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CHINA DAILY

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Flooding aftermath



People continue searching for bodies on Monday in Nyamukubi, South Kivu Province, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, after the village was hit by floods caused by heavy rains last week. The death toll from floods and landslides triggered by heavy rains in the eastern regions of the country rose to over 400, an official said on Sunday. GUERCHOM NDEBO / AFP See story, page 3

Country's foreign trade to maintain steady growth

By ZHONG NAN and WANG KEJU

China's foreign trade will maintain steady growth in 2023, thanks to the improved trade structure and the nation's proactive measures to tackle challenges such as geopolitical tensions and fluctuations in external demand, experts said.

The growth of China's foreign trade will play a key role in underpinning the global supply chain this year, they said.

Exports, one of the main contributors to China's GDP, are expected to expand in the second half of this year, as the country's factories have the ability to adapt swiftly to foreign customers' changing tastes and demands, they said.

Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said that the new growth engines of China's foreign trade are likely to come from member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and those related to the Belt and Road Initiative.

China's foreign trade grew by 5.8 percent year-on-year to 13.32 trillion yuan (\$1.92 trillion) in the first four months of 2023, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Exports rose 10.6 percent year-on-year to 7.67 trillion yuan, further easing market concerns over the export outlook of the world's second-largest economy for this year.

The strong performance of China's exports between January and April was driven by its fast-growing green and high-end manufacturing industries, including new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells, as well as domestic companies' greater participation in trade shows both at home and abroad, Zhou said.

He predicted that overseas demand will continue to rebound in the third and fourth quarters, as inflation in overseas countries gradually eases in the first half of this year.

Lyu Daliang, director-general of the GAC's statistics and analysis

department, said the government's newly introduced policies to promote the stability, scale and quality of foreign trade will unleash the confidence and strength of China's export-oriented companies.

China, for instance, will host a large number of offline exhibitions and promote the resumption of international passenger flights. It will issue country-specific trade guidelines, help automakers establish and improve their international marketing and service systems, and improve foreign trade financing services for medium, small and micro-sized companies, according to information released by the Ministry of Commerce last month.

"These measures will effectively improve the quality of China's foreign trade throughout the year," Lyu said.

Wu Chaoming, deputy director of the Chasing International Economic Institute, is optimistic about robust foreign trade growth in 2023.

He said China's commitment to

speeding up the modernization of its industrial system would also motivate both exporters and foreign-funded companies to invest more in innovation and production capacity, despite the US' attempts to decouple in key supply chain areas.

Zhang Yansheng, chief researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, said that domestic manufacturers should seize the opportunity to upgrade their manufacturing capacity, provide global customers with higher value-added products and secure more orders.

At the same time, diversification of international markets must be better leveraged to offset losses caused by shrinking demand from some European countries and the United States. Greater efforts should be made to extend trade cooperation with countries and regions involved in the BRI and ASEAN, Zhang said.

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Geopolitical alternative taking shape in Asia

WORLD WATCH
By Djoomart Otorbaev

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in July in New Delhi, India, is expected to make several momentous decisions. One will be regarding the admission of Saudi Arabia to the organization.

On March 29, Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud signed a memorandum of understanding on dialogue partner status for the country. This status is the first step before granting a country full membership.

The SCO's foundations were laid in the 1980s when the then Soviet Union and China started the final round of negotiations to demarcate their long border. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation and the republics of Central Asia became participants in the talks.

After they settled territorial issues, the parties decided to deepen regional cooperation and established the SCO in 2001.

The organization has grown rapidly since then. Its current members are China, India, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In addition to Saudi Arabia, dialogue partners are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Egypt, Nepal, Qatar, Sri Lanka and Türkiye. Observers are Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia. The SCO summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, last year began the process of including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, the Maldives and Myanmar as new dialogue partners.

Saudi Arabia's move to partner with the organization came less than three weeks after a historic Chinese-brokered reconciliation deal with Iran to restore diplomatic ties.

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Headed to US



Migrants walk through a barbed-wire barrier into the United States after crossing the Rio Bravo from Matamoros, Mexico, on Tuesday. The US is preparing for the end of the Title 42 policy on Thursday. Under the health regulation, which was put in place amid the coronavirus pandemic, the US quickly expelled many migrants seeking asylum. FERNANDO LLANO / AP See story on page 7

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Reciprocal move by China 'fully justified'

Diplomat declared 'unwelcome' following Canada's unreasonable provocation

By ZHOU JIN
zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

China on Tuesday declared Shanghai-based Canadian diplomat Jennifer Lynn Lalonde "persona non grata" and asked the consular official to leave the country before Saturday in response to the Canadian side's unreasonable provocation.

The move against Lalonde is a reciprocal countermeasure after Canada on Monday declared a diplomat of the Consulate-General of China in Toronto "persona non grata" and expelled the diplomat based on so-called allegations that Beijing tried to intimidate a Canadian politician and interfere in the country's elections.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular news briefing that China has lodged serious representations and a strong protest to Canada, and the countermeasure taken by China is to uphold its legitimate rights and interests, which is fully justified and necessary.

China will not waver in its resolve to uphold its interests, he said, urging Canada to immediately stop the provocation.

"If Ottawa decides to continue its wanton acts, Beijing will make a resolute response and all consequences must be borne by Canada," Wang said.

The spokesman emphasized that China never interferes in the internal affairs of other countries, saying that the unfounded claims by Canada are political manipulation driven by ideology and designed to denigrate China.

It is vicious for Canada to make such trumped-up accusations, which violate the basic norms governing international relations

“If Ottawa decides to continue its wanton acts, Beijing will make a resolute response and all consequences must be borne by Canada.”

Wang Wenbin,
Foreign Ministry spokesman

and undermine its relationship with China, Wang said.

According to Wang, for quite some time, Canadian media and relevant politicians have cited so-called classified documents and fabricated disinformation to smear the Chinese diplomatic and consular missions in Canada.

The accusations are not based on facts but are trumped-up and have a hidden agenda, he said.

China's Consulate General in Toronto said the slander against its staff "has no factual basis and is totally groundless."

The consulate said it has always followed the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the Consular Agreement between the two countries and that its officers have never engaged in activities inconsistent with their official capacities.

"Those Canadian media and politicians have been spreading disinformation with intent to damage the reputation and image of the Chinese Consulate General and maliciously disrupt normal exchanges and cooperation between the two sides," the consulate said.

NATION'S MODERNIZATION DRIVE ATTRACTS GLOBAL ATTENTION

Shanghai forum participants salute new model for human advancement

By CAO DESHENG
caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

In-depth

As China strives to advance its modernization, international attention is focusing on how the nation will fulfill its ambition to become a modern socialist country by the middle of this century and how that process will affect the rest of the world.

The Communist Party of China laid out the central task of advancing national rejuvenation through a Chinese path toward modernization at its 20th National Congress in October.

The Party views Chinese modernization as not being solely related to achieving material wealth or a higher level of efficiency than that offered by the capitalist system. Rather, it is about effectively maintaining a higher degree of social equity, providing 1.4 billion people with a prosperous and dignified life, and promoting harmony

between humankind and nature. More important, the CPC pledged that Chinese modernization will lay a path for peaceful development, and that China will not achieve modernization through colonization or invasion. Neither will it seek hegemony or expansion.

In a congratulatory message sent to the Lanting Forum on Chinese Modernization and the World, held in Shanghai on April 21, President Xi Jinping assured the world that China will provide new opportunities for global development with new accomplishments in Chinese modernization.

It will also give new impetus to humanity's search for paths toward modernization and better social systems.

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Xi's comments were echoed by political leaders, business executives and think tank researchers from nearly 80 countries taking part in the forum. They said China's modernization not only matters to the well-being of the Chinese people, but also creates a new model for human advancement.

Dilma Rousseff, president of the New Development Bank, said: "As a former president of Brazil, I am fully aware of what different patterns of modernization can mean for the peoples of the Global South. Over the centuries, a false modernization was imposed on us, which initially took the form of colonialism, with its killings of the indigenous population, slavery and predatory extractivism."

Rousseff said that more recently, financial neo-liberalism has implied a brutal process of concentration of income and wealth in the hands of a few, and once again, millions of people have been left behind.

"The push for modernization proposed and promoted by China provides a new choice and demonstrates that another world is necessary and possible. This is crucial at this time of greater fragmentation caused by climate change, by the intensification of geopolitical conflicts, by the disruption of production chains, and by a movement of de-globalization," she said.

Rousseff commended the Chinese path toward modernization, particularly its principle of promoting common prosperity.

"The great effect of this modernization for countries of the Global South lies in building a community with a shared future for mankind. And this commitment made by China could help bridge the gap between the global North and South and help create a more inclusive multipolar international order," she said.

Tough journey

Modernization for China has been a journey of hardship and perseverance. In modern times, countless Chinese patriots have looked to the West for a modernization formula to save the nation, but all the formulas failed.

Under the leadership of the CPC, China has found a path to modernization through its own efforts. Over the past 100 years or so, the nation has transformed from being impoverished and backward into the world's second-largest economy, the top trader in goods, the biggest holder of foreign exchange reserves, and the biggest manufacturer.

China has put in place the world's largest compulsory education system, social security system, and medical and health system — achieving in just a few decades industrialization that took developed countries several centuries to realize.

Over the 40-plus years since reform and opening-up was launched, the Chinese government has lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty and increased the middle-income group's population to over 400 million.

China is now the main trading partner of more than 140 countries and regions. It places \$320 billion in direct investment around the world each day, while attracting over 3,000 foreign businesses every month, Foreign Ministry data show. Over the past decade, China has contributed more to global growth than all the G7 countries combined.

Foreign investors cannot afford to ignore the immense commercial prospects created by the vast Chinese market that boasts a rapidly growing middle-income group. Due to uncertainty caused by mounting geopolitical competition between major countries, some observers may be skeptical about China's modernization process, but others consider it has enormous potential.

Martin Jacques, former senior fellow



MAXUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Modernization: Fresh opportunities offered

at Cambridge University's Department of Politics and International Studies, said that when it comes to the nature of modernization, people always think of it primarily in technological and economic terms.

"I think that is obviously important, but it's much too narrow, because fundamental to Western modernization was the division of the world. Fundamental to Chinese modernization are only the opportunities to the world, particularly to the developing world, to develop and to modernize," he said.

Jacques added that Western modernization started at a time when Western countries used the rest of the world as a way to enrich themselves. In an extraordinary shift, the developing world had its first opportunity to modernize in the second half of the 20th century, he said.

"Led ultimately by China, you get this incredible transformation where modernization is actually the possibility for all of humanity, not for a tiny minority of Western countries. So the arrival of the developing world and the arrival of China transform the whole global landscape."

Noting that China's growth is redefining the notion of modernization, Jacques said the nation's rise is going to change the world in a way the West can't cope with. "The West, in my view, is basically frozen. It has no strategy. It doesn't understand China. It's like a rabbit caught in the headlights," he said.

Strategic plan

To build itself into a great modern socialist country in all respects, China has adopted a two-step strategic plan — to basically realize socialist modernization from 2020 through 2035, and to become a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful from 2035 through the middle of this century.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, said at the 20th

“The push for modernization proposed and promoted by China provides a new choice and demonstrates that another world is necessary and possible. This is crucial at this time of greater fragmentation caused by climate change, by the intensification of geopolitical conflicts, by the disruption of production chains and by a movement of de-globalization.”

Dilma Rousseff, former president of Brazil and president of New Development Bank, the multilateral bank set up by the BRICS states

CPC National Congress: "In pursuing modernization, China will not tread the old path of war, colonization and plunder taken by some countries ... We will strive to safeguard world peace and development as we pursue our own development, and we will make greater contributions to world peace and development through our own development."

Observers said the Chinese path toward modernization abandons the old Western way of modernization, which is capital-centric and characterized by soaring materialism and external expansion. It also breaks

the myth that modernization means Westernization, and expands choices for developing countries on their modernization journey.

Essam Sharaf, former Egyptian prime minister and a non-resident senior fellow at Renmin University of China's Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, said he sees four key pillars in Chinese modernization — cooperation, harmony, peace and development.

He said that by adopting these pillars, China passes on the benefits of its modernization to the world through the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, which are considered public goods offered by the nation to the international community.

Mamadou Tangara, Gambia's foreign minister, said China's modernization "addresses, in a resolute way, the global deficits of development, peace, governance and trust."

China's rapid economic growth and long-term social stability are widely viewed as a miracle in the history of human development, Tangara said, and the nation has promoted poverty alleviation, common prosperity, ecological conservation and people-centered democracy as well as the rule of law.

"China has inspired many developing countries to seek their own formula to reduce poverty and to promote their respective economic development and prosperity," he said.

Tangara described the Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI, as an effective platform to promote a more integrated world where "positive collaboration between countries is not burdened by the complexities of ideological and cultural differences."

"Under the BRI, we are all galvanized under the common ambition of seeking mutually beneficial and sustainable socio-economic transformative partnerships. It

essentially bridges physical distance and shared interests and prosperity," he said.

Tangara also voiced his support for the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, saying they unwaveringly offer hope for a shared and better future for humankind.

Since China proposed the BRI in 2013, more than 3,000 cooperation projects have been launched, involving investment of nearly \$1 trillion and creating 420,000 jobs for participating countries, the Foreign Ministry said. As a result, many nations have realized their dreams of building railways and large bridges, and also of alleviating poverty.

The Global Development Initiative has been widely welcomed by the international community. With the support of more than 100 countries and many international organizations, and with some 70 countries in the Group of Friends of the GDI, the initiative is giving a strong boost to the early attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

John Thornton, co-chair of the Board of Trustees of the Asia Society in the United States, said: "The concept of Chinese modernization, to me, is very compelling. It is enduring. It is inspiring. And I see it as kind of an aspiration and also a guide to behavior."

He suggests that the single most important thing for Chinese modernization is to figure out how to communicate the content in a compelling way through global communication channels so that everybody hears the same message.

"Who in the world is not in favor of peace? Who in the world is not in favor of common prosperity? Who in the world is not in favor of harmony between man and nature?" he said.

"And if at least in my country, if people understood that this is what China believes, this is what they stand for, this is where they see the future, then that will have a very positive impact on the relationship between the two countries."

Challenges ahead

While striving to advance Chinese modernization, the CPC is keeping a cool head about the risks and challenges that lie ahead. "Building a modern socialist country in all respects is a great and arduous endeavor," Xi said at the 20th CPC National Congress.

Analyzing the international situation, he said momentous changes unseen in a century are accelerating across the world, the once-in-a-century pandemic has had far-reaching effects, global economic recovery is sluggish, unilateralism and protectionism are mounting, regional conflicts and disturbances are frequent, and the world has entered a new period of turbulence and change.

At home, China faces many deep-seated problems regarding reform, development and stability. "In our efforts to strengthen the Party, and especially to improve conduct, build integrity, and combat corruption, we are confronted with many stubborn and recurrent problems. External attempts to suppress and contain China may escalate at any time," Xi said.

Amid new challenges arising from domestic and international situations, the CPC launched an education campaign last month to study and implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, with a view to building consensus among all its members to make united efforts to advance Chinese modernization for national rejuvenation.

As part of the theoretical study program, the Party launched a research and fact-finding drive aimed at solving new practical problems and serving scientific decision-making.

TOP NEWS



Outpouring of grief

Hundreds of protesters march in silence on Monday in Belgrade, Serbia, against the two mass shootings in the country last week that left 17 people dead and 21 wounded, many of them children.

ZORANA JEVTIC / REUTERS

Congo flood survivors mourn lost relatives

Bodies were still being recovered on Monday from two villages in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo where floods killed more than 400 people last week in one of the country's deadliest disasters in recent history.

Many dazed survivors were mourning multiple family members killed in the flash floods that swept away entire homes and buried the villages of Bushushu and Nyamakubi, both in South Kivu Province, in muck and debris.

"Over there in the mud, that's where our house was. We lost six people in our family. In our house, five children died and our mother who is the sixth," said 22-year-old Alliance Mufanzara, pointing at an empty plot of churned earth.

She, her younger brother and her father were the only survivors.

"We're scared because our whole family is finished," she said. "We have nothing."

Humanitarian workers have spent days recovering mud-caked bodies from the wrecked villages in Kalehe territory, where days of torrential rain triggered landslides and caused rivers to overflow their banks on Thursday.

"It is an unprecedented humanitarian disaster," said government spokesman Patrick Muyaya.

The large number of casualties has meant that workers have had to bury victims in freshly dug mass graves, according to videos posted online, which Reuters was not immediately able to verify.

"We left everything behind," said Bushushu resident Bahati Kabanga, 32, who managed to rescue his only child but lost his aunt, nephews and a sister.

"We felt a tremor while it was raining and decided to flee after seeing houses collapse in the distance," he told Reuters by telephone.

Just over 400 people were confirmed dead, South Kivu Governor Theo Ngwabidje Kasi said earlier on Monday, more than doubling the toll since Friday.

Civil society sources on the ground expect the toll to rise further, as bodies were still floating in rivers and buried under wreckage. Hundreds of people remained unaccounted for, according to the United Nations.

The Congolese Red Cross said that 274 people had been buried so far, including 98 women and 82 children.

Over 8,800 others have been affected by the floods, which swept away homes and schools and cut off roads, it said. Destroyed sewage systems and bodies lying in debris are raising concerns about sanitation, it said.

Families have been separated and traumatized survivors are taking refuge in other people's homes, the Red Cross added.

"If I hadn't gone to the market maybe I could have saved my children," said mother of five Jolie Ambika Nathalie, 34, in Bushushu.

The central government has sent a delegation to Bushushu and declared Monday a day of national mourning.

Warming temperatures due to climate change are increasing the intensity and frequency of Africa's rains, according to UN climate experts.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Consulting firm faces scrutiny over sensitive-information role

Law enforcement campaign launched after links to overseas forces alleged

By JIANG CHENGLONG and ZHOU JIN

Chinese authorities, including national security and other departments, have launched a law enforcement action against Capvision, a leading Chinese consulting firm.

The company is alleged to have "induced domestic experts in key fields", including military industry and high technology, to offer intelligence and thereby played into the hands of overseas forces, China Media Group reported.

Capvision accepted a large number of consulting projects, some of which were closely related to foreign governments, military and intelligence agencies.

From 2017 to 2020, the firm received more than 2,000 remittances from more than 100 overseas companies, amounting to over \$70 million, according to Chinese national security agencies.

Capvision said in a statement on its WeChat account that it would resolutely abide by China's national security rules and take the lead in ensuring the consulting industry was compliant.

In recent years, some Western countries have increasingly engaged in intelligence activities to steal information related to China's military, industry, finance and other key sectors, in order to implement their

containment and suppression strategies against China, the television report said on Monday.

National security agencies have uncovered many complex foreign entities that, in order to evade China's laws and regulations as well as sensitive industry supervision, conceal their foreign backgrounds and use domestic consulting firms to steal State secrets and intelligence related to the country's key areas.

Wang Wenbin, spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, told a regular briefing on Tuesday that the campaign is a normal law enforcement action aimed at promoting the healthy and normal development of relevant industries and safeguarding national security and development interests.

Capvision, founded in 2008, is a leading company offering "rapid, accurate and efficient expert knowledge" to major financial institutions, consulting companies and multinational enterprises, according to the firm's website.

The main advantage of its services is to provide clients with specialized industry knowledge through a network of more than 500,000 experts, the Shanghai-based firm says in its introduction on the website. It has branches in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, New York, Malaysia and Singapore.

Capvision claims to have more than 1,000 clients across the globe, and the

majority of its business involves expert consultation that is mainly conducted by phone, the CMG report quoted a Shanghai national security police officer as saying.

Company staff members said they gained access to the huge number of experts, professionals and scholars by public networking, such as via resumes and recommendations.

However, the CMG report said that the company's employees were actually targeting influential experts working in vital fields including domestic policy research, national defense, finance and currency, high technology, energy and resources, and medicine and health.

Experts who provided consultation would sign business contracts with a "disclaimer clause" that required them to assume responsibility for confidentiality and face any legal consequences themselves.

Nevertheless, some experts were attracted by the hefty remuneration offered by Capvision, which they thought was a law-abiding and regulated enterprise, and then eased their vigilance, divulging internal sensitive content and even State secrets and intelligence when providing foreign-related consulting services, said the national security police officer in Shanghai.

The CMG report gave an example in which a former senior researcher at a major State-owned enterprise who had provided consulting to Capvision was sentenced to six years in prison for spying and for stealing and illegally providing

State secrets and intelligence for overseas entities.

The researcher, surnamed Han, became a part-time expert at the invitation of Capvision in 2015, although in his primary job he was not allowed to have a part-time job as well.

