanding of local production output and the prices of various products, as well as the number and proportion of personnel in different industries. The investigation of rural China laid the foundation for his thought on choosing a revolutionary road of encircling the cities from the rural areas, and his idea of seeking truth from facts.

"This kind of in-depth and practical style is worth learning," Xi said while referring to Mao's investigation in Xunwu at the opening ceremony for the CPC Central Committee Party School in November 2011, when he served as the school's president.

Xi said that when officials conduct investigations and research, they should go into the fields and factories, discuss problems with the masses, listen to them, sense their emotions and suffering, sum up their experiences, and draw on their wisdom.

"The social practice of the masses is the source of obtaining a correct understanding, and also the fundamental place to test and deepen our understanding," he said.

When Xi was Party chief of Ningde prefecture, Fujian province, he traveled to nine counties in his first three months in office. Later, he went to Xiadang township, becoming the first prefecture Party chief to visit the area, which is located deep in the mountains.

Xi once said a county Party chief should visit all the villages in the county, a city Party chief should visit all the townships, and a provincial Party chief should go to all the counties and cities.

Xu said, "No matter what position Xi has held, his first task is to carry out investigations and basically go everywhere within his jurisdiction."

Thorough research and studies prompted Xi to come up with numerous policies that suit China's situation, he said. For example, Xi put forward the concept of "targeted poverty alleviation" while visiting the then-impoorished village of Shibadong during an inspection of Hunan province in 2013.

New focus

Zhang Lianqi, a member of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said the world is undergoing profound changes unseen for a century, with rising uncertainties.

China's reform, development and stability face many deep-seated problems that cannot be avoided. The risks, challenges and difficulties are more severe and complex than ever, he said.

"As a result, it is vital that we grasp the nature and law of things through investigation and research, and find ways and paths to solve problems," he added.

Zhang said the work plan released by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee in March, days after the conclusion of this year's two sessions, has strong relevance for research and study work, as it lists 12 aspects for main research.

The plan states that in-depth research and studies should be closely integrated with the central work of the Party and the requirements for decision-making. They should also help sound decisions to be made and improve the Party's ability to govern and lead.

The plan covers key areas such as promoting self-reliance in science and technology, attracting and using foreign investment, ensuring food security, and defusing major financial risks.

Research should also target major problems that occur when reform and opening-up is deepened on all fronts, when advancing law-based governance, and when dealing with challenges in the ideological domain, the plan states.

It should aim to address problems of the greatest and most direct concern to people, such as employment, education, medical services and housing, as well as environmental protection, the plan adds.

It requires officials at county level and above to lead a research subject, list detailed solutions to problems that are found, do follow-up work, and revisit some areas to look at new problems.

Last month, Premier Li Qiang said at a meeting with



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY



From top: Government officials and legislators carry out research at a job market in Qujing, Yunnan province, a home for the elderly in Nantong, Jiangsu province, and a neighborhood committee in Shanghai. JIANG WENYAO, XU CONGJUN AND LIU YING / XINHUA

reporters during the two sessions: "When you sit in the office, you see lots of problems. But when you reach out to the people, you see all kinds of solutions. After all, the brightest minds are among the people."

He said the government will encourage officials at all levels to engage more with local communities to learn what the people need. It will also seek their opinions on the administration's work.

Zhang, who is also vice-president of the China Taxation Society, has been busy recently making investigative trips nationwide, focusing on the real economy and digital industrialization.

As a veteran national political adviser, he spends half his time every year on front-line research organized by the CPPCC, government departments, or initiated by himself. He attends discussions and drafts proposals and suggestions.

Zhang's trips have taken him to developed regions such as the Yangtze River Delta, which has already started to explore common prosperity, and also to less-developed central and western regions that face difficulties in industrial transformation.

"My credo is: Without research, there are no proposals or suggestions," he said, adding that the principle of "problem-oriented" should be adopted, and both good and bad findings need to be reported.

Each year to help government decision-making, Zhang submits five proposals to the CPPCC National Committee based on his research. Many of his proposals have led to national policies being formulated.

Practical style

Experts said caution should be adopted against formalism that is likely to occur during the nationwide campaign, and efforts should be made to ensure the work is carried out practically.

Xu said problems of formalism have been found in the past. For example, officials were taken to see sites carefully arranged in advance, and some investigative trips

became "tourism", placing a huge burden at grassroots level, and even leading to corruption.

He praised last month's work plan, which requires officials to adopt the "four no's and two direct's" in research. This means not sending notifications, not giving prior notice, not merely listening to reports, and not requiring receptions, but going directly to the grassroots and conducting research on-site.

When Xi worked in Zhengding, Hebei province, he conducted research without prior notification, and went directly to villages, factories and households.

In September 2013, while taking part in a meeting of criticism and self-criticism of the standing committee of the Hebei provincial Party committee, Xi criticized the use of investigation and research as a showpiece.

He said that for some officials, investigation and research seemed to have another function — to let others know they were doing such work, that they were in touch with the masses, and that the original purpose of investigation and research became secondary or even unnecessary.

"If there were no journalists or cameras in sight, they would consider whether to take part in an activity, and even whether it had any meaning," he added.

Xu said officials should view themselves as pupils to listen to people's needs, and learn from those who have the wisdom to solve their own problems, adding that many of the solutions are practical and can be promoted nationwide.

He added that investigation work is a long and hard process, as Mao once said: "Investigation may be likened to the long months of pregnancy, and solving a problem to the date of birth. To investigate a problem is, indeed, to solve it."

Xu added, "The standard for evaluating research is also simple — to see whether it solves the problem, whether the people are satisfied, or if it pushes forward the cause of the Party and the nation."

TOP NEWS

Expanding collaboration



From left: Uzbekistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Bakhtiyor Saidov, Tajikistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sirojiddin Muhriddin, Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Murat Nurtleu, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang, Kyrgyzstan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Kulubayev Zheenbek Moldokanovich and Turkmenistan's First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Vepa Hajiyev participate in a signing ceremony at the fourth China-Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Thursday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Cooperation: China has aided Africa in a number of aspects

From page 1

sent more than 20,000 Chinese health professionals to Africa, benefiting millions of patients on the continent.

The second factor is infrastructure development. Since the beginning of the 21st century, China has strengthened its medical cooperation with Africa through infrastructure development. In 2015, after the second Ministerial Forum of China-Africa Health Development was held in Cape Town, South Africa, China pledged to build 100 hospitals and clinics on the continent. True to its promise, China has continued to implement its pledge through the construction of ultramodern health facilities in Africa.

For instance, in 2018, China fully funded and built the largest and one of the most advanced healthcare facilities in West Africa in Niger. Similarly, in 2022, Egypt launched, with China's assistance, an automated and refrigerated vaccine storage complex with a capacity for storing up to 150 million doses. This facility will ensure the safety of vaccine storage and boost Africa's vaccine supply chain, especially in light of the extra 1 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses from China that were pledged during the 2021 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Dakar, Senegal.

At the continental level, China has aided the construction of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The headquarters will help countries on the continent develop a line of defense for public health, improve disease prevention and monitoring, accelerate pandemic emergency response and improve the African public health prevention and control system and capabilities, in a bid to benefit a population of approximately 1.4 billion people.

The third factor is establishment of healthcare management and policy coordination systems. In shaping the future of sustainable and long-term health cooperation, Chinese and African health ministers established in 2013 the Ministerial Forum of China-Africa Health Development. The forum has been instrumental in mapping and supporting Africa's long-term healthcare policy coordination and management systems.

The fourth anchoring factor is promotion of information exchanges and technologies. Through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China has implemented health research programs that aim to provide cutting-edge technology transfers in Africa. For instance, through digital technology, China was able to train African medical professionals remotely through cloud technology support and share various digital epidemic prevention and control manuals. China has also offered hundreds of thousands of scholarships to African students to earn medical-related degrees.

The collaborative health diplomacy between Africa and China is becoming more vital than ever in saving lives and improving the healthcare system in Africa.

Thus, as Africa and China strive to build a community with a shared future in the new era, including a community of health, the two civilizations should continue to ensure that there is access to quality medicines and pharmaceutical supplies for Africa. In addition, more bilateral engagements with China through joint venture cooperations, private-public partnerships and build-operate-transfer projects should be encouraged to strengthen the healthcare systems in Africa.

The author is executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute in Kenya. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Senate in Texas scales back property measure

By MAYZHOU in Houston
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

The Texas Senate has passed a watered-down version of SB 147 that restricts the sale of farmland after strong protests from the Asian community and civil rights groups against the measure's targeting people by countries of origin.

The Senate voted 18-12 on Wednesday to send the bill to the House.

A major change to the bill dropped the names of four countries — China, Iran, Russia and North Korea — and replaced them with "designated country" as defined by the "Director of National Security" as a country that poses a risk to US national security. Nevertheless, those four countries, and possibly more, are most likely on the list right now.

After amendments, the bill now would prohibit government, companies and citizens of the designated countries from purchasing agricultural, mineral, quarry and timberland, but would allow the leasing of those real properties.

Permanent residents without American citizenship would be exempt from that limitation.

Furthermore, no individuals will be prohibited from acquiring residential property and commercial property. The bill would apply limitations only on companies whose majority shares are controlled by individuals from one or more "designated country".

That means SB 147 now would prohibit government entities, citizens without a green card, and companies with majority control owned by the individuals of the designated countries from buying agricultural, mineral, quarry and timberland only.

Activists from the Chinese community, while satisfied with the changes were nonetheless disappointed that SB 147 passed at all. The slogan that "less discrimination is still discrimination" quickly became a catchphrase soon after the vote was taken.

Texas state Representative Gene Wu issued a statement that he was frustrated by the "Senate's passage of SB 147 in its current form."

"The main concern, that we have

stated from the very beginning, is the bill's attack on 'individuals' without any suspicion or proof that the individual is a government actor or an agent of a government," Wu said.

"Even with the amendments offered, this legislation still takes away the rights of an entire class of people without due process and solely on the basis of their national origin. Under this legislation, the only evidence needed to deny a person their basic civil rights is where they are from. Less discrimination is still discrimination."

Wu said he will continue to work in the Texas House where SB 147 is now heading to eliminate what he called the unnecessarily discriminatory aspects of the bill.

Prior to the vote on Wednesday, Senator John Whitmire, a Democrat, spoke against SB 147. He addressed the bill's author Lois Kolkhorst: "Senator Kolkhorst, the concern from the Asian community which you represent in Fort Bend, the concern is that if you come after the Chinese in this session, who's next? We can't continue to single out a group in our communities and single them out in the society?"

Whitmire said that from what he understands, "this plays very well with a certain (political) base" but it's "terrible and unneeded legislation" that addresses a nonexistent problem and "harms some of our best residents and constituents."

Senator Nathan Johnson, also a Democrat, said that "despite the good motivations and legitimate concerns the bill addresses, I am not convinced it will increase the security of the state at all." Instead, he believes that the bill is going to "send a hostile message" and increase "tensions and suspicions, resentment, violence among Texans here today."

Kolkhorst defended her bill by emphasizing the changes made to it and pointed toward similar bills restricting foreign land purchases in other states. She accused the federal government of failing at national security and said the state legislators have to step in.

Despite that the bill also targets individuals from certain countries, Kolkhorst said, "SB 147 is just about maintaining a strong Texas, it is not in any way picking out someone of certain origin."

Chinese American Legal Defense Alliance (CALDA), a nonprofit civil rights organization, issued statement a few days ago that the organization has been monitoring such bills across the country and it will "file lawsuits as soon as any of these bills are passed, and we will not stop fighting until all of these laws are overturned."

The organization said that those bills "are no different from the so-called 'alien land laws' that many states passed more than 100 years ago to ban Asian people from owning land."

Navy vessels evacuate nearly 700 from Sudan

Chinese and foreign nationals escorted to safety in Saudi Arabia

By ZHAO LEI
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

The People's Liberation Army Navy helped evacuate on Thursday nearly 700 Chinese and foreign nationals from conflict-torn Sudan.

In a news release published in the afternoon, the PLA Navy said that 668 Chinese citizens and 10 foreign nationals have been relocated to Jeddah, a coastal city in Saudi Arabia, by two Chinese warships — CNS *Nanning*, a Type 052D guided-missile destroyer, and CNS *Weishan Lake*, a Type 903 resupply vessel.

According to the release, the two vessels with more than 490 sailors and special operations commandos onboard are part of the Navy's 43rd escort flotilla in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia.

Following orders from the Navy, the *Nanning* and the *Weishan Lake* sailed toward Port Sudan, the principal seaport of the African nation, and arrived there on Wednesday morning.

Navy personnel established a security zone in the port, with separate areas for assembly, regis-

tration, security check and boarding. Armed commandos stood on alert on the site.

A Navy video clip showed sailors of the *Weishan Lake* putting up banners on the port side, and one of these read: "Our ships are moving territories of China, and you will be home safe and sound as soon as you board them."

Footage also showed that the guns onboard the *Weishan Lake* were loaded with real munitions.

On Wednesday afternoon, buses transporting the evacuees reached the port. Many of the civilians were excited at the sight of the Chinese vessels and troops, and waved the Chinese national flag, while some cried, according to the PLA Navy.

In the video, a Navy officer is heard telling the evacuees that wherever they are, "the motherland will always protect you".

He continued: "The Navy will always safeguard our overseas compatriots' safety and interests. Please be assured that as we are here, you are safe now." The evacuees responded by saying, "Long live the motherland!"

On Thursday morning, the *Nanning* and the *Weishan Lake*

arrived in Jeddah with the first group of civilians and after all of them safely disembarked from the vessels, the ships began sailing back to Port Sudan to evacuate a second group, the Navy said.

This is the third time the PLA Navy has carried out an overseas evacuation mission in recent years, the news release said, noting that the previous two operations took place in Libya in 2011 and Yemen in 2015.

At a news briefing on Thursday afternoon, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said that more than 1,300 Chinese nationals had left the conflict zones within Sudan, and the ministry is closely monitoring the situation of Chinese citizens remaining in that country and would spare no effort to help them as and when needed.

Mao said that nationals from five foreign countries boarded the two Chinese naval ships by Wednesday night, while some other countries had also sought China's assistance. China will do whatever it can to help them, she added.

Wang Xu contributed to this story

Glimpse of the past



Tourists view a Terracotta Warrior at the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Wednesday. The museum received more than 50,000 visits that day, ahead of the upcoming May Day holiday.

LIU XIAO / XINHUA

Panda: Ya Ya well cared for during stay

From page 1

In January, Chinese netizens expressed their concerns for Ya Ya's health after the panda appeared malnourished in some pictures and videos.

However, the Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens said in a statement that the Memphis Zoo had taken good care of her. There is no indication that she was neglected, based on videos of her and the results of monthly health reports and annual physical examinations.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Wednesday that the giant panda was well cared for during her stay at the Memphis Zoo and loved by the US people.

Gao Erqiang in Shanghai contributed to this story.

GLOBAL LENS



POLAR RESEARCH HEATS UP

Arctic scientists at center of climate change impact

At the Arctic, scientists are racing to understand how the fastest-warming place on Earth is changing and what those changes may mean for the planet's future.

They are hoping to harvest ice cores but are finding glaciers inundated by water. Research sites are getting harder to reach as earlier springtime melt leaves the ground too barren for snowmobile travel.

Researchers have been studying the polar region for decades, with weather records in Ny-Aalesund, a small town high above the Arctic circle on Norway's Svalbard archipelago, going back more than 40 years. But their work has become vitally important as climate change ramps up.

“One of the special things about this place is there are a lot of different scientists. I'm a chemist. There are biologists, geologists ... It's one of the few places in the world where these kinds of exchanges are so informal and so spontaneous.”

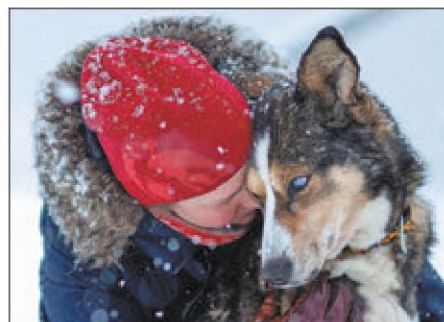
Francois Burgay, researcher

“One of the special things about this place is there are a lot of different scientists. I'm a chemist. There are biologists, geologists,” said visiting researcher Francois Burgay of the Paul Scherrer Institute in Switzerland.

“It's one of the few places in the world where these kinds of exchanges are so informal and so spontaneous.”

That cross-disciplinary collaboration is important for climate research. Svalbard is warming faster than almost anywhere else in the Arctic and cooperation can be critical for understanding how climate impacts will ripple through the polar ecosystem, from ocean to atmosphere, plants to animals.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



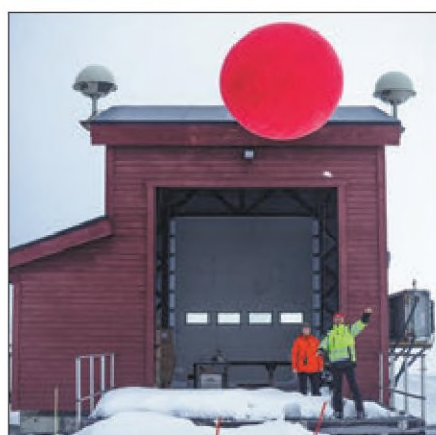
Accountant Sunniva Berge Mo, 33, hugs her dog Zelda at the dog yard in Ny-Aalesund, Svalbard, Norway, on April 9.



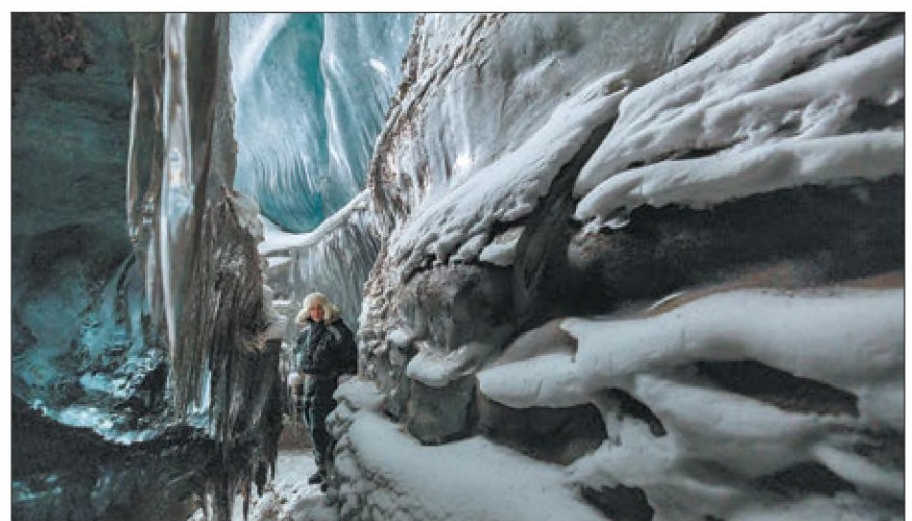
A geochemist walks along the Ice Memory drilling camp near Ny-Aalesund, Svalbard, Norway, on April 10.



Top: Scientists drive snowmobiles across the Arctic during sunset near Ny-Aalesund, Svalbard, Norway, on April 10. PHOTOS BY LISI NIESNER / REUTERS
Above: Members of the Ice Memory Foundation work to drill down into the ice and collect two ice cores, at 1,100 meters above sea level in the Holtedahlfonna icefield near Ny-Aalesund, Svalbard, Norway, on April 10.



Above: Engineers release a weather balloon into the stratosphere to measure weather parameters in Ny-Aalesund, Svalbard, Norway, on April 6.
Below: A resident cycles next to buildings in Ny-Aalesund, Svalbard, Norway, on April 6.



An airport manager looks at the ice walls near Ny-Aalesund, Svalbard, Norway, on April 8.



WORLDUS

US commercial real estate imperiled by shift

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

With the US still trying to get its arms around some recent bank defaults, the next shoe to drop could be the commercial real estate market.

Perhaps the biggest blow to the sector, particularly in large cities, was the shift to remote work amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in the US in early 2020.

While workers have gradually returned to offices, it appears that remote work in some form will become permanent, and how high that percentage is will have a huge impact on the viability of commercial real estate (CRE).

Then there is the issue of higher interest rates, with the accompanying prospect of loan defaults, while landlords have seen a significant drop in revenue from office leases. And most of the banks making CRE loans are smaller, regional institutions, which already have faced depositor withdrawals.

The White House said on April 18 that it is closely tracking the commercial real estate (CRE) sector after recent strains in banking, given that many smaller and midsized banks have "non-trivial" holdings in the office market.

Jared Bernstein, a member of the White House Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), told a Senate Banking Committee hearing that CRE occupancy rates were well below their pre-pandemic level.

"The issue is very much on our watch list," Bernstein said during a hearing earlier in April on his nomination to head CEA, when asked by Democratic US Senator Mark Warner about the effect of the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) on the sector.

Warner noted that close to \$6 trillion in outstanding commercial debt was related to the real estate market,

and that a "massive dislocation" was under way.

Another problem for the industry is that about a third of the \$4.5 trillion in CRE debt comes due before the end of 2025, according to Morgan Stanley analysts.

CRE loans account for about 40 percent of smaller banks' total lending, against about 13 percent for the largest lenders, the Financial Times reported.

Wells Fargo reported recently that its nonperforming CRE loans had soared nearly 50 percent since December — to \$1.5 billion.

The CRE sector is facing a "moment of truth," Mohamed El-Erian, the chief economic adviser at asset management giant Allianz, told Business Insider. He warned that higher interest rates are a major concern.

"The moment of truth will play out over several quarters as some \$1 trillion of commercial real estate holdings needs to be refinanced," El-Erian said.

Nearly \$450 billion in commercial mortgages are due to mature this year, with final payments due in the coming months for many property owners, according to data from Trepp, a platform that tracks commercial real estate data, noted JPMorgan.

Jeffrey Fine, Goldman Sachs' global head of real estate client solutions, recently said on a company podcast that the CRE market is in the middle of a "perfect storm" of higher rates, tight credit and rapidly maturing debt.

The market faces a "big rightsizing," Fine said, and he expects a drop in valuations in older properties and office buildings.

"Over time there's going to have to be a very organized public and private partnership to figure out a careful unwind of this current dynamic," he added. "Otherwise, we have a very messy situation on our hands."

"Higher interest rates call for higher



Signs advertising available office and retail space are seen in Boston on Oct 14. MICHAEL DWYER / ASSOCIATED PRESS

demand capitalization rates (the ratio of a property's net operating income to its price), which will cause most real estate prices to fall," said billionaire investor Howard Marks, reported Business Insider.

Marks, the co-founder of Oaktree Capital Management, warned in an April 17 memo of a slew of mortgage defaults that could increase stress on the US banking sector.

The US' largest city, New York, faces the most trouble over CRE, according to an analysis by myelisting.com, a website that covers the CRE industry.

"Due to its enviable location and substantial demand for office space, the Big Apple has long been a commercial real estate powerhouse. The pandemic, however, has left the city's office market in shambles.

"New York is the riskiest metro area in the nation for office property valuations, where there are a whopping \$16 billion in CRE loans coming due in 2023, a 30 percent increase from 2022," the website reported.

Meanwhile, a stark contrast between the booming industrial real

estate sector and the reeling office market has emerged, according to myelisting.

The demand for industrial space such as warehouses and distribution centers remains strong in major cities, including New York. The need for fulfillment centers has expanded along with the demand for industrial space, as e-commerce has roared.

"While the residential rental market has bounced back, the retail and office markets have remained slack — largely due to the shift to remote work and online shopping," the Federal Reserve Bank of New York said on April 13.

"One of the challenges, or one of the things that makes it not so clear, as you know, people are coming back to the office, they're just not coming back five days a week," said Jason Bram, economic research adviser for urban and regional studies at the New York Fed.

"New York City's biggest corporate landlords had it great for years — benefiting from a booming economy in a city where companies clamored to

set up offices and from low interest rates that buoyed the economics of an industry built on debt," The New York Times reported on April 25.

But now, "floors of office buildings throughout Manhattan have been emptied by tenants who have shrunk their footprint and employees who work from home."

The value of New York City office buildings could fall by \$48.75 billion in the coming years, according to a study by Columbia University and NYU, the Times reported, which will be a blow to the city's tax revenue.

Across the country in Los Angeles, the industrial sector in the US' second-largest city saw a 7.2 percent year-over-year rent gain in 2022.

In the LA office market, however, vacancy rates have increased substantially, and property values have fallen. The city has about \$16.9 billion in outstanding office loans, and is 14th in the US for office-loan risk.

In San Francisco, the office vacancy rate "is about 30 percent, or about 35 million square feet that is not currently being used," Colin Yasukochi with commercial real estate firm CBRE told NBC News Bay Area. "And that's the highest that we've ever seen in San Francisco."

CBRE says that San Francisco has a large amount of tech tenants, who have viewed returning to work in person differently. The sector, centered in nearby Silicon Valley, also has had tens of thousands of layoffs at major companies in the past year, which created another dilemma for CRE.

A former San Francisco WeWork building has seen its property value slashed by about 66 percent, according to Trepp, which tracks CRE data.

The building at 25 Taylor Street was once almost entirely leased to WeWork, the formerly highflying co-working startup. The building was valued at \$28.1 million in 2014, but was recently appraised at \$9.5 million,

according to Trepp.

While a few landlords in San Francisco have been slightly reducing rents, most in the newer, taller towers have not, NBC reported. Some buildings with the best views are actually raising their lease prices because of high demand from companies choosy about where they will keep their downsized office space.

"They want to be at the top of these tall buildings, and they want to be in the buildings along the waterfront with beautiful views because they're trying to get their employees to come back to the office," Yasukochi said.

Landlords in lower or older properties also are not trimming prices but instead are offering months of free rent or money to customize their office space for new tenants, NBC reported.

"They can't materially retreat on rent without risk of defaulting on their building," said Alexander Quinn, director of research with Jones Lang LaSalle Commercial Real Estate.

Christopher Ailman, chief investment officer of the \$306 billion California State Teachers' Retirement System, told the Financial Times that he estimated office values had fallen by about 20 percent and that he was preparing for heavy losses on the fund's \$52 billion real estate portfolio.

The International Monetary Fund's recent financial stability report warned how a mix of declining property values, tighter financial conditions and illiquid markets could devastate borrowers looking to refinance loans, leading to sharply higher default rates.

"If you have maturing debt, you can't carry the existing debt load and you're not willing to put more money in, then it's foreclosure," said Tony Natis, head of the real estate group at law firm Allen Matkins, the FT reported.

Reuters contributed to this story.



Jack Michael Teixeira (center), father of Massachusetts Air National Guardsman Jack Teixeira, arrives at federal court on Thursday, in Worcester, Massachusetts. The younger Teixeira has been charged with leaking highly classified military documents. He has been charged under the Espionage Act with unauthorized retention and transmission of classified national defense information. STEVEN SENNE / AP

Prosecutors: Suspect in leaks has made threats

WORCESTER, Massachusetts — The US Air National Guardsman accused of leaking classified military documents has a history of making violent threats, used his government computer to research mass shootings, and tried to destroy evidence of his crimes, federal prosecutors said on Wednesday.

In a 48-page filing, the Justice Department said 21-year-old Jack Teixeira should be detained pending trial, saying his violent rhetoric coupled with his apparent efforts to destroy evidence "compound his risk of flight and dangerousness."

Prosecutors were expected to present their arguments in favor of his detention to a US magistrate judge in Worcester, Massachusetts, on Thursday afternoon.

Teixeira's lawyers have not commented on the case, and were expected to argue at Thursday's

hearing that he should not be detained pretrial.

The filing, which also contained photos of the suspect's bedroom from the FBI's search of his home, said that in July 2022 he used his government computer to look up famous mass shootings using search terms such as "Uvalde," "Ruby Ridge" and "Las Vegas shooting."

During the search at his home, the FBI found a smashed tablet computer, a laptop and a gaming console inside a dumpster. In addition, prosecutors said they had unearthed evidence that Teixeira instructed other online users to "delete all messages."

Teixeira was charged earlier this month with one count of violating the Espionage Act related to the unlawful copying and transmitting of sensitive defense material, and a second charge related to the unlawful removal of

defense material to an unauthorized location.

If convicted, prosecutors said he faces up to 25 years in prison.

The leaked documents at the heart of the investigation are believed to be the most serious US security breach since more than 700,000 documents, videos and diplomatic cables appeared on the WikiLeaks website in 2010. The Pentagon has called the leak a "deliberate, criminal act."

Prosecutors said in their detention memo that Teixeira in February 2022 began accessing hundreds of classified documents not relevant to his job, and started posting some of the classified information on social media around December 2022.

"The damage the defendant has already caused to the US national security is immense. The damage the defendant is still capable of causing is extraordinary," the

memo says.

The classified documents provided a wide variety of highly classified information on allies and adversaries, with details ranging from Ukraine's air defenses to Israel's Mossad spy agency.

Prosecutors said they also found evidence that Teixeira admitted to others online that the information he was posting was classified.

In an exchange of chat room messages included in the filing, Teixeira was asked whether the information he was posting was classified.

In Wednesday's filing, prosecutors said: "There is no condition of release that can be set that will reasonably assure his future appearance at court proceedings or the safety of the community ... He should be detained."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

US allowed JPMorgan to process payments for Russian grain exports

MOSCOW — The United States gave JPMorgan permission to process payments for agricultural exports via the Russian Agricultural Bank, but the arrangement was no substitute for reconnecting the bank to the SWIFT system, two Russian sources told Reuters.

Access to the SWIFT payment system for the Russian Agricultural Bank is one of Moscow's main demands in negotiations over the future of the Black Sea grain export deal, which the United Nations said helps to tackle a global food crisis that has been aggravated by the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The Kremlin has repeatedly warned the deal will not be renewed beyond May 18 unless the West removes obstacles to Russian grain and fertilizer exports.

Russia's envoy to the United Nations said in Geneva on Wednesday that "no real progress" had been achieved in resolving issues raised by Moscow over the Black Sea grain deal.

"As of today, we regret to say that no real progress was reached in resolving this problem," envoy Gennady Gatilov said at the Russian permanent mission in Geneva.

Russia's grain and fertilizer exports are not subject to Western sanctions imposed following the conflict, but Moscow said Western restrictions on Russia have also had a general chilling effect that has left the private

sector wary of any dealings with Russia even if it is permitted.

A Russian source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the US Office of Foreign Assets Control had allowed JPMorgan to process the transaction.

"But the process is difficult," the first Russian source said.

A second Russian source said JPMorgan and Russian Agricultural Bank were both specifically given exemptions to execute a single transaction. It involved grain and was denominated in US dollars, according to the second Russian source.

Reuters could not ascertain who the exporter was.

The JPMorgan route was proposed as an alternative to reconnecting Russian Agricultural Bank to SWIFT, but could be terminated at any time, the first Russian source said. "This cannot replace SWIFT," the source said.

In another move, Ukraine retrieved 44 prisoners from Russian custody, a senior Ukrainian presidential adviser said on Wednesday.

Andriy Yermak wrote on Telegram that 42 were soldiers and two were civilians. The two sides have held regular prisoner exchanges during the conflict, now in its 15th month.

Also on Wednesday, Russia declared 10 diplomats working at the Norwegian embassy and military attaché's office in Moscow persona non grata, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

twitter.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

These materials are distributed by China Daily Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing, China. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108 529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94104
Tel: 415-348-8288
Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

900 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100
Seattle, WA 98104
Tel: 206-462-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100
Houston, TX 77077
Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA / TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8
Tel: 416-481-5706

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

Vol. 38 — No. 1076

BUSINESS

JOIN THE CONVERSATION; FOLLOW US ON TWITTER · CHINA DAILY

Guizhou's move on debt risk safeguards growth

By WANG KEJU and ZHANG YUE

Efforts of provinces such as Guizhou to resolve local government debt risks through market-oriented cooperation with State-owned asset managers will strengthen China's efforts to improve local governments' financial sustainability and maintain sound economic growth in the long run, experts said.

Their assessment followed a major step taken by Southwest China's Guizhou province toward defusing potential risks and intensifying financial services to boost the real economy.

Last week, Guizhou signed a cooperation agreement with State-owned China Cinda Asset Management Co., which manages distressed assets.

"Cooperation between local governments and enterprises in a mutually beneficial and market-oriented manner to deal with local government debt is worth being recognized, because debt resolution itself eventually relies on the increase of fiscal revenues, and this mainly comes from business profits," said Luo Zhiheng, chief economist of Yuekai Securities, whose research focuses on China's fiscal policies and conditions.

"The newly introduced liquidity will help revitalize assets, give targeted support to key areas and provide a guarantee for Guizhou's sustainable development."

Luo said the cooperation agreement signed between China Cinda Asset Management and Guizhou's provincial government could prove a trendsetter, and can be introduced in other regions and provinces facing severe government debt repayment challenges.

The Ministry of Finance said earlier this year that the country will roll out a mechanism to resolve debt defaults in a market-oriented and law-based manner to properly defuse any potential financial risks at the local government level.

Any debt risks would be fairly shared among debtors and creditors, and the principle of "no bailout from the central government" will be strictly adhered to, the ministry said.

Li Xuhong, a professor at the Beijing National Accounting Institute, said defusing local government risks will have a bearing on China's high-quality growth in the long run.

"It will help alleviate local debt burden, optimize debt structure, provide more fiscal space for local authorities and strengthen the government's capacity to support local economic growth and improve livelihoods. It can

also curb new debt, making the government's financial situation healthier. This will anchor market expectations and stimulate more effective investment," she said.

Guizhou province will develop cooperation in various areas, with a focus on enhancing financial services for the real economy, forestalling and defusing risks, facilitating State-owned enterprise reform and helping the property sector overcome difficulties, China Cinda said in a WeChat post on Saturday.

Specific measures will be rolled out to provide stronger financial underpinning for the high-quality development and modernization drive of Guizhou, as highlighted by the 50-member financial expert panel and two-way cooperation, according to the post.

The GDP of Guizhou province, one of the nation's less-developed and debt-ridden regions, amounted to about 2.02 trillion yuan (\$291 billion) last year, ranking 22nd out of 31 provincial regions on the Chinese mainland. Its local government debt exceeded 1.24 trillion yuan during the same period, according to data released by local authorities.

By the end of February, the amount of outstanding local government bonds stood at 36.22 trillion yuan, according to data released by China's Ministry of Finance.

The liability ratio of China's statutory debt last year was around 50 percent, which was relatively low by global standards. That said, local government debt was unevenly distributed among China's regions, with some areas facing higher levels of debt risks and greater repayment pressures, Finance Minister Liu Kun said in March.

Localities concerned were urged to assume due responsibilities, take concrete steps to mitigate local government debt risks and firmly hold the bottom line of guarding against systemic risks, Liu said, adding that China would make sure it is not compromised under any circumstance.

Economist Luo said the country's local government bond debt risk is controllable, as most projects and assets supported by these bonds are of sound quality, and the ongoing economic rebound strengthens local government financing vehicles' repayment capacity.