At the beginning, he refused to offer confidential information such as product cost and profit rate, when providing consultation, but he soon relented after the Capvision staff claimed that Han would get triple payment if he answered sensitive questions.

In addition, as a company with a large amount of overseas business, Capvision not only encouraged and persuaded experts in key fields to disclose confidential information during consultations, but also failed to inform those experts of the real identity of the clients.

Han said he only found out by accident that his long-term client was from overseas. Persuaded by Capvision, he became increasingly active in accepting overseas consultation in order to get more payments from Capvision.

The former researcher downloaded nearly 5,000 documents via the internal network of the company for which he worked. It was found that Han provided three pieces of national secret information, 13 pieces of intelligence and 18 pieces of information involving commercial secrets to foreign entities.

Contact the writer at jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

Trade: RCEP to further boost exports, imports

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Zhengzhou Yutong Bus Co, based in Zhengzhou, Henan province, is already exporting buses outside developed economies. This year it will supply 800 new energy buses to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan.

Li Haifeng, a senior executive of the company's overseas business unit, said the order, made up of 300 electric buses and 500 compressed natural gas ones, is the largest of its kind from Uzbekistan for China-made buses.

Li said the group's accumulative exports stood at around 86,000 buses at the end of February this

year, with about 68,000 shipped to markets related to the BRI.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the world's largest free trade pact, is scheduled to take full effect for all its 15 signatory states on June 2, the Ministry of Commerce said in April.

Complete implementation of the pact will help further boost exports and imports between China and other participating countries, said Zhang Jianping, deputy director of the academic committee of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

Contact the writers at zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

Beating the heat



An elephant is fed watermelon at Kamla Nehru Zoological Garden in Ahmedabad as the maximum temperature in the city in the western Indian state of Gujarat hovered around 41 C on Monday.

SAM PANTHAKY / AFP

Lunar glass makes moon building program feasible

By ZHAO LEI
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese scientists have an ambitious plan — they want to build permanent structures on the moon using lunar materials, and a recent finding has shown that this idea is feasible.

According to a new study published in National Science Review, a Chinese science journal, the nation's scientists have identified natural glass fibers for the first time in lunar

samples retrieved by the Chang'e 5 robotic mission.

The analysis of these natural glass fibers has indicated that lunar soil has good properties in terms of forming and molding glass material, "which confirms the possibility of manufacturing glass construction materials on the lunar surface", said Shen Laiquan, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Physics, which led the study.

Last month, Wu Weiren, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and a leading scientist at the China National Space Administration, said Chinese scientists plan to use 3D printing technology to turn lunar soil into construction materials and then use them to build science outposts on the moon.

According to researchers participating in the new study, glass is an important component of lunar soil.

It was produced by various kinds of non-equilibrium processes including volcanic activity, meteorite bombardment and solar wind irradiation.

"These drastic processes dominate the formation and evolution of the moon, and our understanding of the moon strongly relies on studies of these processes. As ubiquitous products of lunar non-equilibrium processes, glass can remain stable for billions of years,"

the researchers wrote.

"This glass, with different origins, can therefore record crucial information with regard to its formation processes over geological time scales, and provide insights into many fundamental questions about the moon involving the duration of volcanism, the bombardment history of the solar system, the origins of lunar water and the moon's past magnetism," they wrote.

Zhao Rui, another researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Physics, said that the glass substances recorded various types of meteorite impacts. Analyz-

ing the impact-generated glass can help scientists calculate the power of these impacts, and thus improve research on the formation and evolution of lunar soil.

One of the world's most notable space activities in 2020, the 23-day Chang'e 5 robotic mission was China's first lunar sample-returning mission and one of its most sophisticated and challenging space endeavors. The landmark mission brought 1,731 grams of rocks and soil back to Earth on Dec 17, 2020, presenting the first lunar substances to scientists since the Apollo era.

Alternative: Middle East sees gradual shift away from dependence on West

From page 1

China's role in bringing the two Asian heavyweights together surprised many, given Saudi Arabia's strategic partnership with the United States. But it comes amid a wave of Chinese diplomatic initiatives in the Middle East that have brought regional powers closer to China. Most see the move as another example of the Middle East's gradual shift away from dependence on the West toward deeper cooperation with growing Asian powers.

Saudi Arabia's development priorities have long been closely linked to the interests of the leading SCO members, China and Russia. China is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner, and bilateral trade in 2021 reached \$87.3 billion.

The petrochemical sector is a priority in Saudi cooperation with Beijing. For example, in its most recent move, Saudi Aramco announced on March 28 the acquisition of a 10 percent stake in China's Rongsheng Petrochemical Co, a deal valued at \$3.6 billion. The joint venture will build an oil refining and petrochemical complex in Panjin, Liaoning province. It is expected to process up to 300,000 barrels of oil per day, bringing the total crude oil processing between China and Aramco to 690,000 barrels per day. Statistics on Saudi oil shipments to China show that in 2022 they were four times more than shipments to the United States.

Washington has been watching China's activity in the Middle East with great concern and has warned that cooperation with Beijing could weaken US relations with countries in the region. For example, the

US has expressed concern about using Huawei 5G technology in the region and has pressured the UAE to shut down what the US says is a Chinese "security facility".

While the Saudi leadership is intensely annoyed by and has shown its dissatisfaction with certain aspects of US policy, Saudi Arabia will not withdraw from the "special relationship" that was established in the early 1930s. US military bases remain in the country, and at the end of March, joint exercises were held to combat drones. A few weeks ago, two Saudi airlines placed a \$37 billion order for a total of up to 121 Boeing 787 Dreamliners.

However, the seemingly ordinary political bargaining will have far-reaching consequences this time, since the leading player is China. As it has become more engaged economically in the Middle East, China has seen a strong voice in favor of increased regional cooperation. Is this move a direct challenge to the Western-centric world? Should the collective West think about the reasons for the unwillingness of Asian states to cooperate?

The official US reaction to this development has been cautious. In Washington, State Department spokesman Vedant Patel played down the impact of the Saudi move, saying it was long overdue, which was not entirely intelligible.

The author is a former prime minister of Kyrgyzstan and a distinguished professor at the Belt and Road School at Beijing Normal University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

No verdict yet in second egg freezing trial

Court will decide whether unmarried women have right to access services

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

The second and final trial in China's first legal case over the right of unmarried women to access egg freezing concluded on Tuesday afternoon with no verdict given.

Xu Zaozao, a pseudonym for an unmarried 35-year-old woman who sued a hospital in Beijing in 2018 for refusing to freeze her eggs, emerged from the gate of Beijing No 3 Intermediate People's Court at around 4:50 pm following a nearly three-hour hearing.

"I am cautiously optimistic about the pending result," she said. "Like the first trial, the focus of today's debate was on whether the hospital's refusal infringed upon my personal rights, and we also discussed its potential infringement of my bodily rights because my eggs are part of my body."

A rule released by China's top health authority in 2001 states that single women are barred from accessing egg freezing services. Married couples who have been diagnosed with infertility, as well as married women living with some diseases — such as those with cancer who have to go through chemotherapy — are allowed to freeze eggs.

In a statement released in 2021, the National Health Commission said the technology is intrusive and carries higher risks than sperm-freezing procedures for men, which could impact the health of women and their babies.

"Promoting egg freezing services could also bring false hope and further delay women's childbearing plans," the commission said. "Furthermore, selling reproductive technologies to healthy groups might result in misunderstandings and overuse among consumers."

Two hearings were held for the first trial in 2019 and 2021. In July last year, Xu was notified that she lost her case, so she decided to appeal.

"I appealed because I believe egg freezing services are important for single women," she said. "In recent years, positive signs leading to the potential easing of current regulations have also emerged, and I am more hopeful this time around."

During this year's two sessions of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held in early March, a number of political advisers and legislators touched on the topic of expanding access to egg freezing services.

Xu Congjian, president of Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital of Fudan University in Shanghai and a national political adviser, said during an interview that he suggested "moderately" removing egg freezing barriers for special groups.

"For instance, I met an unmarried woman who wanted to freeze eggs because she had to work in high-altitude areas for several years and pinned her hopes on the technology as a way to balance career development and fertility plans," he said, adding that unmarried women who are dealing with health problems such as cancer and blood diseases should also be given the option to freeze their eggs after professional evaluation of their health condition.

He also stressed that he objected to lifting all restrictions. "The risks for women having babies after age 35 remain high, and increasing the number of children with older parents could also raise societal issues," he said.

On March 13, Caixin.com, a news media outlet, reported that the commission was organizing experts to discuss the possibility of lifting restrictions on egg freezing services for single women.

"If the verdict turns out to be what I've hoped for, I will go to a public hospital and freeze my eggs as soon as possible," Xu Zaozao said.



Xu Zaozao (center) and two lawyers enter the Beijing No 3 Intermediate People's Court before her trial begins on Tuesday.

WU XIAOHUI / CHINA DAILY

Giving their all



Children race on their push bicycles during a competition in Yuncheng, Shanxi province, on Monday. Dozens of children participated in the event, which was staged to encourage them to develop an interest in sports and exercises. YAN XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Stricter emission standard to kick in

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

The planned introduction of a stricter national emission standard for all new heavy-duty vehicles will proceed as scheduled from July 1, and will prohibit the production, import and sales of vehicles that do not meet the standard, according to the latest guideline.

The standard, known as China VI-b, will help reduce air pollution and contribute to environmental protection, and it is also expected to promote the healthy development of the domestic car market, industry players observed.

When the new guideline is implemented, all new heavy-duty vehicles sold in the country are required to meet the standard as the government aims to help stabilize and expand automobile consumption in the country, according to a statement released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and four other departments on Tuesday.

Emissions from cars have

become a significant source of air pollution in large and medium-sized cities in China, and the urgency of strengthening the control of such pollution has become increasingly prominent. In 2021, total emissions of four pollutants from motor vehicles nationwide exceeded 15.5 million metric tons, according to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

Revealed in 2018, the China VI standard is made up of two sub-standards — China VI-a and China VI-b. The overall standard combines practices from both European and United States regulatory requirements, in addition to creating its own.

China VI-a is largely equivalent to Euro VI, and China VI-b introduces slightly more stringent testing requirements and a remote emission monitoring system, according to the International Council on Clean Transportation.

The China VI-a took effect nationally on July 1, 2020, and many regions had even adopted it a year earlier. The stricter China VI-b had been scheduled for July 1 this

Li Fusheng contributed to this story.

4 detained for demolishing load-bearing walls

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

Police in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, have criminally detained four people for allegedly demolishing load-bearing walls of a high-rise building in the city's Songbei district, according to the district government on Tuesday.

According to a statement released on April 28 by the property management company of Limin Xueyuan residential community, the demolition of load-bearing walls during the renovation of a house on the third floor resulted in walls cracking on the fourth and sixth floors of the unit.

The person who rented the

house allegedly planned to turn it into a gym. It is unknown whether the tearing down of the walls was intentional or accidental.

Visible cracks could be seen on the facade of the 31-story building on Tuesday.

"To ensure safety, all residents need to leave the building immediately and wait for further notice," the statement said.

Residents living in over 200 rooms in the building were relocated to nearby hotels. The market value of the building is said to exceed 160 million yuan (\$23 million).

The city's government has set up an investigation team, and monitoring and disposal work is underway.

The district government has dispatched 15 working groups to visit every household, and special consultation and reception centers have been set up where experts, lawyers, medical workers and relevant professionals can answer residents' questions and help them continue living normal lives.

Emergency measures such as partial support have been adopted to prevent further structural damage and deformation, the government said.

A corresponding plan will be formulated to protect the legitimate rights and interests of residents depending on the technical report issued by the authoritative testing institutions.

Chongqing transforming spaces under its bridges

CHONGQING — Many bridges in Southwest China's Chongqing municipality are a popular subject for photography on TikTok. They are shown illuminated at night or bearing trains amid clouds of dreamy mist, winning numerous thumbs-up from netizens.

Now lovers of the famous structures have more to celebrate, thanks to a citywide campaign to improve the spaces beneath them, as well as the miles of riverbank that run through the city.

Also known as the "Bridge Capital of China," Chongqing boasts over 10,000 bridges of all kinds. However, the areas beneath them are often neglected, either planted with bushes or used as parking lots. In many cases, the space is simply unused.

In Jiulongpo district, the Egongyan Bridge strides across the Yangtze River. Under the bridge now sits the newly built Jiulongtan Square, where locals can make use of intelligent workout facilities powered by solar energy or take a leisurely stroll along the riverside walkways.

According to the municipal commission of housing and urban-rural development, the Jiulongtan project stretches 2.2 kilometers along the river, covering 504,000 square meters. It is part of the city's broader effort to renovate and upgrade the urban planning of areas along the rivers.



We have built waterside walkways along the embankment, as well as paths for fitness lovers, giving them easy access to the Yangtze River."

Kang Yi, executive manager of Chongqing's Jiulongtan project

"It may be difficult to imagine, but several years ago, there was only a dilapidated wharf under the bridge," said Wu Feng, a resident living nearby. "It was full of weeds, and the road was too rugged for us to walk on."

Now, the desolate space has been turned into a popular, leafy spot allowing locals to get close to nature. Plant varieties from the Three Gorges Reservoir area have been planted near the water's edge, transforming the barren land while aiding soil consolidation and ecological restoration.

"Taking into account Chongqing's riverside terrain with its various changes in level, we have built waterside walkways along the embankment, as well as paths for fitness lovers, giving them easy access to the Yangtze River," said Kang Yi, executive manager of the project.

Meanwhile, the revamping of the spaces is making good use of the city's rich industrial culture.

For years, the space beneath Egongyan Bridge featured over 50 abandoned air-raid shelters carved into the rock walls. Now, 21 of the air-raid shelters have been transformed into eight exhibition halls with various themes, teaching visitors folk culture and showcasing a former defense industrial base in Jiulongpo district.

On the Jiubin Road overpass in Jiulongpo, artists have created 3D paintings featuring naval and air equipment against a backdrop of blue sky and clouds. The impact is enhanced at night by projected images simulating the rise and fall of waves.

Meanwhile, a decommissioned warship is docked next to the overpass. As an extension of the nearby museum cluster, the ship is intended to boost patriotism among visitors, the commission said.

In the future, Chongqing plans to see 23 renovation projects along its 109 km of riverbank, with some of them already completed. They will not only transform the spaces beneath the city's famous bridges, but contribute to greening efforts and upgrading infrastructure, the commission added.

XINHUA

Hainan eager for first durian crop

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
chenbowen@chinadaily.com.cn

South China's Hainan province is anticipating its first durian harvest this summer after years of cultivation.

A durian plantation in the Sanya Yuchai Ecological Zone has yielded its first fruit on a large scale, with the crop expected to be ready for market soon.

"Due to lower temperatures in Hainan this year, the maturity of the fruit originally expected to hit the markets in May or June has been delayed to the end of June or early July," said Du Baizhong, general manager of Hainan Youqi Agricultural Company, adding the company's planting base in the zone is expected to produce a maximum of 50,000 kilograms of durian this year.

According to the Sanya bureau of agriculture and rural affairs, the city began planting durian four

years ago. The trees began bearing fruit on a large scale this year.

Sanya has planted more than 660 hectares of durian in various districts, and more of the fruit is expected to enter the market.

Du's company is the city's largest durian producer in terms of planting scale. He said that in 2019, when 44 durian trees that were introduced to the Baoting Li and Miao autonomous county as part of afforestation efforts successfully bore fruit, he was inspired to cultivate the tropical crop.

He sent workers to Southeast Asia to learn how to grow the spiky fruit, and established a scientific and research cooperative with the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences. The company also recruited workers with master's degrees in agriculture.

By working with scientific research institutes and being guided by Southeast Asian-Chinese agricul-

tural specialists, the company began to plant durian in the ecological zone in March 2020. With advanced technology and equipment, the base can automate water distribution, fertilizer management, meteorological monitoring and pest control.

The company now has durian plantations in the ecological zone, as well as in Ledong county and Baoting.

"In Hainan, the cultivation of the delicate durian fruit requires more manual interventions and greater attention to their growth rate, compared with that in Southeast Asia," Du said.

"We upgraded our irrigation three times based on the terrain in our base. Now, with intelligent sensors, we can easily conduct analysis on the water supply of the durian crops."

Hainan sought to grow durian back in the 1950s. At first, the province planted seeds directly, but with this method the trees took more

than 10 years to bear fruit. Now, by taking a branch from a tree that is already bearing fruit and grafting it onto one that is growing, farmers can yield fruit within three years.

"With the support of the provincial government and the ecological zone, we have introduced durian crop varieties from Southeast Asia countries such as Laos for study and research," Du said.

Last year, a few trees in the base had already borne ripe fruit, he said.

"Anyone standing 6 or 7 meters away could smell their aroma."

Durian, which is popular among young consumers in first-tier cities, is one of the top imported fruits in China. The successful cultivation of the tropical fruit in Hainan means that durian lovers in China can enjoy the fresh, local variety, which tends to be sweeter than its foreign counterparts, according to the bureau.

Even so, Phaichit Vibontanasarn, vice-chairman and secretary-general of the Thai Chamber of Commerce in China, told the Bangkok Post that the relatively low out-

put of Hainan durian would not greatly affect imported fruit from Thailand.

In fact, trade between China and Thailand has grown partly thanks to the booming livestreaming industry in China.

Xin Youzhi, founder of China's Xinxuan Selection Group and a network anchor, was invited by the Thai government to host a special livestream on Sunday in Bangkok to promote items such as durian produced in Thailand to Chinese consumers.

During the eight-hour show, about 1.62 million durians were sold, raking in revenue of around 300 million yuan (\$43.3 million). The total revenue of all items reached 830 million yuan with 6.78 million orders.

"In addition to helping vendors of Thai brands sell their products to Chinese customers, we will deepen cooperation with the country in the agricultural sector," Xin said. "Meanwhile, we are bringing Chinese digital economy experiences and resources to help Thailand to cultivate such talent."

POLICY REVIEW

High-tech health services ease burden

Remote diagnosis and telemedicine among tools used to bring top-notch healthcare to remote areas

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

For years, one of the greatest fears facing elderly residents of Mayi Island in Zhejiang province was the exhausting trip to hospital when they fell sick.

"From waiting for a ferry to get off the island, to riding the bus to the county seat, it used to take the whole day for me to see a doctor," said Lin Zhongsu, a Mayi resident.

Today, Lin is able to get diagnosed by experienced doctors in larger cities in Zhejiang without even having to leave the island's small clinic thanks to concerted efforts to bring high-quality medical care to remote and rural areas.

In Lin's case, 5G-powered augmented reality glasses enabled doctors based thousands of miles away in Zhoushan and Hangzhou to conduct the examination and find out about his symptoms.

The adoption of digital tools is part of the latest efforts by China to promote the sound development of the medical system in its rural areas.

The general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council recently released a circular detailing their goals of balancing the layout of medical institutions, improving infrastructure, and developing well-rounded teams of health professionals in rural areas by 2025.

Official data shows that there were about 17,000 county-level hospitals, 35,000 township clinics and nearly 600,000 village clinics across China's vast countryside at the end of 2021.

Qin Jiangmei, a researcher from the China National Health Development Research Center, said that the average life expectancy for rural residents has increased from 74.1 years in 2010 to 76.8 in 2020. Between 2009 and 2021, the rural mortality rates for infants, children under five and the maternal mortality rate—all key indicators of a region's level of health service—have all dropped by over 50 percentage points.

"More than 85 percent of rural residents are now able to reach the nearest medical service provider within 15 minutes," she said, adding that basic medical insurance now covers over 95 percent of rural residents.

However, given the country's rapidly aging population, and the growing burdens of chronic illness and the increasing health demands of the countryside, the gap between urban and rural medical services has become more noticeable in recent years.

Qin said that a lack of medical professionals is badly hampering the advancement of healthcare services in rural areas. "The academic credentials of rural medical workers are relatively low, and there is a shortage of well-trained general practitioners," she said. "Rural doctors are in short supply, they are aging, and they are not as highly trained."

Qin said that the lack of medical service in rural areas is being manifested in the decreasing numbers of visits to township or village clinics among total hospital visits nationwide in recent years.

Data shows that visits to rural medical facilities accounted for 44.3 per-



SHIYU / CHINA DAILY

cent of total visits in 2009, but fell to 29.5 percent in 2021, and the percentage of hospitalizations at rural facilities also fell from 28.7 to 13 percent during the same period.

"While rural migration to cities has played a role in these changes, they also reflect the fact that greater efforts are needed to channel medical resources to the grassroots level, especially at the township and village levels," she said.

Measures listed in the document include leveraging smart and digitalized technologies to deliver healthcare services. "Technologies such as remote consultation, the appointment-based transfer of patients, online follow-up consultations and remote examinations

should be promoted, and the use of artificial intelligence-assisted diagnoses should be accelerated at rural healthcare institutions," the report stated.

In Zhejiang's mountainous Shawan township, the 50-minute ride to the county seat hospital in Jingning She autonomous county made it difficult for 77-year-old Liu Yuyu to see doctors when he was having trouble controlling his high blood pressure.

"I grew used to putting up with discomfort from my condition for as long as I could," he said. "But now, using the remote diagnosis platform set up in the nearby clinic, I am able to see doctors from top hospitals in Hangzhou without needing to leave town. It's marvelous."

Lei Yehua, a rural doctor in Shawan township, who helps facilitate remote consultation sessions, said: "We grassroots doctors have also learned a lot by being able to discuss cases with specialists from larger hospitals."

Local authorities said that since the remote medical service was launched at Jingning county hospital in late 2022, it has diagnosed 300 patients, and provided health management advice for 1,500 people in the jurisdiction. It is estimated that patients living in remote areas have saved around 700,000 yuan (\$101,000) on travel expenses as a result.

In addition, the document highlighted the need to improve incomes and benefits for rural doctors in order

to encourage more medical professionals to work in the countryside.

It suggested that local authorities raise subsidies and arrange accommodation for rural health workers in far-flung and impoverished areas, especially in less developed middle and western provinces and also requested that local governments increase the pensions of rural doctors currently aged 60 or above.

Mou Shanyong, deputy director of the Shandong Health Commission said last month that the province has designated 407 hospitals to serve as training centers for grassroots medical workers to make it simpler for them to improve their medical skills.

Policy Digest

New energy vehicle sales boom in Q1

More than 1.58 million new energy vehicles were sold on the domestic market in the first quarter of this year, a 26 percent year-on-year increase, according to a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Commerce.

NEVs have played a key role in boosting automobile sales in recent years, Shu Jueting told a news conference in late April.

Since China lifted the foreign ownership cap in the NEV manufacturing sector in 2018, foreign investment in actual use has increased by 15.69 billion yuan (\$2.27 billion), Shu said.

Guideline aims to improve foreign trade

The General Office of the State Council has released a guideline on strengthening international trade efforts.

According to the document released in late April, all in-person trade exhibitions and fairs in the country should resume. Local governments, institutions to promote foreign trade, chambers of commerce and associated groups should also make more effort to support foreign trade companies in attending trade events abroad.

Authorities should facilitate cross-border business travel, including by speeding up the issue of APEC Business Travel Cards and restoring international passenger flights as soon as possible, according to the guideline.

Chinese embassies and consulates, as well as overseas offices of trade promotion institutions, should create more opportunities and services for foreign trade companies.

The general office urged authorities to stabilize exports to developed economies and help domestic companies expand markets in developing countries and regions such as Southeast Asia.

Authorities should also work to improve the import and export of key products and increase fiscal and financial support for foreign trade companies.

Ministry touts events to promote heritage

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has decided to launch a series of events to promote intangible cultural heritage to mark Cultural and Natural Heritage Day, which falls on June 10 this year.

Key events include National Quyi Week, which will be held in Wuhan, Hubei province. Quyi, a traditional Chinese spoken and sung art form, will be performed to promote exchange between different types of quyi and showcase achievements in preserving the tradition, the ministry said in a notice released on Friday.

It will also support organizations holding events to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, including concerts featuring the guqin, a traditional string instrument, and performances of Kunqu opera.

An online exhibition of photos and videos will also be held to showcase intangible cultural resources and increase public awareness of their protection.

WANG QINGYUN

Medical circuits to serve isolated and remote villages without resident doctors

By WANG XIAOYU

China plans to institutionalize sending rural doctors to isolated and remote areas on a regular basis by 2025, as part of efforts to address the shortage of medical workers in the most undeveloped areas of its countryside, according to a recent circular.

For villages with small populations where recruiting a rural doctor is not viable due to limited demand, as well as for relocated communities that do not yet have their own medical facilities, local health authorities are to arrange for township-level health centers to set

up a medical services circuit, and for county-level health institutions to offer technical support.

The circuit team should comprise clinical physicians, TCM doctors, nurses, public health specialists and support staff. They should offer their services at least twice a week, with each round lasting no less than half a day, according to the circular.

The circular was released by the National Health Commission in March, in conjunction with the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the National Administration of Disease Prevention and Control.

"Medical circuit teams should arrange service hours according to the living and working habits of rural populations, to provide them with access to high-quality, basic healthcare service on their doorsteps," it stated.

In addition to circuit services, the document stated that medical workers from township-level medical institutions will be dispatched to villages with large populations that have been unable to recruit qualified rural doctors.

"Medical workers sent to village clinics should work at least five days a week, and work in the same village for no less than six consecutive

months," the circular stated.

In addition, medical circuit teams and aid workers will be tasked with training local doctors to manage common and major illnesses, and will be encouraged to set up telemedicine cooperation networks to offer diagnosis and treatment to patients.

In a statement explaining the roll-out of the new document, the commission said that there is currently a marked shortage in healthcare capacity in some rural regions, and becoming a rural doctor has low appeal to job seekers.

"It is likely that the previous situation of villages without local doctors

could reemerge...and so we have introduced these new measures to allocate quality medical services to the grassroots level, and increase the access of rural people to convenient and affordable healthcare services," it said.

Dai Jianjun, president of the People's Hospital of Jinxiang County in Jining, Shandong province, told China Central Television that the hospital has opened outposts at 14 township-level clinics and community service centers in Jinxiang county, and regularly dispatches 56 specialists to see patients, visit wards and train rural doctors.

Zhang Xiaojuan, a doctor from

the endocrinology department at Sichuan University's West China Hospital in the provincial capital of Chengdu, recently participated in a medical assistance program to a far-flung county in Sichuan's Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture.

"Through communication with local doctors, we identified new problems, such as the importance of reminding them to identify and transfer patients with rare and chronic disease to higher-level hospitals," she said, adding that most were used to sending only patients in critical condition to larger hospitals.

WORLD

Timor-Leste's entry into ASEAN backed

Foreign ministers meet in preparations for summit eyeing sustainable growth

By PRIME SARMIENTO
in Hong Kong
and LEONARDUS JEGHO
in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia

Indonesia will fully support Timor-Leste's membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and has committed to investing in the country, a senior official said on Tuesday.

Foreign ministers of Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam attended the meeting chaired by Indonesian Foreign Min-

ister Retno Marsudi in the final preparations for the two-day summit of the ASEAN leaders.

Marsudi said Indonesian President Joko Widodo welcomed Timor-Leste's Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak to the ASEAN summit for the first time.

Marsudi said in the briefing that Widodo stressed the importance of economic cooperation between Timor-Leste and Indonesia. Widodo said the two sides need to create a bilateral investment treaty and to complete negotiations on land borders.

Timor-Leste's Ruak thanked Indo-

nesia's support for the country's bid to join the regional bloc.

The association agreed in principle to admit Timor-Leste as its 11th member in November 2022.

Before the closed-door meeting began, Marsudi stressed ASEAN is currently at a crossroads, with multiple challenges including food and energy crises and global economic slowdown testing its strength as a community.

She urged actions against transnational crimes ranging from terrorism and money laundering to drugs and human trafficking, which she said not only threaten peace, stability and prosperity in the region but also hinder the process of community development.

The summit, under Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship this year, is themed "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth". Indonesia has expressed hopes that the bloc will remain a center of regional and global growth, laying focus on efforts to make ASEAN a fast-growing, inclusive and sustainable economic region in the long term.

Among the issues top on the agenda are ASEAN centrality, financial stability and green growth.

Indonesia, this year's rotating chair of the Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is hosting the first of the biannual summit at Labuan Bajo in the Nusa Tenggara region.

Marsudi said Widodo has likewise

met with other ASEAN leaders. Widodo and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's meeting focused on efforts to boost bilateral trade to reach \$15 billion by 2028. Both sides agreed to sign a bilateral investment treaty, cooperate in the renewable energy sector and sign a pact on the marine and fisheries industry.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has again invited Widodo to visit his country. Widodo said they need to discuss the importance of the sea and land borders between the two countries and the protection of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia.

Widodo and Lao President Thongloun Sisoulith discussed cooperation between Indonesia's power company Perusahaan Listrik Negara and Laos'

Electricite du Laos, procurement of airplanes from Indonesia's Dirgantara Indonesia for the Lao Air Force, and procurement of trains from Indonesia's Industri Kereta Api for the Petrorade Lao Public Company.

Earlier this year, various ministerial meetings were held on topics around the theme of this year's ASEAN summit.

At the end of March, the meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors agreed to reinforce the use of local currencies in the region and reduce reliance on major international currencies in an effort to ensure financial stability and avoid spillovers such as high inflation from global crises.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Leonardus Jegho is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Contact the writers at prime@chinadaily.com.

Drought drives Iraq's climate migrants to cities

KARBALA, Iraq — Haydar Mohamed once grew wheat and barley, but Iraq's relentless drought has forced him off the land and into the city where he now works in construction and drives a taxi.

"The transition is difficult," said Mohamed, 42, who abandoned village life several years ago for a shantytown in the central city of Karbala.

He is part of a growing wave of climate migrants in Iraq, a country that is on the front lines of the global warming crisis.

Years of water scarcity left him no choice but to move, said the father of five.

"If you don't work, you don't eat." Until 2017, Mohamed, like his father before him, worked farmland in the remote village of Al-Khenejar in Iraq's southern Diwaniya Province.

In a good year, they would harvest 40 or 50 metric tons of grain, but "water shortages have impacted farmland and livestock," he said.

"In our region, there is no work. I have children in school, which involves expenses. We needed a livelihood."

He now earns about \$15 a day on construction sites in the holy Shiite city and works shifts as a taxi driver to supplement his income.

Near his home, cows graze on rubbish strewn across the dusty ground and gray cinder-block buildings line the bumpy alleys, connected for free by the municipality to

power lines and water pipes.

The United Nations ranks Iraq as one of the world's five countries most impacted by effects of climate change.

The economy is driven by oil exports, but the second-biggest sector is agriculture, which makes up 5 percent of GDP and employs 20 percent of the workforce.

Water scarcity is extreme in the country of 42 million that endures blistering summer heat and regular dust storms, the shortfall worsened by upstream river dams in Turkey and Iran.

Acute water shortages

The UN says nearly one in five people live in an area hit by water shortages, while state authorities have been forced to limit areas designated for cultivation.

In central and southern Iraq, 12,212 families were still displaced due to drought conditions in March, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Across Diwaniya Province, 120 villages now rely on trucked water deliveries, up from 75 last summer, said the provincial governor Mait-ham al-Chahd.

"Thousands of hectares have been abandoned," he said.

Rural migrants faced unemployment in the cities, where there are not enough job opportunities for all the newcomers, he said.

"Public services cannot meet the needs of growing city populations."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Two men sit next to an abandoned home in Al-Bouzayad village in Iraq's Diwaniya Province on April 17. HAYDER INDHAR / AFP



Russian President Vladimir Putin gives a speech during the Victory Day military parade at Red Square in Moscow on Tuesday. GAVRIIL GRIGOROV / SPUTNIK / AFP

Russia honors unity at key turning point amid 'real war'

By REN QI in Moscow
renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

The world is at a key turning point and "a real war" has been unleashed against Russia by the West's "untamed ambitions," Russian President Vladimir Putin said at a parade marking the anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany in World War II on Tuesday.

"Today, civilization is again at a decisive turning point. A real war has been unleashed against our homeland. We have repulsed international terrorism, we will protect the inhabitants of Donbas, we will ensure our security," Putin said at the parade held to commemorate the 78th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in the 1941-1945 Great Patriotic War on Moscow's Red Square.

Putin said Russia honors the sacrifice of the allied armies of the United States, the United Kingdom and China in World War II.

"I am convinced that the experience of solidarity and partnership in the days of the struggle against a common threat is our heritage and a reliable base of support in our movement toward a multipolar world based on trust and indivisible security, equal opportunities for unique and free development for all nations in the world," Putin said.

Thousands of citizens in the capital lined the streets holding photos of their grandparents who died in World War II. Apart from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazakh, Novosibirsk and some other cities also held the parade to mark Victory Day.

The parade in Moscow began with the march of the Honor Guard's banner group carrying the Russian national flag and the legendary Victory Banner across Red Square. The Victory Banner was hoisted over the Reichstag by soldiers of the Soviet 150th Idritskaya Rifle Division in May 1945.

In a 10-minute speech on Red Square, Putin said "Western globalist elites" were sowing Russophobia and aggressive nationalism, while the Ukrainian people had become "hostages to a state coup" and to the ambitions of the West.

This year, Russia's Victory Day Parade on Moscow's Red Square involved over 8,000 troops, including 530 fighters of the special military operation in Ukraine, and 125 items of military hardware.

The parade was held following an alleged drone attack on the Kremlin less than a week ago. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Russian government has been taking every possible measure to ensure security during the parade.

He highlighted the special

significance of Victory Day for everyone involved in the victory over fascism.

Meanwhile, Ukraine and the European Union were marking Europe Day, a celebration of "peace and unity" together.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the head of the EU's executive branch, made a special trip to Kyiv on Tuesday to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

More than a year into the conflict with Russia, Ukraine wants to badly join the bloc as an essential part to anchor its future in the Western world. "Europe Day," when the 27 current members celebrate their bond as one, also shows how far that moment is still off.

Zelensky highlighted the need for faster deliveries of artillery shells from the European Union during the meeting.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said peace negotiations to end the conflict in Ukraine were "not possible at this moment," in an interview published by Spanish daily El Pais on Tuesday.

Guterres said he hoped it was possible "in the future" to bring Russia and Ukraine to the negotiating table.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Asia's rice output rises as planting expanded

SINGAPORE — Asia's rice output is set to climb this year as higher prices spur farmers to expand acreage and use more fertilizer, easing supply concerns after production suffered its first decline in seven years last year.

Production from recently harvested off-season rice crops in India and Thailand, the world's top two exporters, has exceeded last year's levels, and farmers are gearing up for main crops to be planted in coming months, with prices hovering near two-year highs.

Major Northern Hemisphere producers, including India, Pakistan and Thailand, will start planting their main crops this month and next, said Shirley Mustafa, an economist at the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

Higher production

A greater area will be planted with rice "in response to increase in rice prices, and greater access to fertilizers could sustain an output expansion from these crops," Mustafa said.

Production from winter-sown rice in India rose to 22.8 million metric tons from 18.5 million tons a year ago as above-average rainfall in September-October allowed farmers to expand the cultivation land.

In Thailand, output from this year's off-season crop is expected to rise to 5.1 million tons, up 24 percent from a year ago, the FAO said.

Globally, the area under rice cultivation is forecast to climb to 165.70 million hectares in 2023-24, from 163.74 million hectares, the International Grains Council said. World production is projected to climb to 521.49 million tons, up from 509.30 million tons.

"Prices are higher, and we are expecting that to encourage plantings for the 2023-24 crop, particularly in the major exporters," said Peter Clubb, a market analyst at the IGC.

Rice producers, encouraged by higher grain prices and lower costs of crop nutrients, are also expected to use more fertilizer to boost yields.

Prices of fertilizers fell in the January-to-March quarter as supply from Belarus, the third-largest potash exporter, resumed and costs of key inputs, including nitrogen, fell from 2022 highs.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Turkish parties vow to send refugees home in poll run-up

ANKARA, Turkey — For Nidal Jumaa, a Syrian from Aleppo, life in Turkey is tough. He works part time at a furniture workshop and collects plastics and cardboard from trash cans that he sells for recycling, but he can hardly afford the rent for a run-down house in a low-income neighborhood of Ankara.

Despite the hardship, the 31-year-old would prefer to remain in Turkey than return to Syria where he no longer has a house or a job. Most of all, he worries that his 2-year-old son, Hikmat, who requires regular medical supervision following two surgeries, would not be able to receive the treatment he needs back home.

"Where would we go in Syria?" Jumaa said. "Everywhere is destroyed

because of the war. We can't go back."

Syrians fleeing the civil war — now into its 12th year — were once welcomed in Turkey because of compassion, making the country home to the world's largest refugee community. But as their numbers grew — and as the country began to grapple with a battered economy, including skyrocketing food and housing prices — so did calls for their return. A shortage of housing and shelters following devastating earthquakes in February revived calls for the return of Syrians, who number at least 3.7 million.

The repatriation of Syrians and other migrants has become a top theme in Sunday's presidential and parliamentary elections when the country

will decide whether to give incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan a new mandate to rule or bring an opposition candidate to power.

All three presidential hopefuls running against Erdogan have promised to send refugees back. Erdogan himself has not mentioned the migration issue on the campaign trail. However, faced with a wave of backlash against refugees, his government has been seeking ways to resettle Syrians back home.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the joint candidate of an alliance of opposition parties that includes nationalists, said he plans to repatriate Syrians on a voluntary basis within two years. If elected, he would seek European Union funds to build homes,

schools, hospitals and other amenities in Syria and encourage Turkish entrepreneurs to open factories and businesses to create employment.

"How long must we carry this heavy load?" Kilicdaroglu said last month. "We want peace in Syria. We want our Syrian brothers and sisters who took refuge in our country to live in peace in their own country."

In Ankara's impoverished Ismet-pasa neighborhood, plastic sheets partially cover the roof to keep the rain out of the house where Jumaa, his wife Jawahir and their four children live. The family has no furniture and they sleep on mats they throw around a coal heater.

Asked about the anti-migrant sentiment and calls for the repatria-

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

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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

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

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WORLDUS

Jury finds Trump sexually abused writer

By AI HEPING in New York
aiheping@chinadailyusa.com

A jury in Manhattan on Tuesday found former US president Donald Trump sexually abused a writer in a 1996 attack in a dressing room of a department store but rejected her claim that Trump raped her.

After a little under three hours of deliberation, the jury of six men and three women in the civil case found it more likely than not that Trump sexually abused E. Jean Carroll in a dressing room of the Bergdorf Goodman store on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, across from the Trump Tower building, and that she was injured as a result.

Jurors also found that Trump defamed Carroll in comments he made denying her allegations, which she first made publicly in 2019. In a posted statement on his Truth Social website in October 2022, Trump called her case "a complete con job" and "a Hoax and a lie".

Trump was ordered to pay her \$5 million in damages.

"I filed this lawsuit against Donald Trump to clear my name and to get my life back," Carroll said in a statement. "Today, the world finally knows the truth. This victory is not just for me but for every woman who has suffered because she was not believed."

It marked the first time that Trump, 76, who has faced years of allegations that he engaged in sexual misconduct with women, has had to answer such a claim at trial.

Trump has insisted he never sexually assaulted Carroll or even knew her.

The jury heard from Carroll, who formerly was a longtime Elle magazine columnist and at one time a writer for *Saturday Night Live*, over three days, two other women who accused Trump of sexually attacking them and two friends whom Carroll confided in about the alleged attack.

Trump didn't appear or testify in court during the three-week civil trial. He was under no obligation to do



E. Jean Carroll exits the federal courthouse in Manhattan following the verdict in the civil rape accusation case against former US president Donald Trump, in New York City on Tuesday. ANDREW KELL / REUTERS

either. Instead, recordings of his deposition in the case were played in court.

Trump wrote on his social media platform after the verdict was announced: "I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHO THIS WOMAN IS.

THIS VERDICT IS A DISGRACE — A CONTINUATION OF THE GREATEST WITCH HUNT OF ALL TIME!"

Carroll, 79, smiled as the verdict from the jury was announced. She left the courthouse and walked past

microphones and reporters who had gathered outside. Accompanied by her lawyer Roberta Kaplan, she entered a car and left the area.

Trump attorney Joe Tacopina congratulated and hugged Kaplan and shook Carroll's hand.

Carroll testified that she had a chance encounter with Trump at the Bergdorf Goodman store. She said it was a lighthearted interaction in which they teased each other about trying on a piece of lingerie before Trump became violent inside a dressing room.

Tacopina told the jury in closing arguments Monday that Carroll's account was too farfetched to be believed. He said she made it up to fuel sales of a 2019 memoir in which she first publicly revealed her claims and to disparage Trump for political reasons.

Carroll's attorney Kaplan cited excerpts from Trump's October deposition and his comments on a 2005 *Access Hollywood* video in which

he said celebrities can grab women between the legs without asking.

Kaplan said much of what Trump said in his deposition and in public statements "actually supports our side of the case".