In addition, as local government debt issues deeply intertwine with risks in financial institutions, proper handling of debt also curbs financial risks, he said.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn



An employee works on the tractor production line of a machinery manufacturer in Shandong province. ZHANG JINGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Industrial profits down; decline slows

Rebound in supply, demand shifts focus to employment stabilization

By OUYANG SHIJIA ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

Profits at China's major industrial companies declined at a slower pace in March amid a steady recovery in industrial production, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Thursday.

Experts said the slower decline rate in March came amid the gradual rebound in both supply and demand, adding that more efforts should be made to further stabilize employment and ease burdens faced by enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized ones.

Given the normalization of production and life order, the gradual rebound in market demand and the weakening base effect, they said the industrial profits will gradually recover in the coming months.

NBS data showed that industrial enterprises with annual revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.89 million) each saw their total profits drop by 19.2 percent year-on-year in March after a 22.9 percent decline in the first two months of 2023.

China's first-quarter industrial profits came in at 1.52 trillion yuan, down 21.4 percent year-on-year, according to the NBS.

Sun Xiao, a statistician at the NBS, said while industrial profits declined sharply at a slower pace, the declining upstream prices can

help improve the industrial profits in downstream industries.

In the first quarter, value-added industrial output grew by 3 percent year-on-year, while in the last quarter of 2022, it rose by 2.7 percent, and by 2.4 percent in the first two months of this year, the NBS said earlier.

In the next step, the country needs to make a big push to further expand market demand as well as boost market confidence and expectations, Sun said.

NBS data showed profits registered by the equipment manufacturing sector improved significantly, as the contraction narrowed by 19.1 percentage points in March from the first two months.

Notably, profits among vehicle manufacturing companies grew by 9.1 percent year-on-year in March, up from the 4.7 percent decline during the January-February period.

Yang Jinghao, chief economist at Concat Data Technology (Hangzhou) Co, said industrial profits declined sharply in the first three months with a high comparison base in the previous year, and the narrowing contraction points to the gradual recovery in the industry.

Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said the year-on-year decline in first-quarter industrial profits was due to the fact that domestic demand is still in a

phase of gradual recovery. Other factors are the drops in commodity prices like those of energy, low prices of industrial goods and base effects.

Zhou said he expects to see a stable improvement in the performance of industrial firms in the next few months given the stable recovery in demand and the government's effective measures to ease burdens on enterprises.

Zhou also said some industrial companies still face challenges and difficulties in terms of slowing overseas demand, high input costs, financing pressure and a more complicated international environment.

According to NBS data, manufacturing companies' total profits dipped 29.4 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, and the industrial profits in the private sector dropped 23 percent.

Ye Yindan, a researcher at the Bank of China Research Institute, said the government needs to make more efforts to support the development of industrial firms and ease their burdens, including further reductions in taxes and fees, temporary subsidies for some industrial firms and promotion of the development of new businesses and emerging sectors.

Despite facing pressure and challenges ahead, China's industrial profits will likely recover gradually in the coming months with a steady recovery in domestic demand, stimulus policies taking effect gradually and weakening base effects, Ye said.

US chip actions impacting industry

By WANG KEJU and MA SI

Revenues and profits of some overseas chip manufacturers have contracted significantly of late as the United States pushes for decoupling and severing supply chains to and from China, an official said on Thursday.

At a news conference on Thursday, Shu Jueting, spokeswoman of the Ministry of Commerce, made the comment on a news report about the US demanding that South Korea not fill any market gaps in China, adding that China is firmly opposed to such misconduct by the US as it represents typical bullying in the technology sector.

Such practices cause serious disruptions to normal economic and trade exchanges among enterprises, break market rules, sabotage international economic and trade order and threaten the security and stability of the global industrial chain supply chain, Shu said.

Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, said the US government has already adopted a series of well-calculated approaches to curb China's fast-growing chip sector.

The latest move shows Washington also wants to coerce Seoul to follow its moves, which would only further weigh down the global chip industry chain, Pan said.

As the world's largest chip market, the Chinese mainland consumes more than half of the world's semiconductors, which are then assembled into tech products to be reexported or sold in the domestic market, according to research company Daxue Consulting.

South Korean chipmaker SK Hynix registered an operating loss of 3.4 trillion won (\$2.5 billion) in the January-March quarter. Revenue tumbled 58.1 percent year-on-year to 5.09 trillion won over the period, according to the company's regulatory filing on Wednesday.

SK Hynix is the world's second-largest DRAM maker. DRAM chips are flash memory components used in smartphones, personal computers and servers. It is a major competitor of US chip company Micron, whose products sold in China are under cybersecurity review.

In February, Kevin (Jongwon) Noh, president of SK Hynix, met Minister of Industry and Information Technology Jin Zhuanglong, head of China's top industry regulator, in Beijing to exchange views on deepening cooperation.

Samsung Electronics, a leading semiconductor maker in South Korea, announced a preliminary first-quarter operating profit of 600 billion won earlier this month, down 95.8 percent from the same quarter last year.

Shu added that the US has overstretched the concept of national security and abused such measures as export controls in recent years, even at the expense of allies' interests. It has pressured certain countries to take trade-protectionism acts through coercion to seek decoupling or intentionally cut supply chains.

She called on governments and enterprises in affected countries to work together to defend free trade rules for their own long-term interests, and to jointly build a safe and stable, smooth and efficient, open and inclusive and mutually beneficial global industrial and supply chains.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

Briefly

Airbus service center opens in Chengdu

Airbus, a European aircraft manufacturer, on Wednesday set up an aircraft life-cycle service center in the southwestern Chinese city of Chengdu. As Airbus' first such center outside Europe, it will provide parking, storage, maintenance, upgrading, modification, dismantling and recycling services for all types of aircraft, said Airbus. Covering an area of 717,000 square meters, it has the capacity to house 125 aircraft.

New cargo route links Wuhan, Abu Dhabi

SF Airlines launched a new international air cargo route linking Central China's Wuhan in Hubei province with Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates on Wednesday. A weekly round-trip cargo flight is scheduled for this route, with up to 220 metric tons of air express capacity, the cargo airline said. The route will mainly handle general cargo, e-commerce goods and courier shipments.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

China's first desert-based green power plant on grid

By ZHENG XIN zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

A renewable energy power project, one of the many being set up in the Gobi Desert and other arid regions, became the first to be connected to the electricity grid and started generating power on Tuesday, said its operator China Energy Investment Corp, or China Energy.

The first phase of the solar and wind project, located in the Tengger Desert in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region — with an installed capacity of 1 million kilowatts — is expected to generate 1.8 billion kilowatt-hours each year, equivalent to the power demand of 1.5 million households, said the company.

It is also the country's first ultra-high-voltage power transmission channel and a major project transmitting green power generated in the Gobi Desert and other arid regions to Central China's Hunan province, it said.

The project, with total investment of more than 85 billion yuan (\$12.28 billion) and total installed capacity of 13 million kW, is the country's first in response to government ambi-

tions to speed up construction of solar and wind power generation facilities in the Gobi and other parched regions amid efforts to boost renewable energy.

As China plans to speed up construction of solar and wind power generation facilities in dry regions amid efforts to boost renewable power, the government launched the first phase of its wind and solar power projects at the end of 2021, comprising a total of 100 gigawatts of wind and solar power capacity in desert areas.

Wang Dapeng, deputy head of the new energy and renewable energy department at the National Energy Administration, said the government will further step up construction of wind and solar projects in the Gobi and other desert regions to further facilitate the country's green transition.

The first phase of wind and solar power projects in such arid areas is expected to be connected to grid and put into operation by the end of this year, Wang said.

The NEA said installed capacity of renewable energy in China continued to expand in the first quarter,



The first phase of a renewable energy project in the Tengger Desert in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region is expected to generate 1.8 billion kilowatt-hours each year. CHINA NEWS SERVICE

reaching 47.4 million kW, an increase of 86.5 percent compared with the same period last year, and accounting for 80.3 percent of total newly added installed capacity.

The newly added installed capacity of wind power rose to 10.4 million kW while that of solar power rose to 33.66 million kW, it said.

In the first quarter, China's total installed capacity of renewable energy reached 1.26 billion kW, including 376 million kW of wind power and 425 million kW of photovoltaic power.

Power generated from renewable energy has also been continuously increasing, with national electricity generation from renewable energy reaching 594.7 billion kWh, an increase of 11.4 percent year-on-year, including 342.2 billion kWh of

wind and solar power, up 27.8 percent year-on-year, it said.

An analyst said regions like Ningxia, as well as Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, will play a key role in boosting the proportion of clean power in the country's energy mix while helping the country achieve its sustainable energy ambitions, thanks to abundant wind and solar resources.

The regions used to rely on heavy consumption of traditional energy resources for economic growth. The government's plan to build massive wind and solar power facilities in the country's desert areas will help them upgrade to a new energy-based structure, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

BUSINESS

Exhibition numbers, area show recovery

By QIU QUANLIN
qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn

Convention and exhibition businesses in Guangdong province have shown strong recovery since early this year, with a significant increase seen both in exhibition numbers and area, according to the local industry association.

The number of exhibitions in Guangdong increased 330 percent year-on-year to 116 in the first three months, with exhibition areas soaring 412 percent year-on-year during the same period to 4.36 million square meters, said the Guangdong Fairs Organizers Association.

"Such a big increase reflects the vitality of the industry, which helps to greatly boost the confidence of relevant companies," said Liu Songping, chairwoman of the association, adding that the two quarterly figures have exceeded the 2019 levels.

"As an important link in the industrial and supply chains, professional industrial exhibitions play an important role in connecting the supply side with the demand side," said Liu.

A "grand show" of advanced manufacturing, industrial exhibitions are key to the transformation and upgrading of the traditional manufacturing industry, helping to shape new driving forces and advantages, Liu added.



Visitors gather at a booth during an expo in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in March.
CHEN CHUHONG / XINHUA

China hosted 1,807 economic and trade exhibitions in 2022, with a total exhibition area of 55.76 million sq m, according to a report by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT).

Major exhibitions, including the China International Import Expo, the China Import and Export Fair (Canton Fair), the China International Fair for Trade in Services and the China International Consumer Products Expo, have built international cooperation platforms for countries and regions to share economic and trade opportunities and enhance exchanges.

In 2022, the CCPIT organized 13 overseas exhibitions, including 12

online and one offline, with the value of intended deals surpassing \$70 million.

With the recovery of China's economy, exhibitions themed on the promotion of traditional consumption, development of service consumption, cultivation of new consumption and advocacy of green and low-carbon consumption will achieve rapid growth, the CCPIT said.

Citing the sharply increased number of visitors to the first phase of the Canton Fair, Zhang Jieheng, secretary-general of the Guangzhou International Convention & Exhibition Association, said the fair demonstrated the enormous vitality and resilience of the country's trade.

The fair's first phase, which concluded on April 19, witnessed more than 1.25 million visitors from 229 countries and regions, with nearly 13,000 companies displaying over 800,000 products, according to the organizers.

The ongoing second phase of the fair focuses on the promotion of consumer goods, furniture and home decor, attracting about 12,000 companies to showcase their latest innovative and high-quality products.

Guangzhou, the provincial capital, hosted 56 professional exhibitions in the first three months, with a total exhibition area of some 1.93 million sq m.

Shanghai vows better financial support for biz

Regulators stress ties with sectors key to boosting high-quality development

By SHI JING in Shanghai
shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

Continued efforts will be made to further optimize Shanghai's financial ecology so the financial sector can better serve the real economy and facilitate high-quality economic growth, municipal financial regulators said during a news conference on Thursday.

As an international financial center, Shanghai should see its positioning upgraded by implementing major national strategies at a faster pace, said Zhou Xiaoyuan, head of the Shanghai Municipal Financial Regulatory Bureau.

To realize that goal, the financial sector should strengthen its ties with innovation, trade and shipping industries to form a greater driving force for high-quality economic growth, said Zhou.

Meanwhile, financial reform and opening-up can be deepened. The supply of financial derivatives will be enriched by introducing more commodities as well as financial futures and options. The interbank market will further open up while the bond connect mechanism is further strengthened. More international renminbi financial products should be launched and trading for RMB foreign exchange futures should be experimented with, he said.

RMB settlement for commodities, such as iron ore, oil and natural gas, should be expanded, said Liu Xingya, deputy director of the Shanghai Head Office for the People's Bank of China.

Cross-border RMB settlement should be promoted in countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative and among the Association of South-east Asian Nations, and Shanghai-based State-owned enterprises should play a leading role in the proliferation of such settlement, he said.

Meanwhile, substantial financial support will be provided to local companies to create a more amiable business environment. The PBOC Shanghai Head Office will continue to promote foreign exchange risk management services, including the innovative risk-sharing model for hedging foreign exchange fluctuations, said Liu.

Further fee reduction measures and fiscal subsidies can be expected from banks in Shanghai to help small and medium-sized enterprises better hedge risks when the RMB's two-way fluctuation is more noticeable, he added.

Meanwhile, Shanghai will render over 1 trillion yuan (\$144.5 billion) in loans to local technology companies by 2025, said Cao Guangqun, deputy director for the Shanghai Office of China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. Given the fact that some private companies are facing operational difficulties, local financial regulators will help to explore more financing channels and avoid blind withdrawal, cut-off or suppression of bank loans, added Cao.

As the municipal government has calculated, Shanghai is now home to 1,736 licensed financial institutions, 539 of which are foreign.

Hair transplants quickly growing roots across nation

By LIU ZHIHUA
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

China's hair transplant industry is expanding and upgrading as people's awareness of hair aesthetics increases and they have a willingness to pay for personal appearance, according to industry experts and business leaders.

Demand from small cities and the younger generations is expected to pick up due to growing awareness, they said.

Yonghe Medical Group Co Ltd, the largest hair transplant clinic chain in the country by revenue, experienced fast expansion last year despite headwinds from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Beijing-headquartered company opened nine hair transplant clinics and six haircare centers in 2023. Furthermore, a total of 17 hair transplant clinics are expected to kick off operations this year, increasing the number of its clinics to no less than 80 by the end of the year.

According to Zhang Yu, chairman and CEO of Yonghe Medical Group, the general population is

becoming increasingly aware of hair transplantation as an alternative to treat hair loss and improve appearance.

"In the past, many believed that the recipients of hair transplant procedures are so-called white-collar workers, but that has changed," Zhang said, adding that nowadays everyone is willing to pay for better appearances, and blue-collar workers have become important customers in the industry.

Under such circumstances, the company has changed its charging model of the procedures — from pricing in accordance with each patient's total number of transplanted hair follicles to offering a fixed price range based on the level of each doctor's clinical experience, in a bid to attract more customers.

Already having more than 300 full-time physicians and more than 900 nurses, the company is currently upgrading operation tactics to improve services, Zhang said.

Citing data from the National Health Commission, a recent report by Chinese tech media 36Kr's research institute said that more than 250 million people in China

“The hair transplant industry in China is very promising because of the potential demand in lower-tier regions and among young people.”

Cao Hu, global partner of Kotler Marketing Group

experience hair loss and among them, about 42 percent are aged between 26 to 30.

Cao Hu, global partner of Kotler Marketing Group, or KMG, said as consumers become more aware of the importance of healthy hair for a nice appearance, the demand for hair transplants has been booming not only in first-tier but also in smaller cities.

He expects China's hair transplant market to value at around 70 billion yuan (\$10.1 billion) by 2030,

or more than double the current level.

"The hair transplant industry in China is very promising because of the potential demand in lower-tier regions and among young people," Cao said.

Ren Jian, chief growth officer of Yonghe Medical Group, agreed that hair transplant demand has been growing across the entire country.

Apart from hair transplants, hair loss prevention and treatment and other haircare services are gaining momentum, spurring the development of a complete haircare services industry in China, according to Cao. Zhang, with Yonghe Medical Group, said the company is keen to expand its presence in non-invasive haircare services.

However, Cao, who is also CEO of KMG's China arm, said that to better tap the great potential in the hair-loss-related services industry, service providers need to upgrade their current business models that rely heavily on marketing to acquire customers.

Upgrading services to better meet new needs and preferences in niche markets is a more ideal growth path for those market players, he said.

Digging for faster links



Construction site of the Fengzhen Tunnel on the Jining-Datong-Yuanping High-speed Railway in North China. The 290.1-kilometer railway, which is partly built by China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd, aims to better link Shanxi province with the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.
WANG SHUQUANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

HUANG XUAN
China Customs Anti-Ivory Campaign Ambassador

YOUR SOUVENIR COULD BE CONTRABAND

Bringing ivory in or out of the country without proper permits will result in confiscation and imprisonment. Consider the consequences and say no to ivory.

野生救援
WILDAID

CITES
WWF



New highway line crucial link to country, says Vucic

By CHEN WEIHUA

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic expressed his enthusiasm for building highway networks connecting cities across the country and with neighboring countries, while he was attending the opening ceremony of a highway earlier this month.

"If you want to be wealthy, first build roads," he said, citing a Chinese proverb. "Roads bring advantage, happiness and progress, they bring investors. Because without roads, no one will come."

The ceremony inaugurated the 8-kilometer-long New Belgrade-Surcin highway, which is part of the E-763 highway built partly by the China Communications Construction Company.

Vucic said the new section "will be the lifeblood of western Serbia". Vucic visited the construction site on Jan 11 to express his appreciation to the Chinese workers.

During the inauguration ceremony, Vucic said the country's public debt is low compared with European Union states due to good financial results this year, so Serbia will sign more large contracts for highway projects this year.