Trump's lawyer argued that his client was never even in the Bergdorf Goodman dressing room where Carroll said he attacked that evening. Carroll and the witnesses she called to corroborate her account had simply made up the story, Tacopina argued, and so had the two witnesses at the trial who said under oath that they, too, had been sexually attacked by Trump.

Kaplan compared the way her client had appeared during the trial — a "courageous" woman who answered questions "calmly and patiently" to Trump's comments in a videotaped deposition shown to the jury.

In it, Trump had said he couldn't have raped Carroll because she was not his "type".

Agencies contributed to this story.

Peace efforts falter while US sends more military aid to Ukraine

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

While China and Brazil have offered to mediate a cease-fire in the Russia-Ukraine military conflict, the flow of Western arms to Ukraine continued on Tuesday.

The United States announced a new \$1.2 billion military aid package for Ukraine that will include air defense systems, ammunition and funds for training, the Pentagon said. Antonio Guterres, the secretary-general of the United Nations, expressed skepticism Tuesday over efforts to halt the conflict, which started in February 2022.

"Peace negotiations are not possible at this time," Guterres told Spain's *El Pais* newspaper in an interview, adding that the efforts were "doomed to fail".

"I already said that peace negotiations at this time are not going to happen. I hope in the future, yes. There was talk of a Russian offensive in the winter and a Ukrainian one in the spring. It is evident that the parties are fully involved into the war," Guterres said.

China unveiled a 12-point peace road map earlier this year to halt the hostilities. The initiative got a positive response in Moscow, with Russia's top leadership signaling a willingness to discuss it.

However, the proposal was rejected by Kyiv and its Western allies, who accused Beijing of siding with Russia and therefore having no standing in peace talks.

In late April, Brazilian President Lula da Silva said: "There is no use now in saying who is right, who is wrong. What we have to do now is stop the war."

Meanwhile, in Moscow on Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Western "arrogance" is driving a "real war" against Russia, and the West's "superiority ideology is, by definition, repulsive, deadly, and criminal".

Putin, who made the comments Tuesday during a Victory Day parade in Moscow's Red Square, said Western leaders "still talk about their exclusivity, put people against each other and divide society, provoke bloody conflicts and coups, sow hatred, Russophobia, aggressive nationalism, destroy those family, traditional values that make humans human".

Victory Day marks the anniversary of Germany's unconditional surrender in World War II on the night of May 8, 1945.

The Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funds from Washington will be used to purchase the weapons, allowing US President Joe Biden's administration to buy arms from industry instead of pulling them from US stocks. Delivery of the weapons and systems depends on their availability and production timeline.

The Pentagon said it will fund air-defense munitions and drones for

air defense and provide equipment to help modify Western air-defense launchers, missiles and radars so they can be used with Ukraine's systems. It will also buy artillery rounds, howitzer ammunition, satellite imagery assistance and funding for ongoing maintenance and spare parts for a variety of systems.

US officials said the weapons include HAWK air-defense systems. They spoke on condition of anonymity because that has not yet been formally announced.

So far in fiscal 2023, the US Department of Defense has provided \$5 billion in military aid to Ukraine under the USAI in four separate tranches. In fiscal 2022, the US spent \$6.3 billion worth in USAI funds for Ukraine's defense.

The US has also rushed more than \$35 billion worth of weapons to Ukraine using presidential draw-down authority, which authorizes the president to transfer articles and services from US stocks without congressional approval during an emergency.

Tuesday's military aid announcement came as Congress and the White House debated ways to avoid a default on the nation's \$31.4 trillion debt, with many Republicans demanding sharp cuts in domestic spending in exchange for increasing the debt ceiling.

Members of both parties, however, maintain that they support continued aid for Ukraine including top Republicans House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Mitch McConnell, the top Republican in the Senate.

Including Tuesday's package, the US has provided Ukraine nearly \$37 billion in military aid since the start of the conflict. Ukraine says it is preparing to launch a spring offensive against Russian forces, with air defense a challenge for Kyiv.

The announcement of the latest aid package sparked criticism on social media, with some questioning the continued aid to Ukraine while Title 42, a pandemic-era restriction on migration to the US, is set to expire Thursday.

"Today the US approved another \$1 Billion plus in aid to a foreign nation thousands of miles away to help secure their border," tweeted Alejandro Miguelsky. "In 2 days the US will begin to lose whatever border we still have allowing Millions to pour in."

Eddie Tarazona, an Army veteran, wrote on Twitter: "The US is set to announce a \$1.2b aid package to @Ukraine... Not for our Southern Border, not for our Veterans and Troops, not for our decaying infrastructure but for a proxy war we're fighting against @Russia. This must end."

Twitter user "Working Dawg" in South Carolina, in a message to Republican US Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, wrote: "@LindseyGrahamSC STOP sending my hard earned money to Ukraine's winless war. Protect OUR border!"

Agencies contributed to this story.



US border patrol officers organize a group of families between primary and secondary border fences as the United States prepares to lift COVID-19 era Title 42 restrictions that have prohibited migrants at the US-Mexico border from seeking asylum since 2020, near San Diego on Tuesday. MIKE BLAKE / REUTERS

Cities at southern border prepare for migrant surge

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

More than 150,000 migrants are waiting in northern Mexico states to cross the US border once the pandemic-era Title 42 policy ends Thursday, according to the federal government.

Enacted by then-President Donald Trump, the policy allowed border officials to immediately turn away illegal migrants at the border.

Now governments at federal, state and city levels are scrambling to prepare for the anticipated surge of migrants once the policy expires. Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced Monday that he is deploying 450 National Guard troops to the southern border in anticipation of a surge of migrants.

Called the Texas Tactical Border Force, they will be deployed to El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley by Tuesday, Abbott said.

Last week, the Biden administration announced a plan to deploy 1,500 active-duty military members to the southern border this week, at the request of the Homeland Security Department.

For 90 days, military personnel will perform administrative duties and

free up border patrol personnel to work in the field.

"Military personnel will not directly participate in law enforcement activities. This deployment to the border is consistent with other forms of military support to DHS over many years," Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said in a statement.

In El Paso, a major border city in Texas, Mayor Oscar Leeser declared a state of emergency beginning May 1.

When the announcement was made, there were already more than 2,000 migrants sleeping on sidewalks near shelters in El Paso. Unconfirmed reports estimated that up to 35,000 asylum seekers are waiting in Juarez, Mexico, which is connected to El Paso by a bridge, to cross the United States border when Title 42 expires, reported the *El Paso Times*.

Leeser said that the emergency declaration allows the city to open temporary shelters to the anticipated influx of migrants.

In Brownsville, another major border city in Texas, roughly 2,500 migrants have crossed through the river daily into the city in the past few days, according to *The Associated Press*.

However, the city has the capacity to process only 1,000 migrants a day.

It also declared a state of emergency due to the current and anticipated influx of migrants.

According to Homeland Security, the US-Mexico border crossings have reached more than 8,000 in recent days. That number is expected to reach around 10,000 after Title 42 is lifted, reported CNN.

The federal government estimated that more than 150,000 migrants were waiting in northern Mexico states last weekend. That includes 60,000 in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, 35,000 in the state of Tamaulipas, and 25,000 in the state of Coahuila, according to CNN.

With Title 42 ending, the US will deport migrants under Title 8, and migrants entering illegally are not eligible for asylum and could be barred from entering the US for at least five years or face criminal charges if they get caught crossing illegally again.

However, processing time under Title 8 would take longer, which could further strain border resources.

Beyond the southern border, some northern US cities are preparing to deal with the anticipated surge as buses with migrants started to arrive in New York City last week again after a halt for a few months, *The Wall Street Journal* reported.

New York started sheltering migrants in the gym of the former police academy in Manhattan on May 4. Mayor Eric Adams announced the next day that the city will send willing migrants to other neighboring New York communities, including Orange and Rockland counties, just north of the city.

Both counties have resisted and declared a state of emergency following Adams' announcement. The state of emergency in Rockland prohibits other municipalities from sending migrants there.

New York is anticipating 800 migrants will arrive in the city daily after Title 42 ends. CNN reported that an internal city memo indicated that the city is looking at possible solutions, which include tents in Central Park.

In Chicago, where about 8,100 migrants have been sent by border states, there has been such a shortage of shelter that Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot sent an open letter to Abbott imploring him not to resume sending buses with migrants.

Abbott suggested that Lightfoot ask President Joe Biden to control the border.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Survey: 1 in 5 Asian Americans hide cultural identity

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

About 1 in 5 Asian Americans say they have hidden some aspects of their culture from people who aren't Asian, for several reasons, from potential discrimination to "fear of being embarrassed" to wanting to avoid awkward questions or having to explain themselves.

And about 30 percent of Asians born in the US say they have hidden their culture, compared with 15 percent of Asian immigrants.

Those are some of the key findings of a new Pew Research Center report released Monday. The survey is based on a sample of 7,006 adults in the United States who identify as Asian, either alone or in combination with other races or Hispanic ethnicity. Respondents were interviewed between July 5, 2022, and Jan 27 of this year.

Young Asian Americans are more likely to hide some aspects of their culture or heritage such as food, cultural practices, clothing or religious practices, than older Asians are, the survey found.

Thirty-nine percent of Asian Americans age 18 to 29 said that they have done so, compared with 12 percent among those ages 50 to 64, and 5 percent of those 65 and older.

When asked why they have hidden aspects of their culture, Asian adults born in the US cited reasons such as a "lack of understanding" and "fear of discrimination".

Those two responses highlight the challenges faced by US-born Asians, who often must "deal with non-Asians having a general lack of knowledge of their heritage" or "avoid negative experiences such as bullying, teasing, or mockery", the report said.

For foreign-born Asians, the reason for hiding aspects of their culture

is more likely to be the "extra effort sometimes needed to explain aspects of their heritage to non-Asians". They also cited fears of prejudice or situations that would make them feel uncomfortable.

The Pew survey was released during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, a celebration to recognize the contributions and influence of the AAPI community to the history, culture and achievements of the US.

Asian Americans comprise 7 percent of the US population, according to data from Pew. And nearly all, or 90 percent of Asians in the US say that they have many different cultures.

Immigrants make up about 54 percent of the Asian population in the US. Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese people together account for 79 percent of all Asian Americans.

The Asian community is dealing with a surge in hate crimes and attacks. Nearly 3 out of 4 Chinese Americans reported experiencing racial discrimination within the past year, according to a recent study by Columbia University and the Committee of 100.

That figure has further led to most Asian Americans not feeling safe in the US. The Social Tracking of Asian Americans in the US this year reveals that half of them feel unsafe due to their race or ethnicity.

Asians are also the least likely to feel they belong and are accepted in the US. A survey conducted by the Asian American Foundation and the organization Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change found that 22 percent of Asian Americans said they feel accepted by the US, compared with 57 percent of white respondents, 25 percent of Hispanic people and 24 percent of black people.

BUSINESS

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HIGHER GROUND

Industry still lynchpin of future growth

Key meeting says shift in focus from real to virtual economy to be avoided

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's latest emphasis on speeding up the construction of a modern industrial system backed by the real economy will help the country gain a competitive edge in strategically important fields and lay a solid foundation for long-term economic growth amid headwinds and external uncertainties, experts and business executives said.

Recent policy developments have underscored the country's firm determination to focus on developing the real economy — especially high-end manufacturing underpinned by cutting-edge digital technologies — safeguarding the security and stability of industrial and supply chains, and achieving greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, they said.

Their comments came as the recent meeting of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs stressed that in order to build a modern industrial system that is holistic, advanced and secure, China should seize opportunities presented by the new scientific and technological revolution, such as artificial intelligence.

A shift of focus from the real to the virtual economy must be

avoided, the meeting noted, highlighting efforts to reinforce the country's strength in having a complete industrial system with strong support capacity, transform and upgrade traditional industries, and make industrial security a top priority.

Li Xianjun, an associate researcher with the Institute of Industrial Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said China's efforts to put a development focus on the real economy and build up its strength in the modern industrial system will help make China's economy more resilient, strengthen the capacity to buffer against external risks and shocks, and build the country into a manufacturing powerhouse.

"The manufacturing industry, as the main body of China's real economy, is playing an increasingly crucial role in motivating enterprises to bolster technological innovation, facilitating the development of other strategic emerging sectors, and enhancing the country's core competitiveness on the global stage," Li said.

China has maintained its position as the world's largest manufacturing hub for 13 straight years, accounting for nearly 30 percent of global manufacturing output in 2022, according to the Ministry of



An employee operates a robotic arm at an AI manufacturing plant in Huzhou, Zhejiang province.
XIE SHANGGUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Industry and Information Technology.

The meeting sends a clear signal that China attaches importance to rapidly growing AI technology, which is accelerating its deep integration into various industries, and will play a bigger role in liberating productive forces and fostering new growth drivers, said Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School.

Faced with increasingly fierce international competition, the construction of a modern industrial system is of great significance to boost intelligent, green and integrated development of industries, improve the resilience and security of industrial and supply chains, and inject strong impetus into China's economic recovery, Pan said.

He called for heightened efforts to strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights to spur technological innovation, and optimize the business environment to

attract capital and technology inflows.

Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of Chinese consumer electronics company TCL Technology Group Corp, said China's resolve to develop its real economy and modernize its industrial system has set the direction for the country's high-tech manufacturing segment, which has become an important driver of China's high-quality economic development.

"China's manufacturers should transition from exporting products to exporting industrial capacities, ramp up localized operations abroad and avoid trade barriers to enhance their global competitiveness," Li said.

Chen Duan, director of the Digital Economy Integration Innovation Development Center at the Central University of Finance and Economics, said more efforts are needed to beef up investment in frontier technologies and forward-looking fields, and achieve breakthroughs in core technologies in

key areas through independent innovation amid a rising tide of protectionism in some countries.

Meanwhile, Chen highlighted the significance of expanding international exchanges and cooperation in science and technology, and taking an active part in formulating global rules and standards for core technologies.

AI is expected to become an important driving force for improving total factor productivity and promoting China's high-quality economic development on the premise of preventing potential risks brought by new-generation technology, said Li Qilin, chief economist at Shanghai-listed Hongta Securities.

Zhou Hongyi, founder of cybersecurity company 360 Security Group, said AI-powered large language models will spearhead a new round of technological and industrial revolution and the company will leverage digital technologies to promote the digital transformation of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

Reform lifts valuations, equities of listed SOEs

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

Stock-market investors in China are favorably disposed toward State-owned enterprises listed in the A-share market as "the valuation system with Chinese characteristics" has become a buzz phrase among market mavens, following the advanced state of SOE reform, experts said.

Although the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index shed 1.1 percent on Tuesday, shares of A-share SOEs such as Sinochem Ltd, China International Capital Corp Ltd and AVIC Industry-Finance Holdings surged by the daily limit of 10 percent.

China Securities, China CITIC Bank and Dawning Information Industry Co Ltd closed more than 4 percent higher.

The sub-index themed on "the valuation system with Chinese characteristics" compiled by market tracker Wind Info, shed 1.27 percent on Tuesday but is up more than 31 percent this year, while the SCI climbed 77 percent since Jan 1.

Yi Huiman, chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, told a forum in late November that efforts should be made to "explore a valuation system with Chinese characteristics" so that the market can play a bigger role in allocating resources.

Xiang Pengfei, a researcher at Guosheng Securities, said A-share SOEs with special industry backgrounds are often evaluated by investors using what has come to be known as "the valuation system with Chinese characteristics". But, in the past, although these companies used to provide high dividends and stable profitability, they had long been undervalued and overlooked by equity investors.

Now, however, perceptions are changing, thanks to effective supportive policies. So, the bullish performance of certain SOEs may continue in anticipation of more supportive policies, Xiang said.

The rally in A-share SOEs comes ahead of a business exchange meeting to be held by the Shanghai bourse on Thursday. Industry insiders will likely discuss "the valuation system with Chinese characteristics" and promote exchange traded fund or ETF products themed on the SOE stakeholder return index, according to the meeting's invitation letter.

China Reform Holdings Corp Ltd, which compiles the SOE stakeholder return index, is the joint organizer of the Thursday meeting.

In late April, the CSRC approved the release of the first three ETFs based on the SOE stakeholder return index. The funds will be launched by China Universal Asset Management, GF Fund Management and China Merchants Fund. The three ETFs will open for subscription from Monday to May 19, with the combined financing totaling 6 billion yuan (\$866 million).

Analysts from Industrial Securities said the ETFs will introduce incremental capital for SOEs, which will facilitate the expansion of quality SOEs and their high-quality development. Investors will be provided with more asset allocation tools, benefiting from the ongoing SOE reform.

The Government Work Report released in March stressed the SOE reform should be deepened to improve the core competitiveness of these companies. The State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council also emphasized during a meeting in early March that SOEs should look up to world-leading companies in terms of value creation.

According to Dai Kang, chief strategist of GF Securities, SOEs shoulder much responsibility in the development of key industries like military, electricity, telecommunications and engineering equipment.

A-share SOEs with huge growth potential and Hong Kong-listed SOEs with high dividends will gain increasing attention from investors, he said.

But Dai also hastened to add that SOEs' investor relations management is still suboptimal while institutions' surveys on SOEs are inadequate, which affects SOE valuations, he said.

Chinese vehicles hitting roads worldwide

By LI FUSHENG
lifusheng@chinadaily.com.cn

China-made vehicles are gaining popularity overseas, with the value of the country's auto exports in the first four months more than doubling year-on-year, said the General Administration of Customs on Tuesday.

Some 204.5 billion yuan (\$29.52 billion) worth of vehicles were shipped from Chinese ports between January and April, up 120.3 percent from the same period last year. The General Administration of Customs did not release vehicle export volume over the period.

In the first quarter, automakers

exported 994,000 vehicles, up 70.6 percent year-on-year, with Belgium, Mexico and Saudi Arabia top destinations, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

China's vehicle exports have been on the rise for years, with shipments reaching 3.11 million units last year to overtake Germany as the world's No 2 vehicle exporter, behind only Japan, said the General Administration of Customs.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, said prospects for China's exports are bright, especially for its new energy vehicles, thanks to the nation's leading position in the segment.

The CPCA said 300,000 passen-

ger vehicles, including knock-down kits, were exported in April from China, up 227 percent year-on-year, of which NEVs accounted for roughly 30 percent.

Total passenger car exports totaled 1.08 million units from January to April, up 115 percent year-on-year.

Great Wall Motors, China's largest SUV and pickup truck maker, saw its overseas sales reach 21,814 units in April, up 182.09 percent year-on-year, accounting for 23.43 percent of its total deliveries for the month.

The Hebei province-based automaker said it inked cooperation deals with dealerships from dozens of countries at the Shanghai auto show held in April, which further

expanded its global reach.

In April, Great Wall Motors launched new energy models in the Philippines and Brazil. The company said it will enter other markets including Singapore, Cambodia and Vietnam later this year.

SAIC Motor exported 89,643 vehicles in April, bringing the total for the first four months to 346,696 units — up 64.99 percent from the January-April 2022 period.

SAIC, China's largest vehicle maker and exporter by sales, expects its total exports to hit 1.2 million units this year, up from 1.02 million units in 2022, with Europe, the Middle East and Mexico among its major markets.

Zhao Aimin, vice-president of SAIC International, said one important factor behind SAIC's success in overseas markets is the offer of com-

petitive products based on an understanding of local customer needs.

Zhao gave the example of the company's MG4 EV electric hatchback, launched in 2022, which is its first model developed with global markets in mind.

It has won top ratings in new car quality programs across different regions, including the extremely strict European New Car Assessment Program.

Oliver Blume, CEO of Germany's Volkswagen Group, said there is opportunity for Chinese brands to be successful "not only in China but also worldwide in the future".

"It's still a long way to go but some Chinese automotive brands already have very competitive products," said Blume at the Shanghai auto show in April.

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank continued to inject funds into the financial system through open market operations on Tuesday. The People's Bank of China said it has conducted 2 billion yuan (\$288.79 million) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 2 percent. The move is aimed at keeping liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, according to the central bank. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

Power consumption likely to rise 6%

The China Electricity Council expects the country's power use will register stable growth in 2023 driven by the overall recovery of the nation's economy. Electricity consumption will increase by about 6 percent year-on-year to reach 9.15 trillion kilowatt-hours, the council said in a report, adding that the growth is expected to pick up significantly in the second quarter. Total power use hit 2.12 trillion kWh in the first quarter, up 3.6 percent year-on-year.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Swiss firm GF ready to ride recovery, NEV boom

By MA SI
masi@chinadaily.com.cn

Georg Fischer, a Swiss industrial company, is optimistic about the growth prospects of the Chinese market given China's all-round progress toward the national goal of high-quality development, and hence will continue to increase investment in the country to support local customers and partners, its CEO said.

Known as GF, the company held opening ceremonies for its two factories in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, and Shenyang, Liaoning province, in late April. The combined investment of the two factories is expected to get close to 1 billion yuan (\$144 million) at the final stage.

Andreas Muller, CEO of GF, said in an exclusive interview: "China is one of the most important markets for GF. On a global scale, it's the biggest single market for GF's three divisions, namely the Casting Solutions Division, the Machining Solutions Division and the Piping Systems Division.

"The largest number of machine tools are being consumed here in China, so you have to be here in

China. The most cars are being built here in China, and the most new electric vehicles are being built in China as well."

As a Swiss brand with 221 years of history, GF is a major player in safe transport pipelines for liquids and gases, lightweight castings for vehicles, and high-precision machining technology. Its products are used in a wide range of industries like automotive, aerospace, energy, healthcare, and information and communications technology.

GF has 25 subsidiaries in China, including 18 production sites in 14 cities. The new factories in Yangzhou and Shenyang will further expand its manufacturing presence in the Yangtze River Delta region and Northeast China and help provide closer and more convenient services to customers, GF said.

"We believe China will rebound stronger than the rest of the world in terms of GDP growth. We also anticipate that we might be seeing an even stronger growth in the second half of this year than what we have seen in the first quarter and the quarter to come," Muller said.

Such a strong economic rebound, Muller said, will provide more opportunities for GF's devel-



The booth of Georg Fischer during an expo in Shanghai.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

opment. "The share of new electric vehicles in total car sales in China is impressive. I think it's not a secret that today one of the best technologies in terms of batteries is coming out of China."

Data from the China Passenger Car Association showed that in March, new energy vehicle sales reached 653,000 units, up nearly 35 percent year-on-year. The CPCA estimates that China's NEV sales will reach 9 million units this year, up from 6.9 million in 2022.

The National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator, said earlier that it will take steps to encourage consumption and boost growth momentum, including stabilizing strong spending on cars.

Yang Jinghao, chief economist at Concat Data Technology (Hangzhou) Co, said the NDRC's move to spur car consumption, particularly the promotion of NEVs in rural areas, will boost rural consumption and thus offer more opportunities for NEV-related companies.

According to GF, its Shenyang new casting solutions factory is well-equipped to produce complicated, large automotive structural parts like large body parts for NEVs and instrument panel beams. The Yangzhou factory is the largest and most efficient GF Piping Systems factory in Asia, which can serve customers in relatively new sectors like microelectronics, water treatment, chemicals, marine, construction and data centers.

BUSINESS



Workers ready a tunneling machine at a construction site of Hefei Metro in Anhui province in March. The urban rail project under construction is partly being built by China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd. YUAN BING / FOR CHINA DAILY

SOEs shine as demand for better infrastructure on rise

Report underlines advantages of State players in building solutions, biz model

By ZHUANG QIANG

zhuangqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

The surging demand for better infrastructure nationwide and in global markets — especially those involved in the Belt and Road Initiative — is expected to draw increasing participation from State-owned enterprises engaged in the sector, as such demand is providing valuable opportunities to sharpen their business edge and expand operating scale, a recent report said.

According to a report on Tuesday by China Securities Co Ltd, there is robust demand for infrastructure around the world, and the annual global total of infrastructure investment is expected to surpass \$3 trillion by 2025. With diplomatic advantages earned by China through its efforts in pushing global cooperation, such as the BRI, and the nation's edge in infrastructure building, State contractors stand out among their global peers also for their professional solutions and maturer operating models.

In China, where infrastructure investment has been a key pillar stabilizing economic growth, especially during the COVID-ravaged years, the country's fast recovery still relies heavily on efforts to expand domestic demand, in which infrastructure investment plays a significant role, the report said.

Infrastructure investment will still be a focus of macroeconomic

policies this year. The annual growth of the sector is expected to reach a relatively high level of around 10 percent this year, with most spending seen in projects concerning urban construction, transportation and infrastructure supporting clean energy use, the report said.

\$3 trillion

expected annual global infrastructure investment by 2025

"Based on last year's issuing pace of special local bonds and regarding the significant role infrastructure plays in stabilizing the economy, issuance of the bonds is likely to speed up in the second quarter this year," said Wen Bin, chief researcher at China Minsheng Bank.

"In addition, with COVID-19 impacts easing, fiscal spending on pandemic controls will fall while that on infrastructure will rise. With various financing tools taking effect, infrastructure construction will further accelerate this year driven by ample fund resources, and more new projects are expected to commence," Wen said.

Citing the purchasing managers' index concerning construction in April, which was 63.9 — much higher than the 50-point mark that separates contraction from growth — the report said that with various

favorable conditions, State contractors which have generally shown clear improvements in their earning strength will reap more benefits in domestic and global markets amid their future expansion.

China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd, a unit of the centrally administered China Railway Construction Corp, told China Daily that its construction is heading faster toward early operations on some domestic projects.

One of the builders engaging in the urban rail project in Hefei, Anhui province, CR24 said its workers dug through a two-way tunnel on a section under construction on Hefei Metro's Line 6 over the weekend.

Located in the section between Science Avenue and Huaining Road, the underground tunnel went through many high-risk areas in the provincial capital, such as under office buildings, expressways and a railway station. Construction workers paid extra attention as tunneling work runs the risk of leading to the settlement of nearby buildings and foundations, CR24 said.

In addition, the State contractor said its team working on the Wenling-Yuhuan High-speed Railway project in Taizhou, Zhejiang province, is also making faster progress than expected, thanks to recovering industrial and logistics chains nationwide.

One of the SOEs participating in the building of the high-speed rail line, CR24 said that with the supply of construction workers being adequate thanks to the optimization of the COVID-19 control measures, the team managed to gain back its

pace on the project of which 84.8 percent of works are bridge and tunnel construction.

The railway is a local railway project to facilitate integrated regional development, CR24 said, with the newly planned section reaching 37.8 kilometers.

Globally, in Sri Lanka's Dambulla, the first section of a 17-km canal project undertaken by China State Construction Engineering Corp (CSECE) Sri Lanka Branch started operating near the village of Nabadagahawatta in late April, with the water carried from the nearby Wemedilla Reservoir.

The canal section, which is 1.5 meters high, irrigates the farmlands it passes through before reaching the destination, putting an end to the long-felt difficulties faced by local farmers.

CSECE said its workers are responsible for the construction work of two tunnels, four siphons, an open water canal, an underground water canal, bridges, culverts, roads and landscaping along the canal line.

"The construction is progressing smoothly thanks to team efforts, which comprises both Chinese and local employees. The main structure of the entire canal is expected to be completed before the end of this year," said Tao Yanrong, the project manager.

CSECE, ninth on the Fortune Global 500 list, reported in April a 10.6 percent surge in its new contract value last year. Its revenue surpassed 2 trillion yuan (\$288.7 billion) for the first time in 2022, a year-on-year increase of 8.6 percent.

Cross-border livestream marketing boosts trade

HANGZHOU — Chinese exporters have found a new way to rev up sales by setting up livestreaming rooms within their factories, directly promoting a wide variety of products like garments, excavators and charging piles to global buyers.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, Yiwu O-Choice Import and Export, a leading supplier of silk products such as pillowcases, launches broadcasting sessions on Alibaba.com, an online business-to-business marketplace for global wholesalers.

Among the 60-plus members of the firm's foreign trade group, over 10 have turned themselves into livestreamers. During a recent one-hour session, its sales reached \$650,000 in silk products, according to general manager Liu Mingyang.

"We started livestreaming last year and it has become part of our everyday work," Liu said, adding that cross-border livestreaming and short videos have greatly improved their transaction efficiency.

Yiwu O-Choice is among many Chinese export-oriented enterprises that are riding a new cross-border e-commerce wave to reach overseas buyers and boost their trade recovery.

Chinese sportswear maker Zhejiang Aidu Garments decided to dive headfirst into livestream marketing in the second half of 2021. In the first quarter of this year, the company saw a 38 percent year-on-year rise in sales.

"By taking overseas buyers on a virtual tour of our office, research and development center and exhibition room, we have been able to land orders more quickly and efficiently," said Lai Guorong, general manager of Aidu.

The businesses' turn to livestreaming is being accelerated by the efforts of Alibaba.com.

Since it launched a cross-border livestreaming service two years ago, more than 40,000 businesses have tried the new approach, with an average of 5,000 to 6,000 broadcast sessions held each day, according to Zhang Kuo, president of Alibaba.com.

Data show that from January to March, the number of overseas livestreaming viewers on Alibaba.com increased 198 percent year-on-year.

Economists believe that live broadcast e-commerce has bolstered the recovery of China's trade during its digitalization wave.

China's foreign trade got off to a steady start in 2023, as total goods imports and exports expanded 4.8 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, reversing a decline of 0.8 percent in the first two months of the year, official data showed.

In the first three months, exports grew 8.4 percent year-on-year to 5.65 trillion yuan (\$815.6 billion) while imports rose 0.2 percent to 4.24 trillion yuan, bringing total trade to 9.89 trillion yuan.

According to a State Council executive meeting held in early April, China will make more efforts to implement a policy mix to maintain the stability of foreign trade and help enterprises secure orders and expand the market.

"Cross-border livestreaming can help buyers and sellers establish trust quickly. The new approach will have huge potential in the future," Liu said.

XINHUA

New initiative to better bridge MNCs with China

ST. GALLEN, Switzerland — The International Institute for Management Development, a world-renowned Swiss business school, said its newly launched China Initiative aims at supporting multinational corporations in establishing their footprint and growing their impact in China.

"We are very much looking forward to intensifying our activities in China and also aim to bring Chinese companies to the world in a bid to build a bridge between China and the rest of the world," IMD President Jean-Francois Manzoni told Xinhua at the 52nd St. Gallen Symposium, the world's leading platform for cross-generational dialogue and collaboration.

"If you want to be a global school, you have to understand who is innovating and then try to codify these practices and explain them to everybody else," said the head of the institute, an independent business school with campuses in Lausanne, Switzerland and Singapore.

"Our activities in China are not just a distribution channel to other participants. They're also a way to connect with the incredibly vibrant innovation that is taking place there," Manzoni said.

The new China Initiative based in

Shenzhen, Guangdong province, led by CEO of IMD China Mark Greeven, will work with multinational corporations and top Chinese companies to provide insight into a thriving China.

Manzoni said the aim is to assist multinationals in demystifying China and improve their growth and impact in the country while enabling Chinese companies to thrive globally.

"We initially had activities in China that were mainly focused on State-owned enterprises, particularly banks, and those organizations were very happy to come to Switzerland occasionally," he said.

"There's also a vibrant tech and innovation sector in China which we had not yet touched. What we will do now is continue to have a few of us focused on State-owned enterprises, and have this new organization that will work more closely with tech companies," he added.

"We're also there to learn and document their practices and to explain to the rest of the world what's happening in China," he said.

The IMD has been ranked among the top three of the Financial Times' executive education rankings since 2012.

XINHUA

IEA: Unified power market key to nation's green push

By ZHENG XIN

zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China should establish a national spot power market and lift the barriers of interprovincial trade to advance power markets that support the country's green energy transition, according to a recent report.

China's power market, after more than two decades of reform, boasts the world's largest installed capacity — twice that of the United States. However, diversified moves are still necessary to support coordination between national and local markets, according to a report on building a unified national power market system in China released by the International Energy Agency in late April.

It is necessary for the government to further reinforce the role of national institutions to supervise market implementation and ensure coordination among national plans, markets and operational protocols

to allow more flexible trading arrangements, it said.

According to Jacques Warichet, a researcher from the IEA, China should also step up the deployment of short-term markets to implement an economic dispatch and unlock flexibility from supply and demand resources, as markets are playing a growing role in the power system in China.

The mid to long-term markets, with a duration of one month to one year, are the most developed form of markets in China, with their contracts covering half of the electricity consumed and about four-fifths of the traded volume. The short-term markets, on the other hand, have not achieved their full potential despite the possibilities they bring to unlock flexibility from supply and demand resources, he said.

"In market-based systems, the short-term markets play a central role in price formation and support electricity security," he said.

The IEA believes China has been making big steps towards building a unified national power market system. The goals of peaking carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060 will continue to add momentum, expanding its footprint.

"Spot markets are expanding across China after the first provincial spot market pilots were launched in 2019, but their share in trade remains small and the connection with other established markets is still being completed," Warichet said.

He suggested the government should further step up regional trade coordination through a national market to deliver substantial efficiency benefits and increased resilience. In addition to operational efficiency gains, regional trade improves resource sharing across larger areas while bringing many benefits in terms of resilience and can contribute to reducing needed

investments in generation assets for reserve.

Calculations by the IEA show that reductions in operating costs range from 6-12 percent and decreases in carbon dioxide emissions range from 2-10 percent compared with a situation where regional coordination is not improved.

An analyst said increased participation in markets on both the supply and demand sides is expected to continue as the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) aims to give a leading role to markets.

According to Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, power markets can accelerate the decarbonization of the Chinese power sector.

Reducing the carbon intensity of China's electricity is crucial for achieving the government's ambition of peaking carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060, as well as meeting global climate goals, he said.



Wind turbine blades are delivered to a wind farm in Zhangye, Gansu province, in March. WANG JIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Accelerating decarbonization and the further deployment of power markets can create a framework in which a carbon pricing mechanism can take effect and achieve the dual carbon goals smoothly, he added.

For China, well-functioning power markets, together with carbon pricing, play a key role in the green transition.

National institutions can play a bigger role together as integrating the existing markets towards a unified national system will require a higher level of coordination, said the report.

The guidance for market design and market supervision by a national authority can secure the future practices and efficient functioning of markets, it said.

BUSINESSFOCUS

By MA SI

masi@chinadaily.com.cn

Made in China is now entering a new stage of development, as the country beefs up its push to pursue industrial upgrades and intelligent manufacturing.

China now dominates on the Global Lighthouse Network list, a project launched in 2018 by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with consultancy McKinsey & Company, which is a testament to the country's growing manufacturing prowess.

Formed by more than 130 plants to date owned by various companies, the Global Lighthouse Network is a community of manufacturers applying advanced technologies to speed up and spread the smart adoption of fourth industrial revolution technologies — a fusion of artificial intelligence, robotics, the internet of things, blockchain, 3D printing, genetic engineering, quantum computing and other technologies — to their industries worldwide.

To date, China houses 50 such lighthouse factories, the highest number among any country and accounting for nearly one-third of the world's total. These advanced factories, built by both domestic and foreign companies in China, offer a glimpse into how Made in China is upgrading into smart manufacturing and how the country's sprawling industrial economy will evolve in the future, officials and experts said.

Song Huasheng, a professor at Zhejiang University, said the number fully demonstrates that if China was running behind Western countries in the first three industrial revolutions, the country is now a parallel runner and even a leader in certain subsectors in the fourth industrial revolution.

The progress came as China's top leaders attached high importance to manufacturing and the central government unveiled a string of policies to advance industrial upgrades.

For instance, at a group deliberation during the two sessions, China's top legislative and political advisory meetings, in March, President Xi Jinping said the manufacturing industry is indispensable to China at all times and the country should advance new industrialization.

Bai Ming, deputy director of international market research at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said President Xi's emphasis on manufacturing showed that a modern industrial system will be key to China's economic development over the next few years and will have a profound impact.

"In the face of growing external risks, Made in China needs to be backed by a stronger industrial system," Bai said.

Bai said the lighthouse factories showcase how China will sharpen its edge in high-end manufacturing, an arena where all major economies are ramping up to establish a foothold.

For instance, the No 18 Factory of Sany Heavy Industry, a Chinese machinery giant, in Changsha, Hunan province, was recognized as the second lighthouse factory in the global heavy industry sector.

In the factory, Sany has used flexible automated production, artificial intelligence and the IoT solutions to

Lighthouse factories push Made in China into new development stage

Country tops list with number of manufacturers using advanced technology for industrial upgrades



establish a digital and flexible manufacturing system of heavy equipment. The cutting and sorting of steel plates are finished by AI robots with a 3D high-definition vision system, of which the accuracy can be increased to 1 millimeter.

BOE Technology Group Co Ltd, a leading Chinese display panel supplier, has a factory in Fuzhou, Fujian province, which is also recognized as a lighthouse factory by the World Economic Forum.

Liu Wenrui, vice-president of BOE and general manager of the BOE Fuzhou factory, said they have adopted digital technologies and advanced analytics in a fully automated production system, with production costs reduced by 34 percent and output up by 33 percent.

Midea Group Co Ltd, a Chinese home appliances giant, has five lighthouse factories, covering smart home appliances such as refrigerators, washing machines and microwave ovens, which showcase its strength in advanced manufacturing.

British consumer goods company Unilever Plc also has a lighthouse factory in Taicang of East China's Jiangsu province. With a designed daily output of 9 million servings of ice cream, the factory represents Unilever's long-term commitment to the China market by better satisfying Chinese consumers' demands with digital and intelligent technologies, said Xu Yucong, North Asia general manager of Unilever ice cream.

"The 100-million-euro (\$109.7 million) factory is the largest invest-



Top: A worker inspects ice cream quality on a production line of Unilever's lighthouse factory in Taicang, Jiangsu province, in March. JI CHUNPENG / XINHUA

Above: Employees work at Chinese machinery giant Sany Heavy Industry's lighthouse factory in Chongqing in July 2021. XU QIN / XINHUA

ment Unilever has made in the past decade in China, which makes our production intelligent and digitalized," Xu said.

The factory can shorten the period for new product innovation from 12 months to three and enhance the accuracy and efficiency of product demand prediction. It is also more

agile than conventional ones, "allowing us to better keep up with the fast-paced consumer demand in China," Xu said.

For example, the factory can produce a maximum of 9 million servings of Wall's ice cream, including Magnum and Cornetto, on a daily basis. US snack manufacturer Mondelez

International Inc also has a plant in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, which joined the Global Lighthouse Network and became the world's first lighthouse factory in the global biscuit and snack industry in late January.

Joost Vlaanderen, president of Mondelez Greater China, said, "With China entering a new era of

green and innovation-led growth, the country will continue to open up for foreign investments and provide a more favorable business environment."

Jin Zhuanglong, minister of industry and information technology, said China will make more efforts to speed up the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, which play a vital role in building a modern industrial system, and move the manufacturing sector toward higher-end, smarter and greener production.

"The industrial economy is the field with the most innovative activities, the most abundant results in innovation and the strongest spillover effect in innovation," said Jin.

Statistics show that the industrial economy accounts for less than 20 percent of the US GDP, but 70 percent of US innovation activities are directly or indirectly dependent on its industrial economy, he said.

Amid increasingly fierce international competition, it is necessary to build a modern industrial system and improve the resilience and security of China's industrial and supply chains, Jin added.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of consultancy Roland Berger, said, "China has and will keep a very central role in the global supply chain."

"The quality and depths of China's industrial clusters, the flexibility and the ability to quickly pull a lot of people to work, and to launch a new product in consumer electronics are all impressive and cannot be replaced very easily," Depoux said.

According to Depoux, China's industrial and supply chains have improved significantly, as domestic and foreign companies invested heavily in modernizing their local production systems.

China ranks first globally in terms of output for more than 40 percent of the world's 500 major industrial products, said the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Moreover, about 570 Chinese industrial companies are among the world's top 2,500 in terms of research and development investment, boosting their ability to support supply chains, the ministry said.

The high-quality development of China's manufacturing sector has entered a fast lane, buoyed by digital technologies like cloud computing, big data, the IoT and blockchain, said Zhou Yunjie, chairman and CEO of Chinese home appliance giant Haier Group, which has six lighthouse factories to date.

Liu Wenqiang, deputy head of the China Center for Information Industry Development in Beijing, said, "As China strengthens its R&D prowess, it will continue to move up the industrial value chain, which will further increase its appeal in high-end manufacturing."

Hungary, last year. The plant focuses on building server infrastructure, storage systems and high-end personal computer workstations used by its customers throughout Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Covering almost 50,000 square meters across two buildings and three floors, it is Lenovo's first in-house manufacturing facility in Europe. The production line can produce more than 1,000 servers and 4,000 workstations per day — each one built specifically to customer requirements.

Li Xianjun, an associate researcher at the Institute of Industrial Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said, "Advanced manufacturing is playing an increasingly crucial role in bolstering technological innovation, advancing new industrialization and fostering high-quality development."

Li said China's emphasis on the real economy and the development of advanced manufacturing through intelligent digital technologies will help make China's economy more resilient, strengthen the capacity to buffer against external risks and shocks and build the country into a manufacturing powerhouse.