With a total length of about 260 kilometers from the capital Belgrade to the border with Montenegro, the E-763 highway is an important part of the highway network in Serbia as well as the Pan-European Corridor 11, a ferry and highway corridor linking

Italy's Bari to Romania's Bucharest via Montenegro and Serbia. The E-763 is a vital artery from Serbia, a landlocked country, to the port in Montenegro along the Adriatic Sea. It also connects with Hungary via E75 and with Romania via E70.

The New Belgrade-Surcin section, designed with a speed of 80 kilometers per hour, has three lanes in each direction and two-way pedestrian paths and bicycle lanes. The \$70.5-million project, which broke ground in March 2020, included the construction and upgrading of a roundabout, an interchange, six bridges and 11 pipe culverts.

With the inauguration of the new section, the total mileage of the E-763 highway reaches 140 km, including a total length of 87 km built by Chinese companies China Communications Construction and Shandong Hi-Speed Group.

Companies from Azerbaijan also participated in the construction of E-763. Shandong Hi-Speed has so far completed the 50.2-km section of E-763 it has contracted to build.

China Communications Construction has contracted a total of 162.7 km and has so far completed two sections totaling 25.5 km. The 30.2-km section from Prejina to Puzega is now under construction. Serbia's terrain of hills and mountains means that building a highway often requires the construction of many tunnels and bridges.

Chinese expertise brings cities closer together

By CHEN WEIHUA

chemweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

The railway line between the Serbian capital Belgrade and the Hungarian capital Budapest dates back to the inauguration in 1883 of the Orient Express, connecting Paris with what is today Istanbul.

While the 75-kilometer section of track linking Serbia's two largest cities, Belgrade and Novi Sad, has been renovated over those 140 years, until 13 months ago the journey took 90 minutes, with trains trundling along at a graceful 40 km/h.

That all changed on March 19 last year when a high-speed train that started running that day cut travel time to about 30 minutes. In the first year of its operation, the service carried nearly 3 million passengers, that in a country of 7 million people.

The Belgrade- Novi Sad section is part of the 342-km Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway, which, upon completion in 2025, will shorten the rail trip between the two capitals to the current eight hours to less than three. The design speed is 200 km/h on the 183-km Serbian section and 160 km/h on the 159-km Hungarian section.

Serbia's Prime Minister Ana Brnabic took a ride on the high-speed

railway on March 19 from Belgrade to Novi Sad to attend the ceremony marking the one-year anniversary. A Chinese consortium formed by the China Railway International Corporation and China Communications Construction Corporation, or CCCC, helped build the high-speed railway. Russian, Swiss and German companies have also had a role.

"What we inaugurated a year ago today is not just high-speed rail, but is also a milestone in Serbia's development," Brnabic said. "Today is an extremely important day. By the end of next year it will only take one hour from Belgrade to Subotica," Brnabic said, referring to the completion of the Serbian section of the Budapest-Belgrade high-speed railway.

"We have a big dream. Our plan is to bring more Chinese investors to Serbia and to promote the exchange of science and technology between the two countries. China is our great cooperation partner and a trustworthy friend in realizing our dream."

Less than 20 days later on April 6, workers at the Chinese joint venture started to lay tracks on the 108-km section from Novi Sad to Subotica, a Serbian city bordering Hungary. The section will have a total of 49 overpasses, underpasses and viaducts, with the largest viaduct to be built near Vrbas about 1.6 km long.

Completion of Serbian rail link to cut journey duration by two-thirds



Left: Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic (fourth from right) addresses a ceremony in celebration of the first anniversary of the operation of the Belgrade- Novi Sad section of the Belgrade-Budapest Railway in Novi Sad on March 19. PHOTOS BY WANG WEI / XINHUA Right: A train attendant waits for passengers to board in Belgrade, Serbia, on March 19.



Serbia's Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure Goran Vesic announced last month that construction of the section will be completed by the end of next year. The Mayor of Novi Sad, Milan Duric, said he has seen the good quality of the high-speed railway in the past year. "I'm fully confident that we will travel to Subotica on a high-speed railway by the end of next year," he said. Duan Wei, the deputy chief engineer

of the Chinese joint venture, appeared sentimental on the one-year anniversary. Since arriving in Serbia to work on the project in August 2016, he has returned to China only once, at the end of 2018. A mountain of work and the pandemic kept him from seeing his wife and young daughter, a second-grader in elementary school, in person. "I feel sorry for my family for not

being able to join them during Spring Festivals," he said. However, Duan said he feels proud to be part of a key project of the Belt and Road Initiative. Jelena Gavric, a native of Novi Sad, did a live broadcast relating to the high-speed railway on the anniversary of its inauguration. Gavric, who speaks fluent Chinese, and who has worked on the joint venture for the previous four months, said Serbians are grateful

for these kinds of projects and for China's help. "It makes me happy as well," said Gavric, who has spent seven years in China and has become a well-known social media influencer on Chinese social media apps such as Weibo, Douyin and Bilibili. "Serbia and the West Balkans need more modern projects, and hopefully China will play an important role in modernizing this region."

Chinese companies have been active in other infrastructure construction projects in Serbia. PowerChina, which has also built highways in Serbia, is undertaking the civil engineering for Belgrade's subway projects, which also involves the French company Alstom.

Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic said last year that he was pleased with the Chinese and French companies that are the main contractors on the subway project as well as domestic companies that have been chosen as subcontractors.

The City Manager of Belgrade, Miroslav Cuckovic, said recently that the city authorities would sign a contract with the German rail company Deutsche Bahn in early May to become the main supervisor of the subway project.

He told local media RTS that the Belgrade subway will be the second fully automated, driverless subway in the world, the other being in Qatar. Belgrade hopes to complete its first subway line, 21 km long with 21 stations, from Zelenik to Mirijevo, by 2027 and a line of the same length with 23 stations from Mirijevo to Zemun, by 2030.

China Road and Bridge Corporation, a subsidiary of CCCC, has been commissioned by the Serbian government to build wastewater treat-

ment plants in 65 municipalities across the country. Serbia, a candidate for membership in the European Union, must meet EU environmental standards before it can become a member.

During the signing ceremony for the sewage treatment project in 2021, Serbia's then minister of construction, transport and infrastructure Tomislav Momirovic described the project as "Serbia's boldly stepping into the future and creating a modern, functional state".

On April 12, Momirovic, now minister of domestic and foreign trade, was in Beijing signing a memorandum of understanding with China's Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao on starting negotiations on a free-trade agreement.

Wang described Serbia as an "ironclad friend" of China and said his country is willing to invest in the free trade agreement negotiations. Momirovic said such an agreement would create a favorable environment and Serbia is willing to work with China to promote negotiations.



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Strategy benefits all with 'endless potential'

By CHEN WEIHUA



Ivona Ladjevac

The Belt and Road Initiative has "endless potential" to benefit all, said an expert at a Serbian research institute. Ivona Ladjevac, deputy director at the Institute of International

Politics and Economics in Belgrade, said the BRI is producing results in Serbia. However, Ladjevac expressed concern that changing international relations have negatively impacted some participating countries in the BRI in their implementation of the initiative.

She said she felt sad that Serbia, which has an independent foreign policy by maintaining close ties with China and Russia, has also felt pressure from Brussels. Since March 2019, the European Union has described China as a cooperation partner, economic competitor and systemic rival. "It is sad that certain countries cannot or won't realize that the BRI is an extraordinary well of opportunities for mutual cooperation of all countries," she said.

She said it is important to attract Chinese investment to Serbia's agriculture, tourism and IT sectors, citing China's support for the construction of a science and technology park in Serbia. Ladjevac hopes Serbia will also attract more investment from China's private sector. In 2009, China and Serbia

signed the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation. Also the same year the two countries signed their strategic partnership agreement. Ladjevac said the agreement provided the impetus to expanding economic relations and an excellent base for capital infrastructure projects that followed.

Many countries in central and eastern Europe, through cooperation with China, have secured funding for better connectivity. Through her trips to China and interaction with Chinese people in Serbia, Ladjevac was impressed by the Chinese people who she described as "hardworking" and "dedicated" people who "love their country very much".

Ladjevac said the Belgrade-Budapest railway being built is of great significance not only for the two countries, but also of great regional and even international significance as it connects Belgrade and Budapest and provides a link to North Macedonia and Greece, connecting the Greek port of Piraeus with Central Europe and at the same time connecting the Middle East with Europe.

She also said the E-763 highway being built between Serbia and Montenegro is of significance. "In a wider context, it connects Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Italy and thus contributes to better regional connectivity."

From left: The Novi Sad station on the Belgrade-Budapest railway; the Ban Josip Jelacic Square in Zagreb; the Peljesac Bridge; and the Hungarian Parliament Building. With projects including railways and bridges, the Belt and Road Initiative is adding ever greater connectivity to countries involved in the BRI. PHOTOS BY LIANG SHUANG / CHINA DAILY AND XINHUA



Deep bond forged with key project

By CHEN WEIHUA

Selma Knudsen, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, visited her friend in Mozambique in 2017 when the China Road and Bridge Corp, or CRBC, was building the longest suspension bridge in Africa between Kaputa and Kateribe.

A civil engineer by training, Knudsen felt it was so nice there and she hoped to stay there. Her friend suggested that she talk to the Chinese company, but the idea of working for a Chinese company sounded a bit strange to her back then.

But a year later, she joined the CRBC in Croatia. The construction company was building the Peljesac Bridge, which spans the sea channel between Komarna on the northern mainland and the peninsula of Peljesac. "For me, it's not just a job, it's a crown on my career. It's a life story," she recalled in an interview on April 12. "It was like a dream come true because I had always been thinking about working here."

As a senior commercial coordinator, she had to find subcontractors, prepare contracts, hold negotiations and ensure contracts are followed. She was also in charge of procurement and quality control.

After nearly four years of working on the bridge project, she and her Chinese colleagues became good friends.

"We had lots of fun. It was such a great experience. I really enjoyed it," she said, adding she still keeps in touch with her former Chinese colleagues who are now working in other parts of Europe and the world.

Knudsen, who now works in the Croatian capital Zagreb, has gone back to the bridge five to six times after its completion.



Selma Knudsen



Fireworks illuminate the night over the Peljesac Bridge during its opening ceremony in Komarna on July 26. MIROSLAV LELAS / PIXSELL

By CHEN WEIHUA

Jan Skov and his wife Winnie, a Danish couple who own four holiday homes in Komarna, a small village in southern Dalmatia along the Adriatic Sea, have had many bookings since last summer.

"This year is even better than we usually have, up 50 percent," Jan Skov said.

Walking through the small village

near the newly built Peljesac Bridge, it is easy to spot workers putting finishing touches to holiday homes that are being built or upgraded as the summer tourist season approaches.

Many more holiday accommodations are being built not just in Komarna but all over the coast, Jan Skov said.

The new bridge is widely seen as a reason for a surge in local tourism, he said, and another is people's hunger for travel after the pandemic.

Milijana Borojevic, director of the

Peljesac Bridge to reduce hassles for long-suffering travelers

Korcula Tourist Board, said that while the opening of the Peljesac Bridge last year brought an influx of tourists, the full impact will be seen in a couple of years.

"The locals, of course, are pleased with the bridge opening," Borojevic said. "It makes travel much easier and faster, in addition to not having to cross state borders."

Since the bridge opened to traffic on July 26 last year, more than 1.33 million vehicles had crossed it by April 17. Daily flow during last summer's tourist season averaged 15,000 vehicles.

Before the bridge was built, people traveling between Croatia's mainland, such as the biggest coastal tourist city of Split, and Dubrovnik, a major tourist city on the Mediterranean, had to pass through the Neum Corridor, a 9-kilometer stretch of coast that is part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It meant having to go through four time-consuming border checks, often with long queues during summer.

In addition, the checks have become much stricter since Jan 1 this year when Croatia became the 27th member of the passport-free Schengen Area.

"The border checks, especially in summer, were such a hassle," said Selma Knudsen, who has a holiday home in Komarna. She hated having to explain to border and customs officials why she had bottles of wine and other items in her vehicle, she said. "It's definitely easier now."

The 2.4-km-long, 23.6-meter-wide, four-lane bridge was built by a consortium headed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation, or CRBC. Standing 55 meters above sea level with pylons rising to a height of as much as 124 meters, the bridge connects Komarna on the mainland with the town of Brijesta on the Peljesac Peninsula.

The CRBC began work on the project on July 30, 2018, just three months after it led a Chinese consortium to win public tendering by

Hrvatske Ceste, a state-owned company in Croatia responsible for public roads. The project was funded by 357 million euros (\$390 million) from the European Commission's Cohesion Policy funds. The money accounted for 85 percent of the total cost, with the rest covered by Croatia.

CRBC was the first Chinese company to undertake a project funded by the European Union.

During construction, the CRBC worked with 18 design consulting companies, 45 construction companies in the European Union and 112 global equipment and materials suppliers, environmental protection and other professional companies in Croatia, Poland, Romania and elsewhere.

It was a huge undertaking, especially after the pandemic broke out in 2020, when 800 Chinese workers were engaged in construction. Ensuring the progress and quality of the project while protecting workers from the coronavirus was a huge challenge.

Liu Jiayi, a CRBC field engineer on the project, said earlier that successfully meeting the standards of China, Croatia and the EU could be "attributed to everyone's dedication and their pursuit for excellence in details".

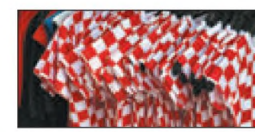
Croatia started building the Peljesac Bridge in 2007 but work was halted in 2010 because of financial difficulties.

"I feel pride that we belong to the generation that has accomplished this remarkable feat, connecting Croatia's south, the southern parts of Dubrovnik-Neretva County, with the rest of the country," Croatia's Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said during an inauguration gala for the bridge featuring fireworks and acrobatic aerial displays and music and dance.



The Zagreb Cathedral in Croatia's capital. LIANG SHUANG / CHINA DAILY

National passion, bathed in red and white



The red and white checkered pattern is seen everywhere in Croatia. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The design and colors that Croatian national teams proudly wear in sporting arenas are very distinct in their design and color. Red and white are central to the motifs they wear, the red bespeaking fire, passion and vitality and the white evoking the purity of snow. Red and white checkered elements can be seen everywhere you go in the country. For example, the landmark St. Mark's Church in the capital, Zagreb, is adorned with that red and white checkered pattern, which Croatians call *sahor-nizza*, the Croatian checkerboard.

Legend has it that both colors denote direction, red for north and white for west. Those who live near the Adriatic Sea are called White Croats, and those in the mountains Red Croats. Red and White Croats, interact with each other, just like a chessboard. The checkerboard diagram shows the story of Croats intermingling. That checkered pattern figures prominently on the national flag.

CHINA DAILY

Speedy conclusion of work applauded

By CHEN WEIHUA

Croatian people and news media have been amazed by the ability of a Chinese company to finish the Peljesac Bridge before the agreed deadline, said the founder and president of a Croatian think tank.

"China's reputation in Croatia has grown significantly," Jaska Plenkovic, founder and president of Geoeconomic Forum Croatia, said. "The official name of the bridge is Peljesac Bridge, but it is also popularly called the Chinese Bridge, which reflects an admiration for the China Road and Bridge Corporation's work."

She expressed that Croatia's government has been interested in other big national projects that involve European Union funds and Chinese companies, especially in infrastructure projects.

"The BRI as a new generation model of cooperation and connectivity among countries emphasizes digital and green investments and multilateralism and China's willingness to strengthen the BRI is an opportunity for countries within the BRI to continue with processes of economic interdependence among themselves and with China," Plenkovic said.

However, Western politicians have been criticizing the BRI from the beginning, but they failed to stop 18 European countries, including EU member states, candidate states and others, from becoming China's partners in building the BRI, Plenkovic said. She stressed that the world needs sustainable development, green economic cooperation and peace more than ever. "All these goals exist in the Belt and Road Initiative," she said. "Keep it alive and healthy!"



Jaska Plenkovic

CHINA

Hangzhou well prepared, eager for Asian Games

By SUN XIAOCHEN
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

With all the venues completed and test events underway, Hangzhou is closing out its preparations for the 19th Asian Games as the city embraces hosting the continental sports gala as a boost for its international image.

With less than five months to go before an estimated 30,000 athletes, coaches and officials land in Hangzhou from across Asia, the Chinese organizers of the Asian Games have drawn confidence from solid preparatory work in venue readiness, service planning and operational tests, and are confident that the games will be a life-long experience for all participants.

"Hangzhou has been all set," said Chen Weiqiang, executive secretary-general of the Hangzhou Asian Games Organizing Committee, during a news briefing in Beijing on Thursday.

As the first mega international sporting event to be held in China in the post-pandemic era, the Asian Games Hangzhou 2022, which was delayed by a year due to COVID-19, plays an instrumental role in presenting the city's dynamic image, promoting international exchange and contributing to China's goal of developing into a world sports powerhouse, said Chen, who is also a vice-mayor of Hangzhou.

The perennial sporting extravaganza will be held at 56 competition venues in Hangzhou and five other surrounding co-host cities in Zhejiang from Sept 23 to Oct 8, featuring a comprehensive program of 483 medal events of 40 Olympic and non-Olympic sports. The Asian Games, arguably the world's largest sports event for its participant number and inclusive program, is making a return to China after being held in Beijing in 1990 and Guangzhou in 2010.

All the competition venues, including 12 new projects and 31 training venues, have been completed. A total of 50 test events, with

some having taken place already, are expected to help organizers fine-tune facilities and improve operations, according to Chen.

With a fully open approach, unlike the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics that adopted a "bubble" management of participants, Hangzhou 2022 has already received registration requests from 18,000 athletes, who will be accommodated at the Asian Games village consisting of 108 residential buildings.