By MA SI

To see how advanced manufacturing technologies are reshaping the consumer electronics industry, an example worth looking at is the world's largest single personal computer factory in Hefei, Anhui province.

The LCFC factory, owned by PC maker Lenovo Group Ltd, demonstrates how it is embracing cutting-edge digital technologies to boost efficiency and lower energy consumption amid fierce competition, significant demand fluctuation and growing need for customized products.

The factory has deployed over 30 fourth industrial revolution flexible automation and advanced analytics use cases, improving labor productivity by 45 percent and reducing supplier quality issues by 55 percent, while managing small-size yet numerous customer orders — 80 percent of which are less than five units — according to the World Economic Forum.

The LCFC factory was recognized as one of 18 additional sites added to the World Economic Forum's Global Lighthouse Network in January this year. The Global Lighthouse Network is a community of

Lenovo facility recognized by World Economic Forum

production sites and value chains that are world leaders in the adoption and integration of cutting-edge technologies.

Established in 2011, LCFC ships products to 126 markets around the world. This is done while managing 300,000 individual pieces of materials and parts every day, and unveiling 300 new products every year with more than 200,000 different product configurations.

Yang Yuanqing, chairman and CEO of Lenovo Group, said, "China is at a critical stage of moving from being a manufacturing powerhouse to a smart-manufacturing center, which will generate more opportunities."

Yang said Lenovo has more than 30 manufacturing bases in countries such as China, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Hungary, India, Japan, Mexico and the United States, which provide products and services to 180 markets.

The company has established a stable cooperative relationship with 5,000 global suppliers. Such a sprawling supply chain network reflects the importance of interna-



Employees run tests on personal computers at Lenovo's LCFC factory in Hefei, Anhui province, in July. The factory was recognized as one of 18 additional sites added to the World Economic Forum's Global Lighthouse Network in January. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

tional cooperation in manufacturing, Yang said.

Lenovo said digital intelligence technology has played a significant role in upgrading its LCFC factory, with a focus on production scheduling, planning and dynamic opera-

tion of the factory's 36 intelligent production lines. This has resulted in significant efficiency gains for scheduling and inventory management, meaning that a completed PC is delivered off the production line every half second.

Moreover, Lenovo said LCFC's focus on research and development and being a center for advanced manufacturing technologies — with a particular emphasis on sustainability — has also resulted in 121 authorized patents in the field of intelligent manufacturing.

One of LCFC's other notable innovations is low-temperature technologies developed to improve PC manufacturing by conserving energy and increasing reliability. Lenovo uses best practices from LCFC across its global manufacturing footprint to support the wider industry ecosystem's digital transformation.

Data from market research company Gartner Inc showed that Lenovo jumped seven places in a year to No 9 on its list of Global Supply Chain Top 25 for 2022. The recognition highlights Lenovo's leadership as a purpose-driven organization and operational center of excellence in the global supply chain community, Gartner said.

Lenovo is also expanding its global manufacturing footprint with a new factory that opened in Ullo,

COMMENT

Editorials

Rationality and dialogue essential to prevent China-US relations passing point of no return

It is no secret that China and the United States have divergent world outlooks. Or that the essential differences between their world views underlie the increasingly fractious relations between Beijing and Washington.

What has happened lately in China-US relations, in particular the growing number of provocative legislative moves by US Congress, former US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan visit last year, the so-called spy balloon incident in February, and present House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's hosting of a meeting of US lawmakers with Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen last month, has certainly been damaging to constructive bilateral engagement.

That is why after the US transformed the wayward Chinese research balloon into explosive entertainment worthy of Marvel Studios, nixing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's planned visit to China, there had been no high-level meeting between the two sides till that between Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang and US Ambassador to China Nicolas Burns on Monday.

The meeting showed that at least Beijing and Washington remain rational enough to try and prevent the world's most consequential bilateral relationship from careering into a collision.

The meeting conveyed the consoling message that, for all the divergences that have been obvious over the recent past and the tacit consensus bilateral ties have truly deteriorated past the point where they could return to their previous state, Beijing and

Washington share the understanding that crisis management is not only in both parties' best interest but a shared obligation as responsible powers.

Given the negative developments in China-US relations over the past four years or more, neither Beijing nor Washington entertains the fantasy of returning to what now seem like the good old days. After all, mutual trust has dropped to a historical low. But what the two sides are trying to do is of critical importance, since unless a careful eye is kept on the frictions between them, there is the real danger they could spark confrontation, a worst-case scenario unaffordable to either party, and indeed everybody.

Qin was correct in pointing out that "the top priority is to stabilize Sino-US relations, avoid a downward spiral, and prevent accidents between China and the United States". Avoiding the worst in bilateral ties is indeed the bottom line for the time being.

However, the conspicuous cognitive gaps between Beijing and Washington, which are the foremost factor undermining mutual trust, mean there is no easy solution to the conundrum. Qin has expressed Beijing's wish that "the US will reflect deeply, meet China halfway, and push China-US relations out of the predicament and back on track".

Various efforts are underway to carry out repair work. It is to be hoped that at the very least they can keep the channels for meaningful communication open.

Arab solidarity defies Washington's will

The Arab League's decision on Sunday to readmit Syria, 12 years after its membership was suspended, should be welcomed by all peace-loving nations.

Syria's re-admittance to the Arab family is the latest in a series of developments in the Middle East after the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is being cautiously hailed as marking the beginning of a political solution to the Syrian crisis and means that war-torn Syria will receive more support from the Arab countries to improve its economy and rebuild the country which has been ravaged by years of civil war.

China has played an important role in promoting the reconciliation between Damascus and the Arab family. After Saudi Arabia and Iran resumed diplomatic relations thanks to China's mediation, no one should be surprised that China has been playing a role in trying to help bring peace to Syria. Its special envoy and work team have been shuttling between different countries in the Arab world to that effect since last year.

While China and the majority of the international community have welcomed Syria's re-entry into the Arab fold, the United States has expressed its opposition to the move, having previously attempted to block the Arab League readmitting Syria, with White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan giving it a last shot in Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

"We do not believe Syria merits readmission into the Arab League at this time," a US State Department spokesperson said the same day, highlighting that the White House has informed its allies in the Middle East that "we will not normalize with the Assad regime and that our sanctions remain in full effect".

But regional countries have shown they desire unity and development. And it is the US' strategic withdrawal from the region that has created the space and window for that to happen, turning it from a pot of water it could stir into turmoil at any time for its narrow ends to a region moving toward peace and stability.

Unity and prosperity will naturally spur the Arab world to strive for its overdue strategic autonomy.

China has always supported Arab states seeking strength through unity, and has actively supported Syria's return to the Arab League, believing that is conducive to the development and revitalization of the Arab world and thus peace and stability in the Middle East. It will continue "to work relentlessly to that end", a Foreign Ministry spokesman said during a regular news briefing on Monday.

The US, however, announced on Sunday that it will extend its unilateral sanctions on Syria for another year after they expire on Thursday, which makes its divisive intentions more barefaced.

That's something the region and the rest of the world should be wary of.

To the point

Theory guidance to meet challenges of today

The Communist Party of China adheres to a people-centered development philosophy and dedicates itself to serving the people wholeheartedly. With the support of the people, the country has built a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

The ongoing thematic education campaign within the CPC aims to enhance the Party's governance ability and leadership to ensure steady progress now that the country is on the path to modernization.

Launched in April, the Party-wide thematic education campaign to study and implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era focuses on guiding officials, at and above the county and director level, in the right direction by ensuring they have a thorough understanding of the Party's new theories.

The 20th National Congress of the CPC last October drew up a blueprint for comprehensively building a modern socialist country. Yet it remains a challenging task for the Party and the nation to achieve this goal. Thus, it is necessary for CPC officials to effectively grasp the guidance of the Party's new theories in order to strengthen their ability to address the urgent needs of the people and crack the thorny issues that need to be overcome.

The history of the CPC speaks volumes about the reasons behind the Party's growth and strength. The Party has always provided strong theoretical training for its members and officials, so they can remain firm in their joint faith with a strong will and coordinated actions.

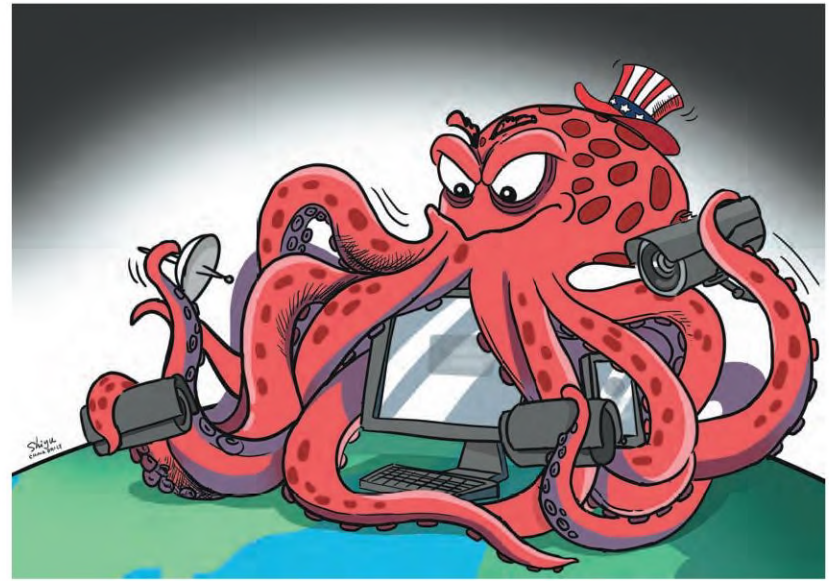
"With a history of 101 years and more than 96 million members, the CPC faces the challenge of continuously strengthening itself to lead the Chinese people to create a better life," said Xiao Ruining, an assistant research fellow at the China Academy of Discipline Inspection and Supervision. The new theories provide strength for the times.

In addition to firming up the ideals and convictions of Party members and officials, the education campaign will prompt the Party to work hard to solve problems. As long as the CPC and the people stand together, think together and work together, no difficulty can stop China's solid steps toward national rejuvenation.

Extensive fact-finding activities are an important part of the thematic education campaign. Officials are visiting factories and grassroots units, such as hospitals and universities, and working to translate research findings into concrete solutions.

ZHENG BOFEL, XINHUA

Shi Yu



Opinion Line

Poor economic outlook, interest rate hikes cause of banking woes

The United States Department of Financial Protection and Innovation announced on May 1 the shutdown of First Republic Bank and appointed the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to take over the bank following the drastic decline in its stock prices.

The same day, FDIC signed a deal with JP Morgan Chase under which the latter would buy all of the bank's deposits and most of its assets. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell announced at a news conference that US banks are healthy and resilient, while JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon said the banking system was "very, very sound".

However, banking stock prices continued to fall. After the Fed announced a 25 basis point interest rate hike on May 3, the prices

of US bank stocks fell sharply, with the index of large as well as regional American banks hitting a two-and-a-half year low. As bank stocks continue to tumble, the US federal and state governments are reportedly reviewing whether the turmoil was a result of "market manipulation". There have been growing calls for the US Securities and Exchange Commission to tighten market regulation.

Short selling might be responsible for the tumbling of US bank stock prices, but the continuous interest rate hikes, the gloomy outlook for the US economy, and misappropriate moves in taking over First Republic Bank have provided a "hotbed" for the short selling of the bank stocks.

The Fed's 500 basis points of interest rate hikes have been jar-

ring for US banks, making many banks face increasingly serious problems of high financing costs and low profitability. Continued interest rate hikes have also made it expensive for banks to hold deposits. The US' economic growth slowed more than expected in the first quarter, reinforcing the perception that the US economy is in a recession.

The ongoing debt ceiling crisis in the US is another factor affecting market stability. The Democrats and Republicans are still wrangling over the limits of the debt ceiling.

But even if the US settles its debt ceiling dispute this time, it is likely that the issue of how to pay interest on the high debt will soon be put on the table.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Taiwan only a dispensable tool for Uncle Sam

During a recent forum discussion on China-US strategic competition at the Milken Institute, US congressman Seth Moulton said, "China needs to know that if you invade Taiwan, we will blow up TSMC".

This was not the first time a US politician has uttered such words. Similar views have been expressed more than once in the past year or more.

On social networking sites, the local media on the island often ridicule some Taiwan politicians, mostly from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, for looking up to the United States as their "daddy" and being willing to sacrifice any-

thing to resist the reunification of the motherland. However, the words uttered by US politicians show that their "daddy" does not really reciprocate the love of its followers on the island, treating them instead as dispensable tools.

However hard these island-based separatists try to please their "daddy", the latter won't consider their interests in its greater strategy. For the US, the island is just a pawn in its geopolitical game of containing China and preventing the country's national reunification. It will not hesitate should the time come to sacrifice the pawn in exchange for certain real benefits.

So, by threatening to blow up TSMC should China be forced to take military action for national reunification, the US means to deny China a first-class chip-making plant even after national reunification. Neither do they care much about the world. Told that blowing up the plant would mean a \$2 trillion loss for the world economy, Moulton seemed not to care one bit.

However, their plan won't succeed. China will realize its national reunification through peaceful means or, if necessary, by force, one day because that is an unstoppable historical trend.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Real economy key to a modern industrial system

The central authorities recently reiterated the importance and urgency of building a modern industrial system supported by the real economy, stressing that governments at various levels must concentrate on the development of the real economy.

China's manufacturing industry is at risk of being "caught by the throat" in some cutting-edge technologies that are crucial to the new industrial revolution. At the same time, in the new historical environment, the government needs to address imbalanced growth. It should always regard scientific and technological innovation as the growth driver, and promote efficient resource integration and the restructuring of industries.

In this process, policymakers must properly handle the relationship between the real economy and the financial sector and the real estate industry.

China's industrial system should be able to withstand the challenges

of external shocks, and adapt to the trends of the digital economy. The country should improve its ability to absorb international industrial and technological resources.

A modern industrial system needs to correctly handle the relationship between scientific and technological innovation and industry. The country should target leading industries and new technology tracks, develop high-end manufacturing with higher technological content, and strengthen strategic emerging industries.

At the same time, the country should speed up the digitalization, networking and intelligent upgrading of traditional manufacturing industries, and break through the obstacles restricting the deep integration of traditional and digital industries.

This requires encouraging entrepreneurship, improving the business environment, especially for scientific and technological innovation enterprises, and giving full

play to the role of capital in promoting industrial development.

Some local governments have accumulated valuable experience in building a modern industrial system. Good top-level design and grassroots exploration should be closely integrated. By giving full play to the initiative of local governments, enterprises and research institutes, a modern industrial system with Chinese characteristics can be constructed.

To build a modernized industrial system, the country must adhere to the market-oriented reform direction, and properly handle the relationship between the government and the market. The government acts as a neutral referee in the market competition.

The construction of a modern industrial system is also a test of policy rationality. The way to enhance industrial stability and resilience should be the free circulation of economic factors and clear competition rules.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Fuxin 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/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

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

Zhang Donggang

Chinese modernization good for rest of world

One of the essential requirements of the Chinese path to modernization is to help build a community with a shared future for mankind. The Chinese path to modernization also links the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation with the destiny of humanity, and is based on China's national conditions and historical and cultural traditions.

The Chinese path to modernization benefits not only the people of the country but also promotes common development for the world. It is the path toward constructing a strong nation and achieving national rejuvenation for China, as well as seeking human progress and building a world of harmony, peace and development.

It is important to understand the global significance of the Chinese path to modernization and help strengthen the efforts to build a community with a shared future for mankind, and promote world peace and development.

Different from Western path to modernization

The Chinese path to modernization is driven by a scientific theoretical framework, opening up new frontiers for the development of scientific socialism. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012, the Party has successfully promoted and expanded the Chinese path to modernization process, and constructed a clear, scientific and feasible theoretical system for the country's modernization.

The Chinese path to modernization integrates Marxism with the civilization and traditions of the Chinese nation, while drawing on the achievements and experiences of other countries in this field. It is the product of the combination of socialist theory and the Chinese path to modernization practice aimed at organically integrating traditional culture with modern practices. This shows the Party has developed a complete understanding of scientific socialism, and its theoretical innovation has entered a new realm.

The CPC Central Committee General Secretary Xi Jinping has said the Chinese path to modernization embodies the advanced nature of scientific socialism. This means that the Chinese path to modernization emphasizes the coordinated realization of common prosperity, promotes comprehensive human development and social progress, balances material and cultural-ethical progress, and features a harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

In contrast to the Western path of modernization, which is centered on capital, the Chinese path to modernization is aimed at promoting the development of the theory of scientific socialism. The Chinese path to modernization process reveals the diverse possibilities of human society in exploring modernization. It provides Chinese solutions to the challenges faced by the world



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

The Chinese path to modernization advocates cultural exchanges and mutual learning. Civilizations thrive because of diversity, communication and mutual learning. China's theory of modernization respects the civilizational diversity and the achievements made by other civilizations.

and addresses major human issues based on its own development and security concepts, governance principles and cultural practices.

The Chinese path to modernization pursues high-quality development and provides a new paradigm for expanding the path of modernization. The question of

whether there is only one path or multiple paths of modernization has for long been plaguing humankind, and has sparked debates on the socioeconomic development. Looking at the timeline of modernization, Western countries have indeed been at the forefront of modernization and have had a profound influence on the world.

For a considerable period of time, the global discourse on modernization theory and practice has been dominated by the West. However, the CPC, by overcoming all odds, has held high the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics and made remarkable achievements in advancing the Chinese path to modernization.

Through practical actions, it has exposed the myth of "Westernization equals modernization" and proved wrong the claim that Western modernization is the ultimate model of modernization. China has presented a new modernization model that is distinct from the Western model and has increased the choices for developing countries to embark on their own respective path toward modernization.

As Xi Jinping said, there is no fixed model of modernization; the modernization model based on the existing social, economic and political conditions will best suit a country. So the efforts of a country to independently explore the path to modernization keeping in mind its socioeconomic conditions should be respected.

In the process of promoting its journey toward modernization, China adheres to the fundamental policy of opening-up and steadfastly pursuing mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. It follows the governance concept of consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, while focusing on protecting the common interests and facilitating the well-being of humanity.

From proposing the Global Development Initiative to helping build partnerships to boost the global economy's recovery, from establishing global development and South-South cooperation funds to promoting the G20 debt relief initiative, China has consistently adhered to the concept that "the development of all countries is true devel-

opment". In fact, China has been creating new development opportunities for the world through its new development endeavors.

Mutual learning and cultural exchanges

The Chinese path to modernization advocates cultural exchanges and mutual learning. Civilizations thrive because of diversity, communication and mutual learning. China's theory of modernization respects the civilizational diversity and the achievements made by other civilizations. It also promotes cultural exchanges that transcend cultural barriers, mutual learning overcoming cultural differences, and inclusiveness beyond claims of cultural superiority.

On March 15, Xi Jinping proposed the Global Civilization Initiative during the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-level Meeting. The initiative offers Chinese solutions to problems obstructing social modernization, in order to foster the prosperity of other civilizations. Civilization, after all, is about harmonious progress, not conflict and containment.

In advancing its modernization process, China has continuously strengthened the bond of friendship among peoples, promoted connectivity through the Belt and Road Initiative, established partnerships among theaters, museums and art galleries along the Silk Road, and built networks of cooperation in education, healthcare, sports, tourism and other sectors. As a matter of fact, China is striving to boost cultural exchanges and connectivity among countries, while promoting the concept of "beauty in diversity".

Upholding global peace and development, China has been promoting the development of civilizations across the world.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Xi Jinping's proposal to help build a community with a shared future for mankind, which reflects China's concern for the destiny of humankind, as well as its profound understanding of the trends of the times. It reflects the commitment and actions of the Party, which has been promoting the progress of humanity and global unity.

Through its modernization process, China has been exploring the scientific laws and promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. This has endowed the Chinese path to modernization with a noble mission of restoring peace and promoting development across the world.

China has been promoting the common values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom for all. And while advancing its own development, China remains committed to safeguarding global peace and development.

The author is the Party Secretary of Renmin University of China. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Kheir Diabat

BRI brings development of China and Middle East closer than ever

Middle East countries have always admired China's economic development and its successful transition from a planned economy to a market economy while maintaining political stability, increasing its GDP manifold, expanding its exports and attracting more and more foreign capital.

China's rapid economic development has influenced the agenda of economic reforms not only in Middle East countries but also in many developing countries because the conditions in China are similar to those in the rest of the developing world.

The specificity of the Middle East in this context is clear given its historical ties with China through the ancient Silk Road. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the two sides have been making efforts to deepen economic cooperation in light of their increasing common interests and interdependence. Especially, the rise of China as a major economic power with increasing influence in the United Nations Security Council gave most Middle East countries hope that the country will sincerely fulfill all its global responsibilities. After all, China upholds multipolarism and has been helping build a global community with a shared future.