Considerate services to address the diversities in religion, dietary habits and overseas guests' interests in exploring the city while experiencing Chinese culture have all been thoroughly planned and prepared, according to Huang Haifeng, a deputy secretary-general of the Hangzhou 2022 organizing committee.

A three-day Chefs de Mission Seminar for the games concluded in the city on Thursday, with the majority of representatives of 45 participating countries and regions leaving convinced that the event will be a resounding success, according to Chen.

"After visiting our venues, a lot of the delegation officials hailed the conditions of the facilities as world-class," said Chen.

To further promote the games as well as Chinese culture, a series of milestone celebrations will be organized, such as the release of the games' medal design at the 100-day countdown on June 15, a live concert of Hangzhou 2022-themed songs at the opening ceremony stadium next month and a torch relay that involves online participants a month before the opening.

International spectators will be allowed direct entry into China, visa-free, as long as they purchase competition tickets via official outlets, according to the organizing committee.

To help make the games a sustainable event with lasting legacy, organizers and property owners have developed post-games business operation models for about 90 percent of the venues.

Dynastic relics



Visitors admire exhibits at the Cao Cao Mausoleum Site Museum in Anyang, Henan province, on Thursday, as the museum unveils some 400 sets of relics that were unearthed at the site or are related to Cao. One of the most well-known historical figures during the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), Cao laid the foundation for the Wei Dynasty (220-265). It took decades for archaeologists to confirm that the Gaoling site was indeed Cao's mausoleum. The museum will open to the public on Saturday. LI AN / XINHUA

US arms dealers' Taiwan visit to be closely monitored

Defense ministry also expresses 'serious concerns' on military bases in Philippines

By ZHANG ZHIHAO
zhangzhihao@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese military will continue to closely monitor the situation in the Taiwan Strait, maintain a high level of alertness at all times and take necessary actions in accordance with the law, Senior Colonel Tan Kefei, spokesman of the Ministry of National Defense, said on Thursday.

In mid-April, foreign media reported that representatives from several United States defense contractors would visit Taiwan in early May to discuss joint production of drones and ammunition.

In response to the reports, Tan said the Chinese military expresses serious concerns about the trip as the Taiwan question is purely China's internal affairs and does not allow for any foreign interference.

"The US 'Military-Industrial Complex' has always been keen on selling weapons around the world and exporting wars for profit," Tan said, adding that Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party is contemptible for "inviting wolves into their homes" and their actions will only bring calamity to Taiwan compatriots.

Tan said nobody can undermine the Chinese military's determination to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"We strongly urge the US to fully recognize the sensitivity of the Taiwan question and the complexity of the current situation in the Taiwan Strait, adhere to the one-China principle and the three Sino-US joint communiqués, and properly handle Taiwan-related issues," he added.

Tan also urged the US to stop interfering in the Taiwan question and refrain from conducting military exchanges and selling arms to Taiwan. "The People's Liberation Army will resolutely counter any form of 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities and external interference, and will firmly safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said.

When commenting on US officials' recent accusations of China "militarizing" the South China Sea and that therefore the US should strengthen its military presence in the Philippines, Tan said China has indisputable sovereignty over the islands and their adjacent waters in the South China Sea.

"China building infrastructure and necessary defensive structures on these islands are a lawful exercise of national sovereignty and entirely legitimate," he said, adding other countries have no right to make irresponsible remarks about these actions.

Tan said China has expressed serious concerns about the US developing new military bases in the Philippines on multiple occasions. "Currently, the US is strengthening its military deployment in the South China Sea and deliberately heightening tensions. Countries from the region should remain highly vigilant to these developments," he said.

The Chinese military will resolutely defend the country's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights, and will firmly safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea, Tan concluded.

In response to a Pentagon report

accusing China of conducting secretive nuclear tests, sensitive biological activities and the proliferation of missile technology, Tan said the content of the report is completely unfounded and purely fabricated with the intention of smearing China.

Tan said the US has adopted a double standard in terms of arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament to serve its own security interests.

"They have constantly shifted blame and withdrawn from treaties in the field of nuclear nonproliferation, obstructed negotiations on the verification protocol of the Biological Weapons Convention, and established hundreds of biological laboratories worldwide," Tan said.

Meanwhile, the US is also developing new types of nuclear warheads, cooperating with the United Kingdom and Australia in nuclear submarine programs, and advancing military plans in outer space and cyberspace, Tan said.

"These actions have seriously undermined global and regional strategic stability and have a significant impact on multilateral arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament processes," he said.

Tan added that China firmly upholds the international system with the United Nations at its core, as well as the international order based on international law. China has strictly fulfilled its international obligations and responsibilities, and has taken concrete actions to maintain the international arms control and nonproliferation system.

"We urge the US to reflect on its own behavior, refrain from smearing others and respond seriously to the international community's concerns about its commitment to following treaties," he said.

Shenzhen, HK aim for 'win-win' on technology

By ZHOU MO
in Shenzhen, Guangdong
sally@chinadailyhk.com

Shenzhen in Guangdong province and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region should focus on integrated development in technological cooperation, leveraging their complementary strengths to build a world-class innovation and technology ecosystem, experts and scholars said.

They made the remarks at the Guangming Science City Forum 2023, which kicked off in Shenzhen on Thursday.

"Integrated development is key for innovation and technology cooperation between Shenzhen and Hong Kong," said Nancy Ip Yuk-yu, president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

The two cities have complementary advantages in the field, which lay a solid foundation for integrated development, with Hong Kong possessing strong scientific research capability and Shenzhen having a sound industry chain, she said in a keynote speech at the two-day event.

By leveraging their respective strengths in integrated development, they can form a two-way and interconnected technological chain."

Nancy Ip Yuk-yu, president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

"By leveraging their respective strengths in integrated development, they can form a two-way and interconnected technological chain. And by integrating domestic and global I&T resources, they will be able to build a world-class I&T ecosystem," she said.

She hoped Shenzhen and Hong Kong could jointly build a cross-border innovation park, where universities do basic research, laboratories deal with research transformation, and incubation bases provide support for startups.

These, together with technological, legal and financial services, will form a whole I&T ecosystem, she said.

Fan Jianping, president of the Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said Shenzhen is a place where technology, capital and talent gather, and also a center for international exchanges.

"With the geographical proximity to Hong Kong, Shenzhen can connect quickly with the world and bring the best technology and talent there to develop industries," he said.

Nonetheless, sound development of an industry cannot be achieved with the strength of just one city, he pointed out. "Cooperation with other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is important. In particular, we need to give full play to the special roles of Hong Kong and Macao," Fan added.

Matthew Chang, the dean's chair and associate professor in biochemistry and synthetic biology at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore, pins high hopes on enhanced collaboration between Singapore and the Greater Bay Area in the field of synthetic biology, believing such work will create synergy and win-win results.

"Singapore has unique research expertise in synthetic biology which, in my view, can be very complementary to Shenzhen and the Greater Bay Area's research expertise. We should keep this discussion going. From the Singaporean side, we are more than ready to collaborate with Shenzhen and the Greater Bay Area in a more intimate manner," he said.

Work of art



A student from Xu Beihong Art Academy of Shanghai Maritime University creates a portrait for workers at a construction site in Shanghai on Thursday. Teachers and students came to draw portraits for workers and pay tribute to diligence and craftsmanship ahead of the May Day holiday, which is dedicated to workers. FANG ZHE / XINHUA

Workers honored with May 1 Labor Medals

By CHENG SI
chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

China honored 1,035 workers with National May 1 Labor Medals on Thursday for their outstanding work performance and contributions to the nation's manufacturing and industrial development.

According to a release by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the recommendation and selection of these medalists were open to community and front-line workers, with those serving in manufacturing and flexible employment emphasized.

Among the winners, 412 were manufacturing workers — accounting for 41.6 percent of the total number — which was followed by 235 skilled front-line and community workers. A total of 176 migrant workers won medals, accounting for nearly 17 percent of the total. Of the 1,035 winners, 216 were women.

These medal winners mostly serve in sectors of manufacturing, transportation, construction and electricity or heating companies.

The federation said that migrant workers make up the principal body of the nation's manufacturing workers, and it required in the recommendation notice published in February that no less than 10 percent of the medals be given to migrant workers to recognize their work performance.

Flexibly hired workers such as ride-hailing drivers, couriers and food deliverymen were also honored with the State-level prize because of their good work and their contributions to battling COVID-19.

"Female food delivery worker Liao Zeming from Chongqing in Southwest China was responsible for sending vegetables and medical supplies to residents when the city was hard hit by the epidemic," said the federation.

According to the federation, it will continue to encourage local authorities and companies to recommend migrant workers and flexible employees with the spirit of craftsmanship for the National May 1 Labor Medals, which aim to recognize more community workers.

Satellites help guard ecological red lines

By HOU LIQIANG
houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

A supervision platform supported by over 30 satellites has been put into operation, as China improves its conservation of crucial ecological zones with a red line mechanism, according to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

The platform "can automatically scan and identify local changes of the land surfaces, and monitor risks of ecological damage in a timely manner," Wang Zhibin, head of the ministry's nature and eco-conservation department, said at a news conference on Thursday.

With construction started in 2018, parts of the platform for the supervision of the red lines for ecological conservation have previously been put into use in accordance with the construction progress, he noted.

To date, he said, the platform has provided over 2,000 clues of envi-

ronmental violations that have supported the country's major environmental protection actions, such as the high-profile central environmental inspection, the teams of which are headed by ministerial-level officials.

"It has essentially covered all nature protected zones, areas encircled by red lines for ecological conservation and other key ecological spaces," he added.

On Saturday, the Ministry of Natural Resources announced that the country has completed drawing red lines nationwide to identify the country's crucial ecological zones.

No less than 3.15 million square kilometers across the country, including over 30 percent of the country's total land area, have been demarcated within the red lines, it said.

The red lines cover areas that are critical in environmental function, ecologically sensitive and vulnerable, and vital for biodiversity.

Wang said China has established a national biodiversity observation network to better understand the conditions of the country's biodiversity resources and their trends.

The network includes dedicated subnetworks for different types of ecosystems and species, including terrestrial vertebrates, insects and freshwater fish, he said.

The China Biodiversity Observation Network, the construction of which was launched in 2011 by the ministry, for example, has 749 designated plots for observation across the country, he said. In total, it has obtained 1.8 million pieces of observation information.

The China Biodiversity Monitoring and Research Network, which is run by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, includes the world's first forest biodiversity network that covers different latitude gradients. It also has Asia's largest real-time monitoring system and database for birds, he noted.

COMMENT

Editorials

Seoul's immoderate cozying up to Washington aggravates risks

Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol's ongoing state visit to the United States carries special weight not because it is the first by a ROK leader in 12 years, or an occasion for commemorating the 70th anniversary of the US-ROK alliance. But because it occurs at a time when both parties in the alliance feel an acute need for mutual reassurance that their partnership remains "ironclad" amid the multitude of present-day challenges.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has escalated both its rhetoric and actions that the ROK perceives as signifying an existential threat to it. Although these have been stepped up in response to the ROK's own escalated military cooperation with the US, which the DPRK likewise perceives to be an existential threat to it.

On its part, the US is coordinating more closely than ever with the ROK, not with a more watchful eye on the DPRK nuclear issue, but as part of its attempts at the geopolitical isolation of neighboring China. From perceived potential contingencies arising from the Korean Peninsula to the Taiwan Strait, to "technology de-coupling" in such areas as semi-conductors, Seoul has a role of critical strategic significance in Washington's "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

The ROK leader has gone to great lengths to make his trip rewarding. He made decisive moves to improve ties with Japan in defiance of conspicuous domestic dissatisfaction at home, promised to provide further assistance to Ukraine despite warnings from Russia, and made comments on

Taiwan that he knew would irk Beijing.

As the joint Washington Declaration issued by both governments on Wednesday revealed, he conveyed "full confidence in US extended deterrence commitments" and recognized "the importance, necessity, and benefit" of his country's "enduring reliance on the US nuclear deterrent". In other words, the ROK won't develop its own nuclear weapons.

President Yoon has apparently been rewarded with what he wanted. In a show of commitment to a stronger combined posture under their Mutual Defense Treaty, the US and ROK leaders announced the establishment of a Nuclear Consultative Group to cope with a potential DPRK nuclear assault, which Washington claims will give Seoul more insights into, and a voice in, US planning for nuclear contingencies.

The US and ROK presidents also made an explicit threat to Pyongyang that any nuclear attack by the DPRK against the ROK would be met with a swift, overwhelming and decisive response with the full range of US capabilities, "including nuclear". A "nuclear attack by North Korea ... is unacceptable and will result in the end of whatever regime were to take such an action", Biden added.

Such posture may serve the ROK's immediate tactical need for sense of security in the face of the threat of nuclear attack. But it is not in the ROK's long-term, strategic or national security interests. When one country's pursuit of security compromises that of others, it will only create more risks and greater uncertainty.

G7 can facilitate peace talks by lifting sanctions

Some recent developments concerning the West's response to the Ukraine conflict indicate simmering and widening divisions inside what appears to be a unanimous Western stance over the crisis.

According to reports, the European Union and Japan have pushed back against a United States' proposal for G7 countries to ban all exports to Russia. The proposal aims to replace the current sector-by-sector sanctions regime against Russia with a complete export ban with just a few exemptions.

Washington apparently hopes the new proposal will be adopted by the G7 leaders in their upcoming summit in Hiroshima, Japan, next month, so as to effectively plug the loopholes in the current sanctions regime and tighten the economic shackles on Russia even tighter.

In another development, the US news website Politico reported on Monday that the Joe Biden administration is quietly preparing for the possibility of re-engaging with China with a view to soliciting Russian President Vladimir Putin to the negotiating table if Ukraine's spring counteroffensive falls short of expectations. The phone talk between the Chinese and Ukrainian leaders on Wednesday has raised hopes that the necessary conditions can be created for a cease-fire at an early date, and Washington giving its support would consolidate those hopes.

All this shows that after more than one year's all-out support to Ukraine and ever-increasing pressure on Russia, the US and its allies are facing uncertainties on the battlefield and feeling the backlash of their sanctions regime against Russia.

Right now, Russia and Ukraine appear to have reached a deadlock in the fighting and allowing the crisis to evolve into a lasting one seems more and more unsustainable to all parties involved.

Sanctions have never worked in resolving regional conflicts. A crisis of the magnitude of the one in Ukraine will not be swayed by the US-led sanctions either. Not to mention that while failing to force Russia to yield, Western sanctions are doing more harm than good to the world economy and the global supply chains.

Western countries have imposed sanctions on Russia in the hope of choking its energy export channels and destroying its economy. But those sanctions have backfired, hurt US allies and triggered a worldwide energy crisis. The sanctions have also disrupted trade and aggravated inflation, leaving several economies teetering on the brink of recession.

More and more members of the world community, China included, have aired their proposals for a cease-fire and an end to the Ukraine conflict. After over one year's ceaseless efforts to intensify the hostilities through escalating sanctions and providing weapons and military assistance to Ukraine, Western countries should awaken to the fact that a political settlement is needed more than ever, not more sanctions.

The G7 leaders should view the Ukraine crisis from a long-term and global perspective rather than through an ideological lens tainted with bloc confrontation and a Cold War mentality. They should act in a responsible way at their upcoming G7 summit and call for peace rather than further fanning the flames of the conflict.

Japan cannot cheat world by tunneling

As the international community has repeatedly stressed, Japan has the obligation to properly handle the decommissioning of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant and the disposal of the nuclear-contaminated water to ensure absolute safety.

That Japan's nuclear regulator criticized Tokyo Electric Power Company for its delay in considering emergency responses to the possible collapse of a reactor pressure vessel at the plant has only exacerbated worries over Japan's slapdash handling of the decommissioning process and the management of the radioactive waste.

At a news conference on Tuesday, Shinsuke Yamanaka, the chairman of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority, said TEPCO should have responded to the new safety hazard when it was discovered last year.

As a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said on Wednesday, Japan needs to shoulder its international obligations, and properly handle the issues related to the decommissioning of the power plant.

In particular, it needs to suspend its plan to dispose of the nuclear-contaminated water by discharging it into the ocean until all stakeholders and relevant international agencies confirm that it is safe to do so.

Yet out of sight is out of mind as far as TEPCO is

concerned. It hopes to surreptitiously discharge the toxic water into the sea. It finished digging an undersea tunnel for this purpose on Wednesday, which means that it will soon begin to treat the Pacific Ocean as its private toxic waste dump unless it sees reason.

The total amount of nuclear-contaminated wastewater accumulated at the crippled plant has now reached 1.37 million tons in total, all of which had direct contact with the meltdown nuclear reactors and contain more than 60 kinds of radioactive elements. It is predicted that it will take at least 30 years to completely discharge all the water into the ocean.

Even processed with the Advanced Liquid Processing System, the contaminated water — which in a word game, the Japanese government and TEPCO insist on calling "treated nuclear wastewater" — will still be highly radioactive.

Whether discharged from a pipe above sea level or an undersea tunnel, the nuclear-contaminated wastewater will still be radioactive, and a threat to marine life and human health.

The current situation and the ocean discharge plan are fraught with hazards. Japan will have an indelible stain on its image and a guilty consciousness that it will impose on its younger generation if it presses ahead with its unconscionable plan.

Ma Xuejing



Opinion Line

Okinawa protests signal unease at Tokyo's confrontational policy

Okinawa residents are protesting against Japan's Self-Defense Forces' deployment of ground-based Patriot Advanced Capability-3 interceptor missiles from Monday in the latest sign that Japan's resolve to take advantage of the geopolitical tensions to accelerate the militarization of the region is against people's will.

Members of the prefecture's parliament have submitted a resolution to the defense department, Cabinet office and the foreign affairs department of Japan urging Tokyo to heed people's call for peaceful diplomacy.

The resolution demands that the government abide by the principles outlined in the four political documents it signed with its Chinese counterparts in 1972, 1978, 1998 and 2008 respectively to maintain China-Japan friendship and actively promote regional rapport through dialogue and diplomacy.

This is the first time a local parliament has submitted a resolution

doubting the Japanese government's China policy and strategic judgment. It reflects not only the voice of the 1.46 million inhabitants of Okinawa but also that of all peace-loving people in the country and beyond.

Ever since Japan annexed the Ryukyu Islands in 1879 and renamed them Okinawa, the islands' fate has been lamentable. Okinawa was passively involved in World War II, with the Japanese government using it as cannon fodder. In 1945, shortly before Japan's unconditional surrender, up to a quarter of the local population in Okinawa died as a civilian shield for the Imperial Japanese Army, making the islands the bloodiest battlefield in the Pacific. It is estimated that 90,000 combatants and over 150,000 civilians living on the islands died in the campaign.

With the US mistakenly defining China as its No 1 challenge and NATO meddling in Asia-Pacific affairs, Japan's right-wing political forces think they have found an

opportunity to break through the "pacifist Constitution" and revive militarism.

They have constantly hyped up the "China threat", substantially increased defense spending, developed offensive weapons and sought to acquire the capability for preemptive strikes, in an attempt to subvert the post-war international order.

Echoing the voices of Okinawa residents, several Japanese social organizations announced on Monday that they would hold a large-scale peaceful rally on May 21 to oppose the deployment of missiles in Okinawa.

The local media in Okinawa also points out that China, Japan's largest economic partner, and Japan are indispensable to each other, and the two neighbors should be wary of Washington sowing discord between them and try to ease tensions and do their best to promote peace.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

Improving virus policy to reap tourists

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Mao Ning has announced that starting April 29 all passengers bound for China need to undergo just a rapid antigen test instead of a nucleic acid test for the novel coronavirus 48 hours before boarding a flight, and the airlines will no longer check the pre-boarding test certificate. World Health Organization officials had said the virus, which causes respiratory diseases will not transition from the pandemic phase to endemic phase but to a low-activity level.

Since the implementation of Class

B management for inbound epidemic prevention and control measures at the end of 2022, enthusiasm for cross-border exchanges among people has reached an unprecedented high. According to the National Immigration Administration, immigration agencies nationwide counted 65.07 million inbound and outbound personnel in the first quarter, up 116.2 percent year-on-year.

The requirements for travelers from different countries or regions have been constantly updated, and the "uncertainty" of nucleic acid testing has also been a concern for many

people. Therefore, further adjustments and optimization of epidemic prevention and control policies are necessary, both for Chinese people coming home from abroad and foreigners visiting China.

It is reported that the requirements for providing nucleic acid test reports for travel from China to countries such as the United States and Japan have also been gradually lifted. This is a good trend.

With the implementation of this new policy, tourism is expected to flourish during the May Day holiday.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

More members will expand BRICS' influence

The appeal of the BRICS organization is more evident than ever before. Reportedly, 19 countries from around the world have expressed an interest in joining the group as members or observers.

Over the past 10 years, BRICS has grown in success and its influence has been widely recognized. Joining it means more opportunities for development.

With BRICS as an example, China has played a crucial role in the process of advancing the development of international organizations, particularly those for the less-developed countries and emerging market economies, over the past two decades.

For instance, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has transformed from an organization initially set up to negotiate border issues to a key international organization that plays an increasingly

important role in promoting peace and development.

The founding of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, headquartered in Beijing, nearly 10 years ago has helped break the West's control over global financial order. It is popular among the less-developed countries, not only in Asia, and has more than 100 members now.

The multilateral development bank established by the BRICS members, the New Development Bank, headquartered in Shanghai, is a meaningful platform for BRICS and other countries to make better use of their financial resources to address development deficits, reducing their dependence on the US dollar and providing them more financial autonomy.

As such, an expanded BRICS means greater international influence and a bigger say in global rule-making for developing countries.

Something long overdue.

It is projected that the BRICS countries will collectively contribute about 32.1 percent of the world's economic growth this year, compared with the G7's 29.9 percent. The International Monetary Fund predicts that the two figures will become 33.6 percent and 27.8 percent respectively by 2028 when BRICS' share in the world's gross domestic product will reach about 35-40 percent and that of the G7 about 27.8 percent.

The collective rise of the developing countries can reshape the evolution of international relations in the foreseeable future. And the thriving of the multinational organizations of the developing economies can help them effectively coordinate their actions to better strive together for fairer international orders.

— NIUTANQIN WECHAT ACCOUNT

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Hukun Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mchile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 6270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wal Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailiasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

COMMENT

Shakhrat Nuryshev

China opens new chapter of partnership

Kazakhstan will continue following a balanced, constructive foreign policy aimed at protecting its national interests. It will prioritize issues of mutually beneficial cooperation and strategic partnership with neighboring states — China, Russia and the countries of Central Asia — and partners in regional associations.

Last year, Kazakhstan and China marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations. During this period, we have achieved great results and taken our relations to the highest level, an eternal all-round strategic partnership, laying a solid foundation for strengthening good neighborly ties and further deepening mutually beneficial cooperation.

In February 2022, despite the difficult situation in our country at the time, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev attended the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing and held talks with President Xi Jinping, demonstrating that the two countries have jointly built a solid foundation for a truly strategic partnership in all respects.

In turn, President Xi's visit to Kazakhstan in September 2022 — at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was yet to be contained — showed the international community that the two countries have established a high level of partnership and mutual trust, as well as opened a new chapter of the 30th anniversary of Kazakhstan-China relations.

As a result of their talks, a number of intergovernmental and interdepartmen-

We hope both sides remove more visa restrictions in order to boost trade, and economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the two countries.

tal documents were signed in the areas of trade, economy, agriculture, finance, water use and the media. Agreements were also reached on opening consulates general in the cities of Aktobe in Kazakhstan and Xi'an in China, restoring direct flights from Kazakhstan to Beijing, opening the "Lu Ban Workshop" and building a third railway crossing on the border.

All these indicate that political trust and business partnership between Kazakhstan and China have reached a qualitatively new level.

Today, there are no unresolved issues between our countries or any obstacles for further deepening of cooperation and strengthening of friendship. The initiatives put forward by President Xi — the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative — are aimed at helping build a just and sustainable world, and Kazakhstan supports them. Kazakhstan also supports the proposed peace plan to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

Tokayev has repeatedly stressed, including at various international venues, that Kazakhstan is firmly committed to

the values of peace, cooperation and trust.

Kazakhstan and China have established close cooperation in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the China-Central Asia Format Meetings.

I want to especially emphasize that representatives of Taoist and Buddhist religions from China have always taken an active part in the work of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. In September last year, despite the strict anti-pandemic measures, a strong Chinese delegation representing traditional religions and the State Administration for Religious Affairs took part in the work of the congress and its secretariat.

And Wang Qishan, then vice-president of China, took part in the Sixth CICA meeting in Astana in October last year. Addressing the meeting, Wang said China sees the development of the CICA from a strategic point of view and based on long-term prospects.

We in Kazakhstan support the plans of the Chinese side to hold the first Central Asia-China summit this year. And during the forthcoming state visit of President Tokayev to China, we expect new breakthrough agreements in strengthening and further developing the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership.

China is one of the major trade and investment partners of Kazakhstan. In 2022, according to Chinese government statistics, bilateral trade hit a record high of \$31.2 billion.

As a key link in the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, Kazakhstan is ready for more practical cooperation on initiatives such as the Digital Silk Road, the Green Silk Road and the Health Silk Road, as well as the implementation of projects in the fields of digitalization, green technology and innovation. We are ready to fully support our Chinese partners through the implementation of a new investment policy, which is an integral part of the new economic course of Kazakhstan.

Last year, Kazakhstan introduced a 14-day visa-free policy for Chinese citizens, which is already yielding results. In fact, Kazakhstan was included in the recent list of countries recommended by the Chinese government for Chinese tourists.

We hope both sides remove more visa restrictions in order to boost trade, and economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the two countries. The issue of the mutual establishment of cultural centers and the opening of a branch of one of the leading Chinese universities in Kazakhstan is being worked out, and cultural exchanges between youths are being resumed.

I am convinced that through joint efforts we will be able to open a bright new chapter in cooperation and partnership between our countries.

The author is Kazakhstan's ambassador to China.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Chen Weihua

The author is chief of China Daily EU Bureau based in Brussels. chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

Borrell's call for navy patrols in Taiwan Strait highly provocative

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell was right to reiterate in an op-ed in the French weekly *Le Journal du Dimanche* on April 22 that the European Union's position on the Taiwan question is "simple and consistent" and "there is only one China".

It was outrageous, though, that he urged "European navies to patrol the Taiwan Strait to signify Europe's commitment to freedom of navigation in this absolute crucial area". Although he said that "at the same time, we must be vigilant against provocations and outbidding", his blatantly provocative statement is a challenge to China's sovereignty and to the one-China principle he mentioned.

Tensions in the Taiwan Strait have risen dramatically over the past years because of Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus that there is only one China which has helped ensure peace, stability and prosperity, especially during the eight years of Ma Ying-jeou's leadership when cross-strait relations flourished.

More important, the United States has increasingly used the Taiwan question as a geopolitical tool against China since the Donald Trump administration deviated from the policy and practice followed by US presidents, from Richard Nixon to Barack Obama.

By sending navy vessels to sail through the Strait, the EU member states will heighten tensions across the Strait.

Incumbent US President Joe Biden has said that US forces will defend Taiwan, words that were later walked back by his aides. The US has increased its high-level official contacts with Taiwan and also ramped up arms sales to the Chinese island while US navy vessels frequently sail through the Strait and in Chinese waters, flexing their muscles. Also, US lawmakers have been pushing for legislation relating to Taiwan, which is provocative to the Chinese mainland.

Many US experts on China, including some pro-Taiwan scholars, have publicly criticized the Trump and Biden administrations for their moves to try and change the status quo across the Strait. For example, Harvard University scholar Graham Allison warned recently that, "American politics is driving towards a provocation that China could not avoid."

That is probably why French President Emmanuel Macron said the EU should avoid getting dragged into a confrontation between Beijing and Washington over the Taiwan question.

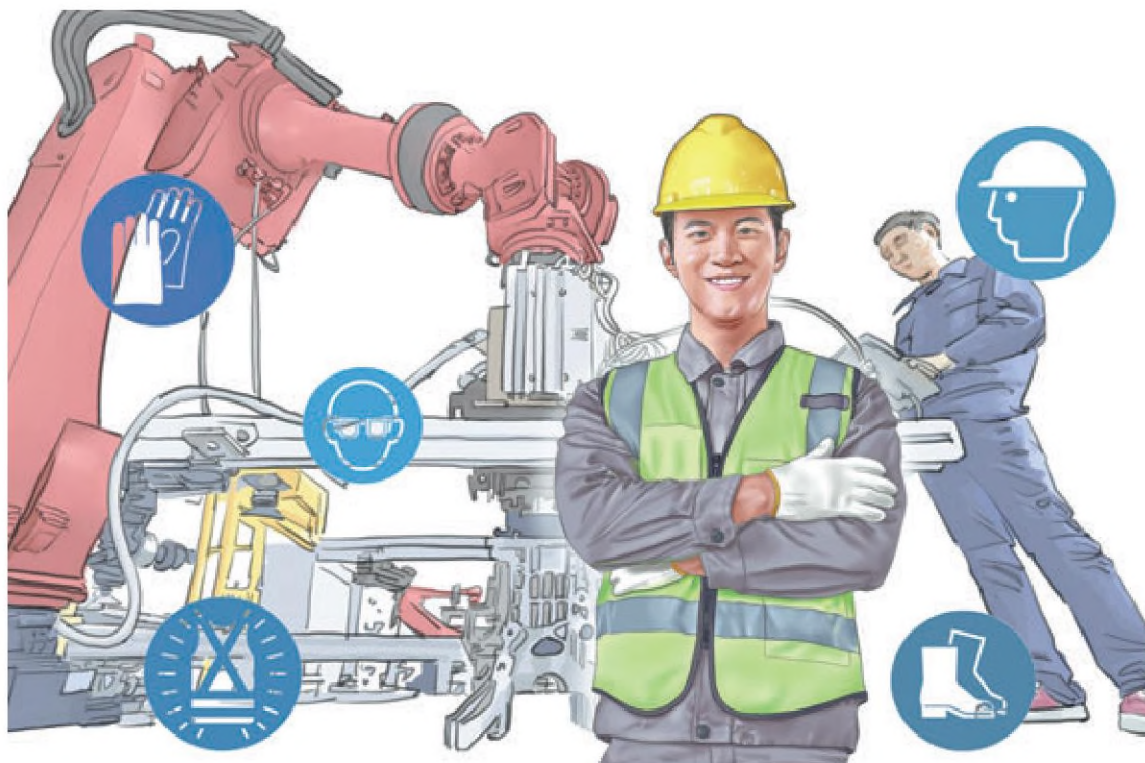
To respond to the unprecedented provocations, the People's Liberation Army has held military drills to demonstrate the country's determination and capability to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Beijing has been crystal clear and consistent that it will exercise utmost patience and strive to achieve national reunification through peaceful means but it will not rule out the use of force to reunify Taiwan with the motherland, which is a clear warning to the separatists on the Chinese island to not try Beijing's patience.

By sending navy vessels to sail through the Strait, the EU member states will heighten tensions across the Strait. As a seasoned diplomat, Borrell should know this well and speak up against the US' provocative moves and Tsai's bid to achieve "Taiwan independence", instead of adding fuel to the fire.

Like some US politicians, Borrell, whose official designation is EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, claimed that Taiwan "concerns us economically, commercially and technologically", but he should know that Taiwan concerns the mainland much more in every which way you look at it for the simple reason that it is part of the country. Even in terms of trade, the mainland is by far the bigger partner of Taiwan than the EU's 27 member states combined.

As a former Spanish foreign minister, Borrell should also realize that China has long supported Spain's sovereignty and opposed the independence movement in Catalonia. The Taiwan question is China's core interest and the redline no country should try to cross. Any foreign provocation and challenge to the country's sovereignty over the Taiwan question is a provocation and challenge to the more than 1.4 billion Chinese people.

Of course, when Borrell and other EU officials say "Europe", it really means the bloc's 27 members while Europe has some 50 countries.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Changhee Lee

A safe, healthy workplace vital for workers

Every year, some 2.9 million women and men around the world succumb to work-related accidents or diseases — that's more than 8,000 deaths every single day — and at least 402 million people suffer from non-fatal occupational injuries. The toll is enormous in terms of personal tragedy and hardship. And it comes with a huge economic loss. It is estimated that occupational accidents and diseases lead to a 5.4 percent loss of annual global GDP.

Safety and health at work concern everyone. Every accident at work and every occupational disease can be prevented. Prevention is the key. Since 2004, the International Labour Organization and its Chinese tripartite constituents have been organizing commemorative events on World Day for Safety and Health at Work on April 28 to build awareness among every enterprise and worker on the importance of building a safe and healthy working environment at every workplace.

A safe and healthy working environment is so important that in June 2022 the ILO took a historic step when it added a safe and healthy working environment to its Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Why does this matter? It matters because occupational safety and health can now no longer be viewed

The participation of both employers and workers through social dialogue and workplace cooperation is vital if a sound culture of prevention in occupational safety and health is to be created.

as an optional extra. All of the ILO's 186 member states are now obligated to respect, promote and achieve a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental principle and right at work, irrespective of whether they have ratified either of the ILO's conventions relating to occupational safety and health.

This is significant for several reasons. First and foremost, it recognizes that every worker has the right to be protected from hazards and risks that can cause injury, illness or death in the workplace.

By making occupational safety and health (OSH) a fundamental right, the ILO is sending a clear message to governments and employers of all countries that they must take responsibility for providing a safe and healthy working environment for all workers.

When workers feel safe and healthy in their workplace, they are likely to be more productive and efficient. This can benefit workers, employers as well as the wider economy. Conversely, when workers are injured or become ill due to workplace hazards, it can have a significant negative impact on productivity and economic growth.

In China, progress on occupational safety and health is being made on many fronts. China has ratified six OSH-related international labor conventions, including the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), which became a fundamental convention in 2022. China has made remarkable progress on occupational safety and health over the last two decades. Between 2005 and 2021, total workplace fatalities declined by 83 percent, and those in the coal mining sector were down by 98 percent. This shows what can be achieved when there is a strong commitment by governments and social partners.

For occupational safety and health to become a daily reality for all workers, it must be addressed alongside the ILO's other fundamental principles and rights at work. These relate to the right to organize and collective bargaining, the elimination of forced and child labor as well as ending discrimination in the world of work. These fundamental principles and rights at work

are an important part of the labor provisions in most of the free trade agreements concluded in recent years, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The participation of both employers and workers through social dialogue and workplace cooperation is vital if a sound culture of prevention in occupational safety and health is to be created. Trade unions have an important role to play in this regard, helping voice concerns of workers as well as training them in basics of OSH. Also, enterprise-level OSH committees allow workers and employers to jointly address occupational safety and health issues.

A safe and healthy working environment is now a fundamental right for each and every worker. Governments, employers, trade unions as well as companies at every level of the supply chains must work together to make this right a reality.

We can do so through shared commitment, joint efforts and by adopting a holistic approach. One which recognizes and promotes all fundamental workers' rights and helps deliver social justice and decent work for all.