In this context, the Belt and Road Initiative put forward by President Xi Jinping in 2013 is of great importance to the Middle East countries, especially to the Arab countries. Many countries in the region see the initiative a project that will define the new global balance of power, because it reflects a development strategy that links global trade networks across Asia, Africa and Europe.

The Middle East countries hope China will play a bigger role in global economic

relations alongside the European Union, thus limiting the dominance of the United States in the global economy.

The Arab countries, especially the Gulf countries, are aware of their importance to China because of their geostrategic locations in global trade.

The supervision of the Arab countries over the Strait of Hormuz (Oman and Iran), the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (Yemen and Djibouti) and the Suez Canal (Egypt) accords the region unique importance as a point of intersection of three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe). That China is aware of this fact is reflected in its efforts to deepen cooperation with the region under the Belt and Road Initiative framework and increase investments in the Gulf countries. Also, these countries constitute a cornerstone of China's energy security.

The Middle East countries were among the first to support the Belt and Road Initiative, which is aimed at improving communication infrastructure between Asia, Africa and Europe. The Middle East countries have signed many agreements and memorandums under the initiative's framework, because they want to become important regional and global strategic, logistical and economic centers.

Perhaps the volume of trade between China and the Middle East countries, which reached \$507.15 billion in 2022, reflects the interest of the region for China's initiative. In fact, China has established strategic partnerships in several fields with many Middle East countries in order to enhance mutual benefit.

To be precise, China has established comprehensive strategic partnerships or strategic partnerships with 12 Arab countries, and signed cooperation agreements under



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the Belt and Road Initiative framework with 21 Arab countries and the Arab League. Also, 17 Arab countries have supported President Xi's Global Development Initiative, 15 have joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and 14 have joined the "China-Arab Cooperation Initia-

tive for Data Security".

The Belt and Road Initiative has many advantages that can benefit the Middle East countries. For example, it can help them to increase investment cooperation in many projects to develop infrastructure, improve transport services and build com-

Arab countries support the strengthening of trade relations with developing countries, especially China, not least because they want to transform into important regional and global strategic and economic centers. And they know the Belt and Road Initiative can help them do so.

mercial logistical hubs.

In addition, the joint China-Arab projects will strengthen commercial, customs and financial linkages between the two sides and benefit both, commercially and politically, leading to deeper security cooperation.

Arab countries support the strengthening of trade relations with developing countries, especially China, not least because they want to transform into important regional and global strategic and economic centers. And they know the Belt and Road Initiative can help them do so.

In short, the Arab countries are enthusiastic about Belt and Road projects, because they can facilitate the economic integration of Asia and the Middle East, and further strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the Middle East and China.

The author is a professor in the Foreign Affairs Department of Qatar University. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG JIAN

Removing the hurdles

China-Europe relations do not target a third party, but to get rid of US' controls, the EU should implement its stated policy of 'strategic autonomy' by completely abandoning the myth of dependency on the US

China and Europe are expecting a warmer relationship amid frequent high-level interactions, including the visits to China by French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and strengthening mutual trust and cooperation with China has become all the more important.

In a world with a growing peace deficit, both China and Europe deeply cherish peace. China's development path and European integration both require world peace, making the two natural partners for safeguarding world peace. No country can thrive in isolation in an increasingly turbulent world; countries have to stick together to oppose hegemonic, domineering and bullying practices. China and Europe must, therefore, work together to safeguard world peace. In April 2022, President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Security Initiative as a way to uphold "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security" for jointly holding world peace and security. Europe is also considering a new European security order in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This provides a good foundation for China-Europe dialogue and cooperation in the field of security.

If every country in the world builds "small yards with high fences" and fights its own battle by hiding behind the suspension bridge, the world economy has no chance of restoring growth, but could slide into a recession or even the abyss of a great depression.

Both China and the European Union are open economies that benefit tremendously from economic globalization. Without an open and predictable world economic environment, the development of both sides would encounter great difficulties — anti-globalization and deglobalization serve neither China nor the EU's

interests. The combined economic aggregate of China and the EU accounts for one-third of the world economy, making them two major markets for common development. China and the EU are closely tied in economy with mutually beneficial cooperation that not only benefits the two peoples, but also provides a stellar example of economic exchanges between world economies. In the years to come, the two sides have greater responsibility to maintain the openness of the world economy.

China and Europe stand as two major civilizations advancing human progress, both with long-standing historical and cultural traditions. The two sides are both making earnest efforts to improve global governance and have some similar propositions that create room for cooperation; closer bilateral ties could advance bilateral cooperation in global governance. They should jointly uphold the authority of the United Nations, maintain the normal functioning of multilateral organizations including the World Trade Organization, and oppose such hegemonic practices as marginalizing multilateral organizations and getting unilateralism into full swing.

That said, certain issues have restricted the breadth and depth of China-Europe cooperation. Bilateral cooperation in a new era is faced with new requirements and new opportunities.

The first requirement is to transcend ideological differences.

There are no fundamental strategic differences or conflicts between China and the EU. The so-called values issue is one of the major causes for bilateral divergences and contradictions and the biggest stumbling block to bilateral cooperation. In 2019, the EU put forth the idea of dealing with China simultaneously as a partner for cooperation and negotiation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival. Over the

past three years, the EU's triple positioning for China is gradually sliding toward the last two or even the last positioning — a systemic rival — thus politicizing its China policies and greatly undermining the potential of bilateral cooperation. Such a development trend is detrimental to their respective development and world peace and development. Only when the EU rises above ideological antagonism and transcends ideological divergences can China-EU mutual trust be fundamentally strengthened and mutual beneficial cooperation be deepened.

The second one is to abandon the zero-sum mentality.

Economic cooperation is the bedrock and the most dynamic part of China-EU ties, with decades-long development bringing concrete benefits to both sides. China-EU trade exceeded \$840 billion in 2022, hitting a new record high.

However, in recent years, the EU is increasingly viewing China-EU economic relations from the perspectives of values and competition. The EU has started to take mutually beneficial economic cooperation as a battle that one side wins and the other side must lose, changing its China policy from promoting bilateral relations to setting up barriers to impede the sound growth of bilateral ties.

Mutual interdependence in stable China-EU relations is very normal and fairly beneficial for both sides against the backdrop of economic globalization. China was not, is not, and will never be a threat to the European economy. We sincerely hope that the EU can transcend the competition trap and embrace pragmatic cooperation.

The third one is to get rid of the inertia of its strategic dependence on the United States.

For a long time, the EU and European countries have been relying heavily on the US for defense and security. Without



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complete independence on the world stage, they have been, to a great extent, subject to Washington's attitude, especially on major strategic and security issues. Therefore, the US factor has always been a crucial factor in China-EU relations. Over the past few years, following a decline in its hegemonic status, the US has been implementing a comprehensive containment strategy toward China out of anxiety. It is also doubling down efforts to pressurize European countries to be its accomplice in containing China's development. As a result, the US' shadow in China-EU relations is getting larger and larger.

In the meantime, the US has further tightened its control over Europe in defense and energy areas through the Ukraine conflict. Some European countries, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe and North Europe, have growing doubts toward strategy auto-

my and are unwilling to displease the US, further impeding the process of achieving the EU's strategic autonomy. Currently, some European countries, including France, have not given up their efforts at pursuing strategic autonomy. French President Macron recently reiterated that France and Europe must not be US vassals. China-EU relations are not targeted at a third party. But to get rid of the US' controls, the EU must truly implement its stated policy of "strategic autonomy" and completely abandon the myth of dependency on the US.

The author is the assistant president of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations and the director of the CICIR Institute of European Studies. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

ZHANG MING AND ZHANG ZHE

Opening-up through reform

Given the global challenges, China must let its market play a more decisive role in resource allocation, remove local protectionism and promote globalization and the renminbi's internationalization

Since the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum, Donald Trump becoming US president in 2016 and the United States provoking a trade war against China in 2018, the world has entered a new round of transformation. The profound changes in the domestic and international environment have brought a series of new challenges for China's high-level opening-up. External challenges mainly include prominent anti-globalization trends, rising international geopolitical conflicts, and intensifying economic and trade frictions between China and the US. Internal ones mainly include a raft of challenges such as insufficient institutional openness and imbalanced development in the eastern, central and western regions.

In order to cope with the challenges, China has proposed to establish a new development paradigm which focuses on the domestic economy while stressing a positive interplay between domestic and international economic circulations. The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that "We will leverage the strengths of China's enormous market, attract global resources and production factors with our strong domestic economy, and amplify the interplay between domestic and international markets and resources". This statement signifies that China's development strategy will shift from "promoting domestic development through international means" to "promoting external development for internal growth", and from "promoting reform through opening-up" to "promoting opening-up through reform".

The following seven aspects can help China better coordinate reform and opening-up to achieve high-level opening-up. First, the high-quality economic development has put forward higher requirements for improving the socialist market economy system, and for creating a more market-oriented, legal, and international business environment. However, there is still a gap between the transformation of government functions and the requirements of high-quality economic growth. The goal of allowing the market to play a decisive role in resource allocation has not yet been fully



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

realized, and the marketization, rule of law, and internationalization of the business environment still need to be improved. To achieve high-level opening-up, it is necessary to further deepen the reform of institutional mechanisms, especially by aligning with international high standards to establish and improve an institutional system that truly allows the market to play a decisive role in resource allocation and the government to play a better role from the perspectives of government, enterprises, and the market.

Second, China's domestic market has a huge advantage in scale, but its expansion still faces many problems. Due to local protectionism and market segmentation, there are problems of slow flow and low allocation efficiency of various factor resources. Also, for a long time, there were no unified market system and rules in China. For these reasons, China should vigorously carry out comprehensive reform of market-oriented allocation of factors in urban agglomerations and metropolitan areas with urgent reform needs, good foundation

for reform and great development potential. The pilot projects may involve elements such as land, labor, capital, technology, data, and environment. It is also necessary to establish and improve unified systems for property rights protection, market access, market supervision, fair competition, and social credit nationwide.

Third, one way to get rid of the constraints imposed by Western countries on China's scientific and technological progress is to strengthen strategic determination, adhere to the national strategic goal orientation, and clarify the main tasks and breakthroughs for core technological innovations. The other way is to give play to the market, strengthen the dominant position of enterprises in technological innovation, efficiently allocate scientific and technological forces and innovation resources, and strengthen cross-domain and interdisciplinary efforts in research.

Fourth, China should continue to play the role of a flag bearer in promoting globalization, such as actively participating in

World Trade Organization reform and advancing the resumption of the WTO Appellate Body's operation. China also needs to further improve the new international multilateral cooperation mechanism led by emerging market countries. It should actively implement the Belt and Road Initiative, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, and co-build the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, New Development Bank, and the Silk Road Fund.

Fifth, China should steadily expand institutional opening-up in areas such as rules, regulations, management and standards. On the one hand, China should carry out the bringing-in strategy by closely tracking the evolution of high-standard international economic and trade rules, and actively align with those higher standards and higher-level rules. On the other hand, China should accelerate the pace of its standards going global, promote its own advantageous rules worldwide in areas such as high-speed rail and digital trade, and help formulate international rules. It is equally essential to deepen international cooperation on standardization, speed up the compatibility between Chinese and international standard systems, and boost the coordinated development of domestic and international standardization.

Sixth, China should optimize the layout of domestic opening-up regionally. Regional opening-up will be a strong foothold for China's high-level opening-up. First of all, the leading status of eastern coastal areas in China's opening-up layout should be further consolidated. Second, the opening-up in the central, western, and northeastern regions should be enhanced. To accelerate the pace of opening-up in these regions, the high-quality development of key border ports, border cities, and border economic cooperation zones should be further promoted and the layout of key border development and opening-up pilot zones, border economic cooperation zones, and cross-border economic cooperation zones should be optimized, so as to better play the role of internal and external connectivity of key ports and border cities. In addition, the New International Land-Sea

Trade Corridor connects the Silk Road Economic Belt to the north with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to the south, helping upgrade infrastructure in the provincial-level regions of western China and facilitating their integration into the global cargo transportation system, thus helping them form a new pattern of opening-up.

Seventh, the Chinese government should steadily and continuously promote the internationalization of the renminbi based on its deep participation in the global industrial division of labor and cooperation, and pay more attention to quality rather than speed. To do so, efforts should be made in the following aspects: First, China needs to continue to optimize its institutional design, policy support, and market cultivation, strengthen the coordination of domestic and foreign currency policies, and encourage market entities to more conveniently use the renminbi for pricing and settlement in international trade and investment. Second, the renminbi liquidity supply mechanism should be continuously improved and innovated, and deep cooperation between the offshore and onshore markets of the renminbi should also be intensified. The third is to continuously optimize the layout of renminbi-clearing banks, deepen bilateral monetary cooperation, and better cultivate the offshore renminbi market. Finally, while promoting the internationalization of the renminbi, attention should also be paid to maintaining financial security and preventing systemic financial crises. China still needs to adhere to the principle of making gradual and controllable progress in terms of capital account opening.

Zhang Ming is the deputy director of the Institute of Finance and Banking at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the deputy director of the National Institution for Finance and Development. Zhang Zhe is a PhD candidate at the School of International Politics and Economics at the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The authors contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE

Keying into success

Piano festival, to be launched by Tianjin Juilliard, will give young performers an exciting platform, **Chen Nan** reports.

Wang Xiaohan, a veteran pianist and teacher at Tianjin Juilliard, says it takes courage to find one's own voice when playing the piano.

Pianists should be able to bring creative ideas and approaches to the music they perform while staying loyal to the intentions of composers.

"Why does an audience pay for a ticket to watch a pianist's performance? When you are seated in a concert hall to witness a piano performance, the fulfilling and heart-warming experience is a great feeling. The pianist is skilled and the actual tune of the piece needs to be maintained and must reach the listeners' ears. The pianist intrigues the audience with a playing style and creates a unique artistic presence and ambience," says Wang, a prizewinner of international music competitions such as the ARD International Music Competition and the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

He now chairs pre-college piano studies at Tianjin Juilliard.

Wang looked for such qualities in pianists before he co-initiated the inaugural Tianjin Juilliard Piano Festival, which will be held in Binhai, a coastal area in Tianjin, where the school is located, from July 30 to Aug 13. The festival, organized by the school, will have master classes, workshops, lectures, concerts and public events.

Applicants — young artists and junior participants — will have the opportunity to perform concertos with orchestras and prominent conductors.

Wang, along with Yoheved Kaplinsky, the well-known pianist who is currently the chair of the piano department at the Juilliard School in New York, will serve as co-artistic director of the piano festival in Tianjin.

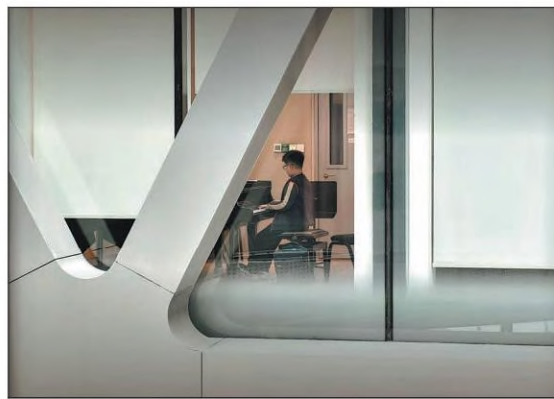
"We have been discussing the idea of holding the piano festival for several years," says He Wei, CEO and artistic director of Tianjin Juilliard.

"Since we are music educators, our intention is to provide participants with invaluable experience, working alongside internationally renowned pianists and teachers.

"It's our mission to develop talented young musicians as artist citizens and to bridge cultures through music," He adds.

"Our school opened amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been a long-time wish for us to welcome people living in Binhai and outside the area to visit our campus and enjoy music. This piano festival will be a great celebration of music this summer."

As the first overseas branch of the renowned New York-headquartered



Top: Tianjin Juilliard Orchestra performs under the baton of conductor Chen Lin at the school's concert hall. **Left:** Yoheved Kaplinsky gives a master class at the Tianjin school. **Right:** A student of Tianjin Juilliard takes class on campus. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Juilliard School, the Tianjin campus broke ground in 2017 and offers a US-accredited master's degree from the Juilliard School. The Tianjin school's graduate program opened in the fall of 2020 with the first batch of students.

Twelve international artists are scheduled to join the piano festival, including pianist Robert Levin, who is a professor emeritus of music at Harvard University, and Polish pianist Katarzyna Popowa-Zydro, who served as the chair of the jury for the 17th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw.

"We have assembled the highest level of pedagogues and performers from around the world to provide festival participants with an exciting and inspiring educational experience this summer. The variety of musical activities and the unique opportunities will make this an enriching and unforgettable festival for all," says Kaplinsky.

It will be the first time that Levin will visit the Chinese mainland, which is great news for Chinese piano students, teachers and music lovers, Wang says. He met Levin at the 17th Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition, which was held in Tel Aviv from March 14 to April 1, when Wang served as a jury member for the contest.

"He is a legendary pianist who is widely considered a leading Mozart authority, a scholar-performer with a particular focus on researching and performing works of the composer," says Wang, adding that Levin will give lectures about Mozart's concertos during the Tianjin festival.

Performing guest artists at the festival are Chinese pianist Chen Sa and Russian pianist Sofya Gulyak, the first woman to win the Leeds International Piano Competition in 2009. Wang will also perform.

The Suzhou Symphony Orchestra will perform in the final gala that will be conducted by Chen Lin, the chair of the conducting department at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

All 24 selected from the category of young artists, aged 7 to 28, will compete in the festival's concerto competition, and six winners will be selected to perform a full concerto with the Suzhou orchestra, conducted by Lai Jiajing.

All 48 participants in the junior category, aged 7 to 18, will have one rehearsal with the Qing Xin Ensemble, also conducted by Lai, playing one movement of a concerto.

Contact the writer at chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

It's our mission to develop talented young musicians as artist citizens and to bridge cultures through music."

He Wei, CEO and artistic director of Tianjin Juilliard

NCUK to further support Chinese students studying abroad

By YANG FEIYUE

yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

The Northern Consortium United Kingdom is seeking to promote cooperation between its member universities abroad and top Chinese universities to share high-quality education and provide more assistance to Chinese students.

"We hope to generate more programs suitable for Chinese students through interschool exchanges to comprehensively improve students in all aspects," said Stuart Smith, CEO of NCUK, at a partnership meeting in Beijing in late April.

NCUK specializes in offering support and services to international students through its network of leading universities.

More face-to-face student consultations and academic visits to China will be arranged by university partners of NCUK, Smith says. "They will meet with students in person, and share their knowledge and expertise." In addition, new accredited subjects such as computer science will be introduced, which will allow students to progress with degree courses in artificial intelligence, robotics and cybersecurity.

"We also hope to expand our post-graduate preparatory services to students who have graduated from undergraduate programs," Smith adds.

For NCUK, China is one of the most important markets in the world, according to Smith.

"About 40 percent of our students come from China, so we are very focused on providing support to Chinese students," Smith says.

Since its inception, the body has helped more than 45,000 students to get into leading universities worldwide. It has found that Chinese students are "generally excellent", especially in traditional subjects when they study abroad.

"Our feedback suggests that NCUK students often encounter fewer problems when studying abroad. This feedback comes directly from the universities we partner with. So overall, it is a very positive academic and cultural experience for them," Smith says.

He says that China's higher education market will be on the rebound

in the next five years.

"We have seen that students have shown greater interest in evaluating education, not only in terms of expenditure, but also in their expectations for the final output, especially in terms of career-thinking," Smith says.

The students can first study in top Chinese senior middle schools or universities in collaboration with NCUK for one or two years before they transfer to leading universities in the UK, Australia, North America and New Zealand to obtain their bachelor's degree.

"Students can be well-prepared in terms of both academic and social skills, and can better integrate into higher education in the UK," Smith says.

The International Business

School of the Beijing Foreign Studies University currently has approximately 70 students under the NCUK program.

"In addition to academic classes, NCUK has arranged programs on cross-cultural communication and learning methods such as time management, as well as how to write papers and search literature," says Zhang Yanping, director of the international cooperation office of the BFSU's business school, which has been working with the body since 2014. "They have been very helpful to our students."

The domestic courses are close to those offered in UK universities, and in some cases, more difficult, and students are evaluated the way they would be in universities abroad,

Zhang says. "This way, they have been adapting quickly to study abroad."

Beijing No 35 High School has worked with NCUK for nearly 11 years. The school currently has about 20 students under the program and 17 NCUK-accredited faculty members, according to Wu Hao, head of the high school's international department.