The author is country director of the International Labour Organization in China and Mongolia. The views do not 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.

SUN ZHUANGZHI

Now trending, multipolarity

As developing countries demand a greater say in world affairs, it is necessary to redefine the behavioral norms of international law

President Xi Jinping first proposed the important concept of "building a new type of international relations" while speaking at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in March 2013.

He stressed that the profound changes taking place in the world brought new opportunities for multipolarity with the rapid rise of multiple centers of power, stronger economic vitality of emerging markets, and their growing influence on the international stage.

Major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics is to promote a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation. This is in line with multipolarity, which opposes group confrontation or vicious competition, but advocates respect for diversity and equal opportunities for all countries.

Entering the 21st century, multipolarity has become an obvious trend.

A new wave of technological revolution, represented by the development of the internet, big data and artificial intelligence, is becoming increasingly popular, which has not only radically changed the way of interaction between countries and peoples, but also shifted the original balance of power.

The "profound changes unseen in a century" features the rise of emerging and developing countries as a group and a world no longer dominated by a few developed countries. This is a manifestation of multipolarity.

In 2001, when the concept of BRIC was coined, the total GDP of the BRIC countries (excluding South Africa) was \$2.7 trillion, accounting for only 8 percent of the global total.

By 2021, the combined GDP of the five BRICS countries reached \$24.5 trillion, which is about 24 percent of the global total and contributes to over 50 percent of global

economic growth.

Collectively, the economies of emerging and developing countries now account for nearly 40 percent of the world's total. The changes in economic power should be reflected in world politics and international relations, which means developing countries are seeking a greater say and autonomy. This is precisely the true nature of a multipolar world.

However, not all international powers welcome multipolarity. During the Cold War, the United States used to suppress rapidly developing economies (such as Japan) to guard its hegemony, but the approach was not questioned or challenged since the economies were all allies of the US.

In contrast, the rising powers after the Cold War are mostly non-Western countries, and they seek independence not only in economy but also in politics and security.

With the founding of the G20 in 1999, developing countries have started joining developed countries in discussing and deciding the rules of international economic activities. The global financial crisis that started in the US in 2008 further raised international awareness of the dangers of a unipolar world, accelerating the shift and rise of new power centers.

However, the path of the world order has been somewhat altered, due to the complex changes in international relations, especially the escalating super-power rivalry, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and regional conflicts.

Led by the US, Western countries have taken advantage of the situation to impose unilateral sanctions and "long-arm jurisdiction", so as to strengthen an international system that suits their interests. The Joe Biden administration has sought to maintain the US hegemony by connecting with long-time allies and strengthening NATO's geopolitical influence, while making every effort to contain competitors. The path to multipolarity remains long and difficult.

To build a new kind of international relations and a healthy global governance system, it is necessary to go beyond the traditional inter-

national political thinking, learn from historical experience, and redefine the behavioral norms of international law.

First, new relationships based on trust should be built, so that countries strengthen communication and exchanges at all levels, strive to define a stable cooperation framework, and avoid unnecessary confrontation and malignant competition.

Second, new models of cooperation should be explored, so that countries interact through dialogue rather than confrontation, through partnership rather than alliance. For example, China, Russia and Central Asian countries continue to enhance their strategic partnerships, clarifying the new principle of "everlasting friendship".

Third, new concepts of development should be established to shake off the influence of the Cold War mentality and power politics, promote openness and inclusivity, and create a good development environment for all countries in the world.

Fourth, new mechanisms of interaction should be built. China's stable and friendly relations with its neighboring countries are the favorable results of policies based on "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness", as well as various cooperation and consultation mechanisms.

When President Xi met with Russian President Vladimir Putin during his state visit to Russia in March, he pointed out that both China and Russia support multipolarity and work for greater democracy in international relations, and both countries should strengthen coordination and cooperation on multilateral platforms such as the United Nations and be a bulwark for world peace and stability.

As two major neighboring countries, China and Russia have smoothly solved historical issues and established good neighborly friendship through all-round cooperation. They have continuously deepened political mutual trust, given full play to the strategic role of head-of-state diplomacy, and actively expanded pragmatic bilateral and multilateral cooperation. They have not only found a way for major powers to interact with sincerity, equality and mutual benefit, but also set an example for a new type of international relations.

As the world undergoes unprecedented changes and witnesses heated competition among major powers, the comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation between China and Russia in the new era has demonstrated strong resilience, benefiting the development and well-being of people in both countries. Moreover, through cooperation on multilateral frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, G20 and APEC, the two countries have made contributions to global and regional governance.

The author is the director of Russian, Eastern European and Middle Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a researcher of the National Institute for Global Strategy at the CASS. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

BENYAMIN POGHOSYAN

Playing second fiddle

Being the junior partner of the US in the emerging new world order is not in Europe's best interests

There are competing visions among academicians, experts and politicians on the future of international relations. What will be the primary features of the world in 10, 20, or 30 years? Will it be a world where states cooperate for the benefit of all, or will it be a "jungle" where all fight



against all and the strongest gets everything? These are challenging questions to answer, but one pattern of the emerging new world order is clear — it will not be a unipolar world, governed and controlled by one state. The unipolar moment, which emerged after the end of the Cold War and was marked by the uncontested US hegemony, is over. The growing economic and political power of other states, first of all, China, Russia, India, Brazil and others, have contributed to the process of power diffusion and its shift from the West to the East. However, the narrative about the US-led Collective West competing with the Global East is too simplistic to describe the complexity of the emerging new world order. The West is not, and perhaps never was, a monolithic pyramid with the United States sitting at the pinnacle. France's decision to withdraw from NATO's integrated military command in 1966 is one example of how individual European countries sought to protect their independence. The establishment of the European Union, and the creation of a common area of up to 500 million people with a high level of economic development, social protection and the rule of law, has significantly boosted the EU's capacities and capabilities for independent power projection. In recent years, active discussions have been underway in Europe to push forward its "strategic autonomy", a term coined by French President Emmanuel Macron. But the conflict in Ukraine and the complete disruption of Russia-West connections seem to have complicated the task of Europe increasing its autonomy. As the US took the lead in pushing forward the West's economic and military support to Ukraine, it seems that Europe has had no other choice than to accept US

After visiting China, President Macron, in an interview with Politico, stated that Europe must reduce its dependency on the US and avoid getting dragged into a confrontation between China and the US over Taiwan. Europe needs sound geopolitical analysis to avoid being downgraded into the US junior partner, who follows the US' orders regardless of the implications.

supremacy and rally behind the US, not only on Ukraine but on all other major issues, including the US policy toward China.

However, this perception is not true, and it will lead Europe nowhere. The current international relations are not a remake of the 1950s and 1960s bipolarity, where everyone was forced to make a choice between the US and the Soviet Union. The world is much more diverse, and an emerging plethora of several global players deny the logic of simple, binary choices. Europe may still opt for the US security umbrella, but Europe needs to understand that being the US' junior partner in the emerging new world order is not in Europe's best interests. First of all, it will harm Europe economically. The Ukraine conflict has already negatively impacted Europe's economy, while the US energy and defense industry companies are reaping astonishing high revenues from the increased arms and the liquefied natural gas trade. The recent US actions, including the adoption of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, have sent a clear message to everyone. The US is going to use the current geopolitical dynamics in Europe to attract European capital and intellectual know-how to the US, depriving Europe of cutting-edge

technologies and making it an economic backyard for US companies. This perspective will not only end any possibility for the EU's "strategic autonomy" but also decrease the living standards of tens of millions of people in Europe, increasing poverty and ruining the European dream. As Europe is facing tough challenges due to its economic decoupling with Russia, the US is putting pressure on the EU to start economic decoupling with China and support the US' assertive posture on Taiwan. If Europe follows this path, it will not only put an abrupt end to any possibility of the EU avoiding the fate of being a US' junior partner but will ruin the European economy, making the EU a source of human capital boosting the US demography and as the destination for US exports. It may also drag Europe into a dangerous confrontation with China for reasons that have nothing to do with European collective security or any European country's strategic interests.

Many European leaders understand the potential pitfalls of this scenario. In recent months, the German chancellor, the president of the European Council, the prime minister of Spain and the president of France have all visited China, seeking to boost bilateral relations and promote further economic cooperation. Facing the tough economic challenges due to the conflict in Ukraine and the US efforts to strengthen the US economy at the expense of Europe, economic decoupling with China is a non-starter for Europe. It is good for Europe that at least some European leaders understand this dynamic very well. After visiting China, President Macron, in an interview with Politico, stated that Europe must reduce its dependency on the US and avoid getting dragged into a confrontation between China and the US over Taiwan. Europe needs sound geopolitical analysis to avoid being downgraded into the US' junior partner, who follows the US' orders regardless of the implications.

The author is the chairman of the Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies in Yerevan, Armenia. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE



Virtual world gives viewers a different experience

By FANG AIQING

The impressive collection of literature in the Library Cave at the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Northwest China's Gansu province, represents one of the most inclusive, advanced and open facets of the ancient Chinese, says Dunhuang specialist Zhao Xiaoxing.

Sitting in the Hexi Corridor, the main artery of the ancient Silk Road, the grottoes, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, have been facilitating goods and cultural exchanges between the East and the West for more than 1,600 years.

While the Dunhuang frescoes have recorded the glories of the past visually, the more than 60,000 items of literature housed in the Library Cave, or Cave 17, dating from the 4th to the 11th centuries, have kept the historical essence through the written word, says Zhao, director of the Dunhuang Textual Research Institute, Dunhuang Academy.

She was explaining the value of the literature on April 18, during the launch of the Digital Library Cave, a gamelike program that enables users to virtually witness, and participate in, the rise and fall of the Library Cave on the website Digital Dunhuang or via the WeChat miniprogram, Cloud Museum of Dunhuang Caves.

The Library Cave was built in the mid-9th century and later remained unopened for almost 1,000 years before being accidentally discovered by Taoist priest Wang Yuanlu in 1900. The majority of its cultural relics, comprising Buddhist manuscripts, political and economic documents and other delicate and precious items, are now kept in foreign museums.

There is, as yet, no consensus on why the relics were held there initially or why the cave was later concealed, but academic efforts to reveal the cultural value of the documents have never ceased.

For example, in the digital cave, co-initiated by the Dunhuang Academy and technology company Tencent, users can zoom in on a 10th-century account of beverage expenses claimed by the local government that was attempting to lubricate the wheels of domestic and foreign affairs.

The account shows that the government at the time had established a mature organizational structure and a strict reimbursement system, and suggests that there was religious diversity, prosperous handicraft production and multiple folk activities. The digital cave project presents the ancient document that holds these accounts, in its entirety, despite the fact that, in reality, it was split into three parts, with two held domestically and one in France.

Zhao adds, while official historical materials dealt mainly with big events, many documents found in the Library Cave recorded things about society at the grassroots level, such as registered residences, providing a micro social landscape through which researchers today are able to piece together what household life was like in those times.

According to Su Bomin, director of the Dunhuang Academy, the digitalization process of the frescoes started in the late 1980s.

After three decades, it has collected digital information from nearly 300 out of the 735 Mogao Caves, supported by the central government and in collaboration with universities and academic institutions.

Zhao says people will naturally view Dunhuang Studies as profound and possibly unfathomable. Therefore, it is imperative that information is relayed in a way that can be easily accessed to popularize the history and value of Dunhuang, and that virtual-world projects like the Digital Library Cave enable people to see things more clearly.

Currently, her institute has been targeting the organization and research of Ancient Tibetan and caoshu (cursive script) literature kept at Dunhuang, and extending the Dunhuang Documents Database, especially for scholars and enthusiasts worldwide to view, search and compare the full texts of Dunhuang literature.

Digital caves bring history alive

Past and present merge into a fascinating and educational presentation of ancient legacies, Fang Aiqing reports in Dunhuang, Gansu.

For more than a century, the Library Cave, or Cave 17 of the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang, in Northwest China's Gansu province, has been famous for its extraordinary collection of relics and a tale that has had its share of twists and turns.

For many who have had their curiosity piqued and want to know more about its legendary past, the Gobi Desert and the arduous journey to get there has deterred them from visiting to see for themselves the grandeur of the Dunhuang frescoes, while preservation requirements have resulted in limits on the number of visitors allowed access.

However, the Digital Library Cave, launched by the Dunhuang Academy in conjunction with technology company Tencent on April 18, International Day for Monuments and Sites, joins an array of measures that give the public the chance to get a virtual glimpse of the ancient wonder.

With technological solutions and narratives that are usually applied in digital games, it provides an immersive, interactive experience with not only a representation of the physical grottoes, but also historical scenes re-created, based on the joint input of scholars and engineers.

Su Bomin, director of the academy, says: "The project has enabled the relics to come alive with new means of expression. It makes the value of these relics more accessible to the audience, especially the younger generation."

Miraculous discovery

When Taoist priest Wang Yuanlu accidentally discovered the Library Cave and opened the entrance of the sand-buried treasure trove in 1900, more than 60,000 Buddhist manuscripts, documents pertaining to government and social economy, silk paintings, embroidery and sacred articles, among others, were brought to light after nearly 1,000 years of isolation.

Rows of scrolls, dating from the 4th to the 11th centuries, piled up from floor to ceiling in the square chamber, which is 2.6 meters in length and width and 3 meters in height, making it one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the 20th century. It is regarded as one of the four major discoveries of ancient Chinese documents.

However, most of these relics were taken overseas, held in museums in London, Paris, Tokyo and St. Petersburg.

Today, in Cave 17, a painted statue of Hongbian, chief of monks and a politically influential figure when the cave was built in the mid-9th century, said to be the owner of the cave, sits on a bed of earth, meditating.

The mural behind him depicts two Bodhi trees with a fabric bag and a water flask hanging on the branches. Also shown are a Buddhist nun with a silk fan in hand and a female follower wearing the clothes of a man, holding a scepter and a towel. The west wall of the cave is embedded with a stele inscribed with stories of Hongbian's life.

The statue, which is believed to be a true-to-life portrayal of Hongbian, was originally found in Cave 362, nearly three stories above Cave 17.



From top: The Digital Library Cave project re-creates the 1,600-meter-long external cliff face of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province. Representation of the Library Cave, with a statue of its supposed owner Monk Hongbian in the mid-9th century, can be found in the digital version. The project reproduces the Library Cave filled with rows of manuscripts as it was when rediscovered in the beginning of the 20th century. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In the 1960s, Chang Shuhong (1904-94), the first director of the Dunhuang Academy, suggested relocating the statue to Cave 17, which, as it turned out, seemed to fit the "new" setting perfectly. This indicated that the statue was very likely placed there originally, but moved to the upper cave to make room for the manuscripts at some point later.

In the digital tour, a view of Cave 17 filled with ancient treasures — as it looked when it was originally unearthed — and what it looks like today, can both be seen.

In-game learning

Just like in a game, the audience plays the role of a time-traveling explorer and, under the guidance of Mogao Caves' digital ambassador Jiayao, participates in, and witnesses the passing of the millennium, from when the cave was built, sealed and rediscovered, to how the relics were lost or scattered, and reunited virtually.



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.



During the process, the audience will meet eight non-player characters, all real historical figures, including Hongbian and Wang, the controversial Taoist priest.

"The Digital Library Cave is a combination of art, academic research and technology," says Li Hang, vice-president of Tencent's Corporate Marketing and Public

Relations, adding that it lowers the threshold required to learn about the cave and the relics, therefore extending the reach of the site to a wider audience.

According to Li, the project has facilitated the creation of a "digital twin" of the 1,600-meter-long external cliff face of the Mogao Caves and its 16th and 17th caves that is accurate to the millimeter, as well as exact digital re-creations of the murals, statues and relics housed there.

The surroundings are dotted with indigenous plants, and the exploration experience is accompanied by pieces of background music played with traditional instruments like *pipa* (a four-stringed lute), *bili* (a double-reed pipe) and drums, all of which can be seen in the murals at Dunhuang.

Alongside the use of high-definition digital scanning, the project also involves physically based rendering, a technical approach for better game rendering, to realize

Rigorous approach

In the digital version of the caves stands the Sanjie Temple, a well-known nearby historical site that no longer exists.

According to Zhao Xiaoxing, director of the Dunhuang Textual Research Institute, Dunhuang Academy, scholars speculate that the manuscripts found in Cave 17 were part of a 10th-century large-scale sutra restoration project at the temple. Some of them might be materials used by the monks to repair the manuscripts.

Zhao wrote the scripts and storyline for the game, based on the academy's decades of research.

The several-second presentation of the 3D model temple took the technological team months of effort. When it was almost completed, it fell over, and the team had to start over.

Zhao explains, the original design was so grand that it looked more like an official temple in cities such as Chang'an, today's Xi'an in Shaanxi province, and Luoyang, Henan province, and, as such, didn't fit the surroundings of the Mogao Caves.

They then worked with the academy's ancient architectural expert Sun Yihua, reexamined historical references and adjusted the design, from the layout to the main body of the architecture, and even the orientation of the statues on both sides of the pagoda gate.

A large group of young scholars at the academy, specializing in various fields like literature, art, music and dance, archaeology and new media technologies, have been participating in the digital cave project, with meticulous verification of every scene and detail, Zhao says.

The game can be accessed either on the website Digital Dunhuang, or via the WeChat miniprogram, Cloud Museum of Dunhuang Caves.

According to the two organizations, in the near future, Digital Library Cave will be available in multiple languages, including English, Japanese and Korean, as this year marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, and Dunhuang, sitting in the Hexi Corridor, the main artery of the ancient Silk Road, historically served as a vital crossroads for trade, religious and cultural exchanges.