"The students must have self-discipline because there are many areas of self-directed learning and they need to manage their time well. If they prepare themselves mentally before entering the program, they will smoothly follow on the right path," Wu says.

The students receive cross-disciplinary training under the program. "No one will babysit you and urge

you to finish your assignments, but you need to meet the deadline," Wu adds.

The study-abroad market in China is accelerating its recovery after COVID-19, as several educational institutions report a surge in inquiries about learning opportunities in Australia, Canada, the UK, and the United States.

A report of the New Oriental Education and Technology Group showed that its overseas test preparation and study-abroad consultation businesses increased by approximately 17 percent and 14 percent respectively year-on-year in the second quarter of the fiscal year 2023.

According to the company EIC Education, its study-abroad consultations increased by 45 percent in January and February compared to the same period in 2022, with 133 percent increase for Australia, 110 percent for Canada, and a 50 percent increase for the UK and the US.

NCUK China director Feng Jiang-hua says the body will make more efforts to promote high-quality education and satisfy Chinese students' requirements.

"Their thirst for knowledge and curiosity about different education systems are the reasons behind this change," Feng says about Chinese students. "We look forward to (helping) more Chinese students enhance their all-round abilities on the basis of their high academic performance and become global talent."



Left: Students engage in discussions at an art class in a program by the Northern Consortium United Kingdom. **Right:** Stuart Smith (center), CEO of NCUK, with NCUK partners at a recent meeting in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Clockwise from right: Li Jingshi (right), Huang Nian'er (second right) and Jin Chenhao (third right) celebrate winning the first National Young Sommelier Service Skills Competition with their tutor and schoolmates; Jin practices wine tasting; and he learns the art of wine service.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Uncorking their passion

New competition seeks to inspire and nurture talented young sommeliers from across the country, **Li Yingxue** reports.

Huang Nian'er, 22, and her two schoolmates, Jin Chenhao and Li Jingshi, have been practicing dance and performing onstage since their freshman year in 2019. As they prepared to graduate from college this summer, they found themselves back onstage once again.

However, this time they were not dancing, but rather serving wine. Despite the change in their performance, their dedication and hard work did not waver.

The trio, who have named themselves "Huang Jin Li" after a combination of their last names, aced the contest, ultimately being named the winners of the first National Young Sommelier Service Skills Competition.

Their participation not only brought them victory, but also opened up a new career path. Despite majoring in hospitality management at Beijing Hospitality Institute, they now see the possibility of becoming sommeliers in the future.

Huang recalls that, after the competition, jury head, Lyu Yang, who is, himself, a Master Sommelier, shared his own stories with them. "Learning from his career experience, I have a clear understanding of this job, which used to be more of a concept for me. His understanding of the service industry has made me think it's a meaningful career," Huang says.

Huang is set to begin her postgraduate studies in the United Kingdom in September, and the competition has inspired her to delve deeper into the world of wine. Although her previous knowledge about the libation was mostly gained through her previous internships and preparation for the competition, the event has sparked her interest in learning systematically about wine.

Previously, both Huang and Jin had worked at bars in Beijing, which gave them some exposure to the world of wine. However, the competition proved to be a turning point for both of them. In fact, Jin discovered his interest in sommelier services through the competition and is now actively seeking opportunities to join the field.

"Winning the competition was our goal, but we enjoyed the preparation process very much," Jin says. "It's a good memory for us, and for our four years of college study. We also forged a friendship during the competition."

The National Young Sommelier Service Skills Competition opened registration at the end of last year, and it soon garnered significant attention from major universities throughout the country, despite



Shi Shaojie, a teacher at Beijing Hospitality Institute, gives a lecture on wine tasting. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

being the inaugural event.

A total of 83 universities and 161 teams, comprising 487 competitors, participated in the preliminary stage. Following two rounds of intense competition, the top 10 teams were chosen to progress to the semifinals, and only three teams made it to the final round.

Both the semifinals and final were held at Beijing Hospitality Institute at the end of March. The final competition consisted of six sections, including wine service, sales techniques, wine tasting and analysis, and blind tasting. The wine service section needed to be done in English, which also included serving *baijiu* (white liquor) and *huangjiu* (yellow rice wine).

The team of three excelled in each section and impressed the judges with their knowledge of wine, service experience and their fluent English, and won the championship as a result.

One of the judges, Dong Zhenxiang, the founder of the Peking roast duck restaurant chain Da Dong, praised the competition for its role in promoting the importance of sommeliers in the service industry.

He noted that, in the past, people tended to focus only on the taste of the wine, but in recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on refined dining and beverage service.

"This competition has played a significant role in demonstrating the importance of sommeliers, which can draw more attention from various sectors of the industry toward young sommeliers and encourage more professionals to fill the talent gap in this industry," Dong says.

Li says the competition helped her to discover her future direction during her senior year, a time when

she felt most confused about her future career options.

"As a sommelier, when you recommend a wine to pair with a dish the guests have ordered and, after tasting the wine, they feel it's a good match, you can tell the happiness and satisfaction from their language and gestures, which is quite straightforward, and brings me a sense of accomplishment," she says.

The 22-year-old recalls that, during high school, she had the chance to spend the weekends in the library with scientists from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, as she used to dream of being a scientist herself.

The experience made her realize that her real interest is communicating with people, not lab tools, so she chose to study marketing in college.

The stage is another of her interests. Alongside dancing performances, she enjoys taking part in competitions. The wine service competition has opened her eyes, helping her realize that there are more certificates to gain and various competitions to take part in.

"The result is not the most important thing, what I cherish is the immersive experience of the competition," she says.

She believes that even failure can bring about valuable learning experiences and, after each competition, she takes time to review her performance and identify areas for improvement.

The team was tutored by Shi Shaojie, a former sommelier who teaches about wine at Beijing Hospitality Institute. Shi taught a wine-tasting course in the freshman year, which sparked the interest of the trio in wine tasting and wine culture.

In preparation for the competition, Shi assigned them online

homework during winter vacation and rehearsed the wine service process repeatedly before the finals. He also brought out some of his wine collection for the three budding experts to practice blind tasting.

Shi switched careers because he believed that there is a significant shortage of talented sommeliers in the Chinese market to meet demand. "I believe that being a teacher can make a better contribution to the industry," he says.

Shi emphasizes that being a sommelier is not a solo job, as sommeliers need to collaborate with servers and chefs. Although the wine service part is often done alone, it's essential to have strong teamwork skills. He believes that team competitions are an excellent opportunity for young practitioners to understand the importance of that.

Shi also believes that facing challenging situations, such as this competition, can help young people prepare for future experiences in life and work. "It can teach them to stay calm and composed when they encounter similar situations in the future," he says.

The trio's success in the competition can also be attributed to the extensive preparation process they underwent prior to the event, according to Shi. He emphasizes that they were given ample notice, which allowed them to effectively manage their time and set achievable goals for each stage of their preparation.

"Each year I teach hundreds of students, and only a few may end up working in the wine industry. But I hope at least they will learn something that can be useful in life, such as knowing how to select or taste wine," the 38-year-old says.

Shi says that the team's example can greatly stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning in this area, as he notes that all of his freshman students recently have been very motivated and working hard to learn the wine-tasting course, and some are eager to sign up for the second edition of the competition, which will be held in September.

Shi observes that, in recent years, there has been a surge in the number of bistros opening up in Beijing, which has led to a high demand for sommeliers.

"Most of the sommeliers are trained from servers, which may not fill the gap in the supply of sommeliers, and through this competition, more young people could be inspired to pursue this career path," Shi says.

Contact the writer at liyixue@chinadaily.com.cn

China's 'culture vultures' descend on the capital

During this year's May Day holiday, more and more Chinese tourists are adding destinations such as museums and art galleries to their itinerary, suggesting an upward trend in China's domestic cultural tourism sector.

Among the country's traditional culture fanatics is a woman surnamed Dong. She was in charge of arranging her family's tour from Langfang, North China's Hebei province, to Beijing during the five-day holiday. The tour's highlights included the signature visit to the Palace Museum dressed in ancient costume and seeing the treasures at the National Museum of China.

On the last day of the May Day holiday, Dong took her child to a niche museum in the eastern suburbs — the exhibition hall of China Railway Museum.

They took photos on the station platforms and with all kinds of locomotives, and her child enjoyed a ride on a small steam train while learning more about the history of China's railway development. Clutching his favorite toy, a train-like Transformer robot, the young boy had a great time before, eventually, it was time to depart for their journey home.

As the first May Day holiday since the country optimized its COVID-19 pandemic response measures, cultural tourist attractions, especially museums and art galleries, have become a hot new trend.

Local residents and tourists from afar shuttled between all kinds of museums, wandering around various exhibitions, busy viewing rarities from all over the world and experiencing tangible and intangible cultural exchanges, both ancient and modern, between home and abroad.

Data collected by multiple museums show that the number of visitors during the holiday rebounded to higher than that recorded pre-COVID during the same period in 2019. On the first day of the May Day holiday, the top 10 scenic spots in Beijing during the holiday saw a

rebound in visitor numbers, including several cultural tourist attractions: Qianmen Street, the Summer Palace, Nanluogu Xiang shopping alley, the Temple of Heaven, Beihai Park and Yuanmingyuan, or the Old Summer Palace.

Cultural institutions were also a preferred choice for those seeking a relaxed and enjoyable holiday experience.

During the recent holiday, museums and art galleries all over China teamed up with foreign counterparts to make their exhibits more innovative and attractive, with an almost panoramic view of the worldwide cultural treasures on offer.

Digital technologies also helped to give visitors a more immersive experience, adding strong impetus to the arts and culture craze in China.

A retrospective exhibition named *Parallel Space — Meet the Terracotta Warriors in Greece* digitally presents the archaeological

achievements collected and preserved in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, the archaeological sites of Terracotta Warriors, and a relevant cultural relics protection laboratory of China.

With the help of digital technologies, visitors in Shougang Park in western Beijing can see the ancient warriors stand face-to-face with the statue of Kroisos Kouros, seemingly engaging in a "dialogue" across time and space.

As China's night economy continues to heat up, some museums extended their opening hours, and even remained open at night, during the holiday.

Among them, more than 30 museums in Beijing, such as the Capital Museum and China Railway Museum, kept their doors open after hours. Many famous buildings in the city held related nighttime activities, allowing visitors to appreciate their special beauty under the night sky.

From May 1-3, Beijing held a bazaar selling all kinds of cultural and creative products from over 40 museums in the city, highlighting a collaboration between time-honored brands and new fashion forms.

"Beijing is rich in museum resources, so I chose to visit the bazaar during the holiday with my classmates. I've collected multiple museum seals today. Each seal is a cultural imprint for me," says Ma Hualin, a graduate student at Beijing University of Chemical Technology, who visited the bazaar on May 1.

One visitor, surnamed Zheng, traveled from South China's metropolis of Guangzhou all the way to Beijing. After a one-day tour of the Civil Aviation Museum, Zheng took his family to the bazaar on May 1. Luckily, as part of an interactive on-site activity, he guessed correctly the name of an aircraft model on display, based on a vague description, winning a cartoon postcard of the plane.

"My son likes to study all kinds of planes, so I took him to the bazaar, hoping to help broaden his horizons," Zheng says.

"Now, society pays great attention to museums, and the number of people who like to visit museums is expanding. People of different ages visit museums for various reasons, such as to view exhibitions, listen to lectures, participate in social and educational activities, or simply to just buy things," says Gu Ying, deputy director with the White Pagoda Temple administrative office.

"Museums are an important force to inspire wisdom for a better life, promote social well-being and build a sustainable future. Behind the cultural tourism craze is the public's discovery and recognition of the historical and cultural value of the museums," says Bai Chong, director of the museum division of Beijing municipal bureau of cultural heritage.

XINHUA



Top: Tourists pose at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing during the May Day holiday. **Above:** Crowds of visitors at the Palace Museum in Beijing during the holiday.

PHOTOS BY JU HUANZONG / XINHUA

SPORTS

DIVING

Golden girls enthrall the nation

Teenage sensations Quan Hongchan and Chen Yuxi continue stunning start to season

By SHI FUTIAN

shifutian@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese diving sensations Quan Hongchan and Chen Yuxi continued their near-perfect form this season by adding to their fast-growing collection of World Cup gold medals — boosting their already massive profile back home in the process.

The pair last week stormed to the women's 10m synchronized title at the second stop of the World Aquatics Diving World Cup, in Montreal, Canada, with an astonishing score of 378.60 — a whopping 62 points ahead of second-placed Lois Toulson and Andrea Spendolini Sirieix of Britain.

In the women's 10m platform, Quan pocketed gold (458.20) ahead of Chen Yuxi (438.90), with their Montreal medal haul quickly becoming trending topics on Chinese social media. The hashtags "Quan Hongchan and Chen Yuxi win gold" and "Quan Hongchan wins with huge margin" attracted a combined 100 million-plus views on Weibo.

"I actually did not care too much about my scores. I just wanted to do my best here," said 16-year-old Quan. "I just want to make sure I finish my training and don't think too much about other things."

Quan and Chen Yuxi's stunning performances capped a dominant weekend for Team China, who swept the nine gold medals on offer to easily top the medal table.

Chen Yiwen was another double champion in Montreal — winning the women's 3m springboard and, along with Chang Yani, the women's 3m synchronized.

Olympic champion Wang Zongyun paired with Long Daoyi to win the men's 3m synchronized, while Wang also triumphed in the men's 3m springboard.

Yang Hao was the runaway victor in the men's 10m platform, over 66 points ahead of second-placed Rikuto Tamai of Japan. Yang teamed with Lian Junjie to win the men's 10m synchronized competition.

Team China also emerged victorious in the 3m and 10m mixed team event.

The Montreal meet mirrored last month's opening leg of the World Cup series in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, where China also claimed all nine golds and Quan and Chen Yuxi



Quan Hongchan executes a routine on her way winning the women's 10m platform title during the second leg of the World Aquatics Diving World Cup in Montreal, Canada, on Sunday. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP



Chen Yuxi and Quan Hongchan perform en route to winning the women's 10m synchronized platform final at a Diving World Cup meet in Montreal on Saturday. AP



Quan Hongchan (right) and Chen Yuxi pose with their gold and silver medals respectively following Sunday's women's 10m platform final in Montreal. AP

enjoyed another huge winning margin of over 60 points (373.20).

In Xi'an, however, Chen Yuxi (431.20) edged Quan (423.50) to gold in the 10m platform.

The two have quickly established themselves as the stars of the series,

with fans eagerly awaiting their future contests.

Complacency, it seems, will not be an issue for either diver.

"I'm not 100 percent satisfied with my performance. Irrespective of the gold medals, I care more about ex-

cuting my moves beautifully. As athletes, we should always demand more of ourselves," Chen Yuxi said after her victories in Xi'an.

"If we are not moving forward, that means we are moving backward. In training we finesse the

details, and we still have a number of little errors to fix."

The two teenagers are showing commendable maturity to deal with the paradox of being both rivals and partners in competition.

A touching moment captured by



As athletes, we should always demand more of ourselves. If we are not moving forward, that means we are moving backward. In training we finesse the details, and we still have a number of little errors to fix."

Chen Yuxi, champion platform diver

the TV cameras during the national diving championships in March in Shanghai illuminated their close bond. After an error cost Quan her chance of 10m platform gold, Chen Yuxi gave her sobbing teammate tissues to wipe away the tears.

Quan later revealed that Chen Yuxi continued to console her over dinner in the canteen that evening.

"We can all make mistakes in competition, and that's not always a bad thing. I just hope Quan will bounce back in future competitions," said Chen Yuxi.

"We are lucky to have this healthy competition between us. We help each other and we improve together. That's the reason for our victories. Without each other, it would be more difficult for us to improve and we would never reach this level."

Quan and Chen Yuxi shot to stardom at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 when Quan led the way in a Chinese 1-2 in the 10m platform. As well as their exceptional athletic feats, the teenagers' endearing interviews in front of the cameras ensured they became household names.

Their popularity continues to soar as they embrace their newfound status as role models.

A recent Xinhua commentary summed up their phenomenal appeal: "Throughout the history of the Chinese diving team, there have been many inspirational stories and moments. Now for Quan Hongchan and Chen Yuxi, they are the closest of teammates and toughest of rivals."

MMA

China's warriors on course for UFC showdown

By SUN XIAOCHEN

sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

For the first time in history, the world's premier mixed martial arts promotion could be about to witness an all-Chinese world-title fight.

Following her ferocious first-round knockout over former division champion Jessica Andrade, Chinese striker Yan Xiaonan has punched her way back into title contention in the Ultimate Fighting Championship's strawweight class, setting herself on a collision course to face compatriot and reigning 115-pound (52-kg) queen Zhang Weili.

"I don't know what the plan is on (Zhang) Weili's side ... but if they give me the chance, I can definitely fight for the belt, because when I step in the Octagon my only goal is the championship," Yan said after her stoppage win over Brazil's Andrade at UFC 288 in New Jersey on Saturday.

"I hope Dana (White) can make this fight happen," added the 33-year-old, who improved to an 8-2 win-loss record since her UFC debut in November 2017.

Although nothing official has yet been discussed, it appears that UFC president White is open to the idea of a Yan-Zhang matchup, possibly in China.

A "Chinese derby" would be a highly lucrative option for the UFC, which last visited China in 2019 with a Fight Night event, where Zhang dethroned Andrade to capture the belt for the first time in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

"I don't know what we're gonna



China's Yan Xiaonan celebrates defeating Brazil's Jessica Andrade in their women's strawweight bout at UFC 288 in Newark, New Jersey, on Saturday. Yan stopped Andrade (right) in the first round and could next face compatriot Zhang Weili in a world-title fight. AP

do with Yan, where she's gonna go. But I'm definitely gonna look at China...I'm looking at that right now," White said at Saturday's post-fight news conference.

If those comments weren't promising enough, Yan told online show *The MMA Hour* that White strongly indicated to her that the fight will happen in China.

"I met Dana in the locker room after the fight, and he said let's do it in China. 'So if we can make the UFC China event happen, let's do it,' he said...I think it's possible, probably some point at the end of this year," Yan said through an interpreter during the interview.

Entering the main event on Saturday night as the division's sixth-

ranked contender, Yan took less than three minutes to prove that she's more of a threat than her ranking would suggest.

After opening the bout with a few botched attacks, Andrade, a wrestling specialist, upped her aggression with a flurry of hooks. However, she ran into a massive counter punch as Yan sent the Brazilian crashing to the canvas.

Yan followed up with a few hammerfists before the referee stopped the fight at the 2:20 mark.

The victory, the first KO of Yan's career in the Octagon, triggered a rousing reaction from her fellow Chinese fighters who were watching the action on TV.

"I told you!" UFC bantamweight



I don't know what the plan is on (Zhang) Weili's side ... but if they give me the chance, I can definitely fight for the belt, because when I step in the Octagon my only goal is the championship."

Yan Xiaonan, on potentially facing compatriot Zhang Weili in a world-title fight

Song Yadong roared as he clenched both fists in front of the camera.

"Yan's stronger and better in every regard to her (Andrade) now. Let's go!" enthused Song, the current No. 7 contender at bantamweight and currently China's best male hope for a UFC title fight.

By dominating one of the division's former champions, Yan pocketed a \$50,000 bonus from White for putting on the "performance of the night", while further elevating her profile in a division currently controlled by Zhang.

Since reclaiming the strawweight title from Carla Esparza with a second-round submission in November, Zhang, who first wrestled the belt from Andrade and then lost it to

Rose Namajunas in April 2021, has yet to arrange a title defense. However, the UFC had earlier pitched another Brazilian, Amanda Lemos, as the next in line to challenge the 32-year-old Chinese "Magnum".

Yan is confident she has forced a change of heart over the challenger. "The UFC hasn't announced anything for Weili so I think they were waiting for this fight to see who deserves the title shot more, me or Lemos," Yan said. "I think I did better than her and I deserve the title shot more than her."

Since Zhang's first championship win in 2019, the Las Vegas-based UFC has been making steady inroads into the Chinese market. It opened its second Performance

Institute in Shanghai in the same year and has developed a competitive roster of local fighters, led by Zhang and Yan in the women's ranks and Song on the men's side.

A showdown between China's two best fighters in the post-pandemic era would be a blockbuster bout for MMA, Yan reckoned.

"It's going to be a historic moment. Nothing is going to be bigger than that, if me and Weili fight for the title in China. Right now, Weili is the only UFC champion from Asia, so if me and her, both fighters from Asia, fight for the UFC championship, it means we represent the highest level of this sport and we would also show the world the development of MMA in Asia."