Contact the writer at fangaiqing@chinadaily.com.cn

LIFESHANGHAI



The stage is set for the Mandarin production of the *Phantom of the Opera* at the Shanghai Grand Theatre, with Lin Han (left) playing Christine Daae and Ayunga (right) in the title role of the Phantom. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Phantom set to appear

Chinese version of popular opera ready to thrill audiences with hauntingly romantic tale, **Zhang Kun** reports.

The first Chinese production of the *Phantom of the Opera* will premiere at the Shanghai Grand Theatre on Tuesday, and theater lovers in China are clearly looking forward to it, if the audience numbers of a recent livestream are anything to go by.

A few days after the *Phantom of the Opera* had its last curtain call on Broadway on April 16, the Shanghai Grand Theatre, which is behind the first Chinese production of the musical, lit up the musical's signature chandelier at its premises on April 19.

The lighting of the 3-meter-wide chandelier, which has more than 6,000 crystal beads and weighs 1 metric ton, was livestreamed on multiple internet platforms and watched by more than 1 million people.

One of the most popular musical productions in the world, the *Phantom of the Opera* by Andrew Lloyd Webber is the longest-running show in Broadway history. Since its debut in 1986, the musical has been performed in 85 cities around the world.

The Chinese production will be the 18th language the show is performed in.

Two weeks before its premiere, the Shanghai Grand Theatre invited members of the media for a backstage tour. Denny Berry, the executive choreographer for the Chinese edition, who also used to work with the flagship production in New York, told the media that being in Shanghai was "bittersweet" as her



Left: The Chinese edition will premiere at the Shanghai Grand Theatre on Tuesday. It will be the 18th language the show is performed in. Right: A news conference was held on April 19 with Rainer Fried (far left), the executive director for the Chinese edition, and executive choreographer Denny Berry (center).



If you go

Phantom of the Opera

- May 2-June 4, Shanghai Grand Theatre, 300 Renmin Avenue, Huangpu district, Shanghai. 021-6386-8686.
- June 13-July 2, Bay Opera of Shenzhen, 16 Huanlei Gangwan, Baoting Road, Binhai Community, Baoan district, Shenzhen, Guangdong province.
- July 25-Aug 13, Guangzhou Opera House, No 1 Zhujiang Road West, Tianhe district, Guangzhou, Guangdong province. 020-3839-2888.

colleagues had to "put to bed the flagship production" while she had to be here in another country to bring to life the musical's first Mandarin production.

Stage rehearsals for the Chinese production began on the same day the *Phantom of the Opera* had its final curtain call at the Majestic Theatre on Broadway.

The Chinese production team consists of more than 120 members, 40 of whom work with the technical department.

According to Rainer Fried, the executive director of the Chinese production, all casting was conducted online in a "nerve-wrecking, long process" due to the pandemic. It was

only six weeks ago that more than 40 cast members from the original Webber production landed in Shanghai.

Fried describes the feeling of walking into the rehearsal room and meeting the cast as "emotional, moving and scary", but he expresses satisfaction with the casting choices. "We haven't made a single casting mistake. The actors exceeded expectations completely. I can't speak highly enough of them," he says.

Fried adds that he was especially impressed with the translation team, who stayed close by in the room during the rehearsals in Shanghai, an unusual practice com-

pared to other international productions.

"I realized the great difficulty in translating a show as big as the *Phantom* into Chinese. ... I am grateful for the devoted and passionate translation team. Their input ensured the first Chinese production would be a beautiful show," he says.

According to Zhao Chenlin, executive producer of the show, the installation of the stage settings and technical rehearsals required an entire month because of the amount of work involved. She notes that the props and equipment alone filled 22 trucks, and unloading them took three whole nights.

The scene of the secret lake under

the Opera Garnier, Zhao points out, is one example of how detailed the settings for the Chinese production are. To achieve a misty, fantasy-like effect on the lake surface, the production crew will use more than 280 candles, dry ice weighing 250 kilograms and 10 smoke machines.

Jill Parker, the assistant costume designer, says that most of the props and costumes were specially made for the Chinese production, with only a small portion inherited from touring productions.

"From handwoven rhinestones to the gowns to elaborate embroideries to layers after layers of fabric, there is not a costume in *Phantom* that isn't labor-intensive," she says. "Some are so fragile they have to be cleaned by hand after use."

One of the three male actors who will play the title role of the Phantom is Ayunga, who is also the co-producer of the Chinese musical.

The Chinese production of the *Phantom of the Opera* is of great significance to the future development of China's theater industry, he says, noting that the Japanese edition that premiered in 1988 helped the production company become a leading player in Asia. The Korean edition also left a great impact on the live show business in South Korea.

"We have now planted the seeds, and I believe that with the success of the Chinese *Phantom*, the musical scene in China will go on to blossom."

Contact the writer at zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

Cellist feels the melody of home calling

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai

One of the most globally renowned Chinese musicians, cellist Wang Jian is back home in Shanghai.

The 54-year-old musician has been active in the international music scene for decades. He first came to public attention in 1981 as the serious-looking little boy holding on to the cello that seemed too big for his arms in the Academy Award-winning documentary *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China*.

Through the past decades he has had a successful career, performing with leading orchestras all over the world, such as the London Symphony, Zurich Tonhalle, NDR Elbphilharmonie, and Stockholm Philharmonic, among others.

In March, he moved back from Europe to Shanghai with his family, taking a teaching job at the string department of his alma mater, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Last week, his grand comeback concert with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, *Salute to Wang Jian*, took place at the Shanghai Symphony Hall, when he played *Hymnus for 12 Cellos* by German composer and cellist Julius Klengel with the 12-piece cello section of the orchestra.

"It was musicians like Wang Jian that showed the world Chinese culture and music since China's reform

and opening-up," says Yu Long, artistic director of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and conductor of the concert.

On Friday, Wang gives a recital with pianist Xue Yingjia at the Shanghai Oriental Art Center.

"I have been returning frequently to Shanghai in the past 10 years, and witnessed the great changes in China," Wang says ahead of the concert at the Shanghai Symphony Hall. "Ten years ago I would not have been able to give a cello recital," he says, as chamber music did not attract an audience in those days.

China has made dramatic progress in the socioeconomic development and the cultural scene has seen rapid growth in audiences for classical music.

Tickets for his recital at the Shanghai Oriental Art Center sold out within two hours.

He recalls that his father, who taught him the basics of the cello when he was 4, used to take him swimming in winter, at the outdoor diving pool located at today's Shanghai Symphony Hall. "It was bone-piercing cold," he says. "But it really benefited my health."

Wang moved to Shanghai from Xi'an, Shaanxi province, at 4, to live with his father who was a cellist with the *yangbanzi* (model play) troupe under the Shanghai Peking Opera Theatre. It was, at that time,

one of the most important cultural institutions in China, and it provided a venue where a large number of outstanding musicians, singers and composers could work together.

His mother, a flutist who graduated from the Xi'an Conservatory of Music, managed to join them in Shanghai nine years later.

To keep his toddler son company, his father borrowed a viola from a colleague, so that the boy could imitate him when he practiced on the cello. That was how Wang began to learn to play the instrument. The dormitory room where he lived with his father was so tiny that he had to practice in the courtyard.

When he was 9, Wang was enrolled into the primary school attached to Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He was an outstanding student, and was often sent to perform for important foreign visitors to the city. In 1979, Isaac Stern, a celebrated violinist from the United States made a historical visit to China. Wang saw him at school.

He had no idea whom the maestro violinist was, because at that time Chinese students only had access to classical music from Russia. He remembered the musician in an orange shirt, his face red from the sunburn, with a pair of glasses pushed to the forehead.

The boy only played a few stanzas when Stern called on the camera

team to come over. "They rushed up, turned on the flash and while I played on, Mr Stern kept applauding, and saying 'bravo!'"

In 1981, the documentary about Stern's visit — *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China* — was released and won an Oscar for the best documentary. Wang became known internationally as the child prodigy playing the cello with a big frown and his eyes often closed.

"I had this bitter and serious look since I was a child," Wang told the media recently. "Such facial expressions even I didn't like. But then I realized it reveals my effort. ... When you play you have to open your heart and remove all the masks, so that you concentrate on the deepest and strongest emotion from the bottom of your heart. You can't possibly have a smile on your face at times like this."

In 1981, Wang played with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra for the first time. It was a concert for Children's Day, and he was picked by the conductor Huang Yijun to play a concerto by Camille Saint-Saens. "Those grandpas with the orchestra asked how old I was and I said 12. They said 'no way, you must have a girlfriend. You have the feelings of a grown-up, and a grown-up who had suffered.'"

In 1985, he went to the US where he studied with the renowned cellist



Above: Cellist Wang Jian (center) performs at the Shanghai Symphony Hall in April. Left: Wang joined the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, in 1992, as a soloist during its European tour. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Aldo Parisot at Yale University for eight years. In 1992, the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra went on a tour to Europe and Wang joined the company as a soloist. The next year, he completed his studies and came back to Shanghai to play with the orchestra again.

Now that he is back home, Wang

hopes to play more concerts, and take more cello music to cities that he has never been to before.

"There are all these new concert halls, and people are picking up new aesthetic interests for chamber music. We will be able to bring more pieces that were previously never heard there," he says.

Shanghai incentivizing Thai investment

No shortage of opportunities for new business ventures



A view of the landmark Lujiazui area in Shanghai, East China. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

By TANG ZHIHAO
tangzhihao@chinadaily.com.cn

Shanghai, a bustling metropolis in East China, has been an attractive business destination for global investors since the nation's reform and opening-up in the 1980s. In its ongoing pursuit of exemplary development, the city is eager to expand its partnerships with Thai companies to ensure mutual long-term prosperity.

According to officials from Shanghai's commission of commerce, Shanghai and Thailand could deepen cooperation in trade, high-end manufacturing and innovation to unlock more business potential in coming years. The city is also seeking to expand partnerships with Thai businesses to promote innovation in fields such as industrial design, digital transformation, green development, tourism, and healthcare.

In prioritizing quality development, Shanghai has identified three key industries — integrated circuits, biomedicine and artificial intelligence — as well as advanced manufacturing and consumption. Tremendous opportunities are also forecast in emerging sectors such as metaverse technology and green transition.

"Thailand has released a 20-year development plan called 'Thailand 4.0', aimed at transitioning from an economy that is dependent on producing existing products designed by others to one led by innovation, research and development," said an official from Shanghai Commission of Commerce. "Against this backdrop, investment and cooperation between Shanghai and Thailand are essential."

Shanghai is home to more than 60,000 foreign-funded enterprises and boasts 891 headquarters of foreign companies and 531 foreign-invested R&D centers. Global investors cite the city's solid industrial development, complete industrial chain, diversified economy and favorable regulatory climate as major draws. Its significant investments in infrastructure, innovation, modern transportation systems, education and start-up support are other attractions.

Shanghai attracted 1,375 major investment projects in 2022, totaling over 1.2 trillion yuan (\$173.33 billion), and according to officials from the city's commission of commerce, the trade volume between Shanghai and Thailand reached 86.6 billion yuan — a 4.76 percent year-on-year increase. In 2022, Thailand investors set up 10 new businesses in Shanghai with a total investment of \$9.14 million.

Top investment spot

Phaichit Viboonatanasarn, vice-president and secretary-general of the Thai Chamber of Commerce in China, was recently asked to define the key characteristics of Shanghai. He chose the Chinese idiom "hai na bai chuan", which translates to "the sea embracing all rivers". This term is used to describe an open-mindedness that accommodates different business-



From left: Visitors queue up at the exhibition booth of CP Group at the fifth China International Import Expo. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY
Bank of China has a significant presence at the CIIE. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

es and ideas, much like an ocean accommodating rivers from all directions.

"Excellent business models, talents, technology, and culture from around the world collide and precipitate new fruits here," he said. "With the comprehensive promotion of the Chinese path to modernization, Shanghai will be the vanguard of the journey."

Major Thai enterprises like Charoen Pokphand Group, Bangkok Bank, Saha-Union Investment, and Thai Eastern Industries have all established footholds in the city. "Whether in the fields of finance, logistics, manufacturing, international trade, services, or fast-moving consumer goods, Thai companies use their professional experience and uphold the traditional friendship of 'China-Thailand Family' to participate in and witness the development process of Shanghai," said Viboonatanasarn.

"The first and foremost factor considered by Thai enterprises in judging an investment destination is a high degree of political and economic stability, followed by a big and growing market size and a well-developed ecosystem of the industry. Shanghai has always had a top score in those fields."

Continuing expansion

CP Group began its journey in Shanghai with a joint venture with SAIC Motors to produce motorcy-

cles in 1985. As of today, the group has invested \$2.4 billion in 15 projects in the industrial, agricultural, financial, real estate, commercial retail and import and export sectors.

"Shanghai offers the best investment environment, providing excellent opportunities for mutually beneficial and profitable investments," said Thanakorn Seriburi, senior vice-president of Chia Tai Group of Companies.

Over the past 38 years, CP Group achieved many "firsts" in China, including becoming the first foreign enterprise to invest in a domestic television production when the Zhengda Variety Show debuted on China Central Television in 1990. The group also funded construction of CP Plaza, one of Shanghai's largest shopping centers, in the city's Lujiazui district in 2002.

"CP Group has been impressed by the city's dynamic spirit of constant transformation and its core values of openness, innovation, and inclusiveness. Additionally, CP Group has appreciated the government's efficient work style, which prioritizes integrity, standardization, and a commitment to keeping promises. These factors have collectively contributed to creating a favorable investment environment in Shanghai for CP Group," said Seriburi.

Seriburi said CP Group would



continue investing in Shanghai, particularly in the commercial retail industry that was affected by the pandemic. It will restructure its commercial retail business to support Shanghai as a global consumption hub while focusing on the pharmaceutical, manufacturing, automotive and livelihood support industries to create new business opportunities.

Kasikornbank, also known as KBank, one of Thailand's leading financial institutions, launched its Shanghai branch in 2017 and plans to set up a foreign limited partner fund management company and QFLP fund in the Lin-gang Special Area of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone to further consolidate its growth. The bank is applying for a quota of 1.5 billion yuan.

"Shanghai offers a vibrant and supportive ecosystem for investment," said Natthorn Chaiyapruk, senior vice-president of Kasikornbank. "This QFLP Fund establishment in Shanghai will be an important move of KBank entering the private equity investment market in China. It will create synergies among KBank's resources and partners to further enhance our business development in China and the ASEAN Economic Community."

Chaiyapruk cited three factors in choosing Lin-gang for the new project: strong policy stimulation covering tax incentives, cross-border

fund facilitation and tariff preferences; sound business environment and a growing industrial ecosystem which focuses on developing high technology, financial services and advanced manufacturing industries. The Lin-gang Special Area was established in 2019 and has become a hub of industries such as advanced manufacturing, international trade, cross-border financial services, modern shipping and innovation.

Driving to a bright future

Shanghai will maximize its advantages to play a larger role in supporting global investors toward bigger goals in the post-pandemic era. This year, to further enhance the city's appeal to investors, the Shanghai government has implemented policies to ease market access and increase support for innovation and entrepreneurship.

During the Shanghai Global Investment Promotion Conference on April 6, the city announced 24 new investment promotion policies, including incentive plans to strengthen the confidence of global investors and attract major projects to the region.

For example, headquarters projects can qualify for a subsidy of up to 10 million yuan for property purchase or leasing, and major investment projects can receive up to 100 million yuan. Discount loans and financing leasing subsidies will also

be provided to businesses that plan to expand production capacity.

Shanghai is also poised to welcome more Thai investors with professional platforms and services. The city's China International Import Expo, held annually in November, has become a key platform to provide Thai businesses with insight about China. It is also of great importance in introducing food and agricultural products to Chinese consumers.

Since 2018, Orient International (Holding) Co, a leading local service provider, has introduced more than 10 Thai enterprises to the CIIE with a total exhibition area spanning more than 2,000 square meters, to showcase fruit products, latex products, clothing and jewelry. Jin Danyan, general manager of Orient International Business Group, pointed out that the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, signed in 2022, will boost trade between China and Thailand.

Connecting businesses

Shanghai serves as both a pivot for Thai businesses seeking investment opportunities in China and a bridge linking Chinese enterprises with Thailand.

According to the city's commission of commerce, between 2012 and 2022, 52 projects directly invested by enterprises and organizations from Shanghai were launched in Thailand.

In March, China's new energy vehicle brand Neta, which landed its management headquarters, R&D center and marketing functions in Shanghai in 2021, set up a manufacturing base in Bangkok to produce right-hand drive electric vehicles and support exports throughout member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It also signed a partnership agreement with the Thai company BGAC to establish a modern electric vehicle assembly base to help build a green electric vehicle ecosystem in Thailand.

These two moves signify Neta's entry into a new phase of fast and stable development in the ASEAN, marking a new milestone in its globalization efforts, according to the company. The company said the reasons for establishing a presence in Shanghai are the city's talented workforce, geographical advantages and strong economic foundation.

Bank of China Shanghai branch, which serves a large number of foreign enterprises in Shanghai, is also eager to utilize its expertise to support Thai businesses in establishing a presence in the city. Leveraging its experience in serving numerous Fortune 500 companies and foreign-funded headquarters, the bank provides comprehensive and integrated financial services for Thai investors as well as global cash management and centralized management products.

Building on its international advantages and expertise in areas such as technology finance, cross-border finance, and supply chain finance, Bank of China continues to innovate its product system and improve its financial service capabilities. This provides strong financial support for more Thai enterprises investing and developing in Shanghai.



Visitors at the exhibition booth of Thai food and agricultural products at the fifth China International Import Expo held in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ADVERTORIAL